

SURVEY REPORT

on Youth News Consumption, Disinformation Recognition, and Civic Engagement in North Macedonia

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About the publisher:
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zaneta Trajkoska

Edition:
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Authors:
Marijana Markovic, PhD
Mila Stamenova, MSc
Dejan Andonov, MA
Eleonora Serafimovska, PhD
Jordanka Cherepnalkova – Trajkoska, M.Sc.

Editor:
Dejan Andonov, MA

Graphical Design:
Zoran Kardula

Graphical editing:
Ljuben Dimanovski

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1 SUMMARY

Leading up to the parliamentary and presidential elections in the Republic of North Macedonia, the Institute of Communication Studies conducted a survey to determine young people's media and news consumption habits, their ability to recognize disinformation in the media, and how engaged they are in political and civic matters. Regarding the media and news consumption habits among young people, the survey aimed to answer which sources of information they use, how often and in what way they access the news, as well as which topics are of interest to them. In an attempt to understand the youth's ability to recognize disinformation, young people were asked about their self-perception when it comes to checking and evaluating information. In addition, the survey looked into the behavioural effects on young people when faced with disinformation. Considering the levels of civic engagement or activism, the survey focused on individual volunteering, participation in organizations and electoral participation of young people.

Which media are your news source?

From the survey, it can be concluded that **young people mostly access online news through the social media platforms** of Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, and they also get informed about the events in our country and in the world from family and friends, news generators and experts with public profiles.

What are the news habits of young people?

More often, they passively consume news, i.e., they usually come across news while doing other things, rather than actively looking for and checking the information. Reading the news often causes them to share it verbally or online with friends and colleagues and to read other people's comments on the news on social media, and **less often they practice reacting directly and publicly with their own written opinion on a particular news story.**

What kind of news (thematically) do they follow most often?

In terms of topics, young people are less interested in political developments in the country, economy and social justice, while the focus of their interest is education, technology, culture, local news, health, but also crime and corruption. The topics about which the respondents noticed misinformation or disinformation were about politics, celebrities and about crime and corruption.

Do they check whether the news is true, and if so, and how do they do it?

Young people have a critical stance when it comes to the accuracy of the shared information, yet they focus very little on identifying the emotional tone of the news, which should be paid more attention to in media literacy education.

How do they deal with disinformation?

Young people believe that they are successful in recognizing misinformation, although only 7.8% are sure that they have shared misinformation, and almost half (51%) answered that they may have shared it without knowing it was misinformation. Respondents declared that they know where to report misinformation / disinformation if they see it on social media, but only 34.3% answered that they have reported misinformation / disinformation in the media. Only 20.6% of young people believe that most of the information shared by news websites is true, and an even lower percentage of respondents (13.4%) declared that most of the information on social media is true. Almost 2/3 of the young respondents believe that the main creators of disinformation are political parties.

Are young people socially engaged and to what extent?

Among the surveyed young people, there is an evident interest in government-related developments or in public affairs - 46.4% are engaged in both civic and electoral matters, 44% reported to have one form of engagement - either electoral or civic, and 9.3% of respondents did not show any kind of engagement at all - neither on civic nor on political matters.

Regarding their **civic engagement**, about half (53%) of the respondents said that they have been involved in some kind of **volunteer activity to solve local problems**. About half (58.5%) of the respondents mostly reported volunteering in some sort of organization for youth, children or education.

In terms of **electoral engagement,** 39.8% of respondents declared that they vote regularly, 16.7% sometimes vote, and 12.6% have never voted. Half of the respondents answered negatively to the question of whether they tried to convince someone to vote for a certain political option through conversation. In the past 12 months, only 5.8% have worked for or donated money to a candidate, political party, or organization that supports a particular political candidate.

When they were asked about their **"political voice"**, the most common statement of the young respondents is "I haven't done that" in response to a series of presented activities that in a way demonstrate political attitudes in relation to certain social events, such as charity fund-raisers, participation in protests, meeting a political official, signing a written petition, boycotting a company because of its social values, etc.

Are young people are "addicted" to social media, and if so, to what extent?

Regarding the use of social media, **5% of respondents belong to the critical group of high social media addiction,** but the percentage of respondents (19%) who are close to the critical score for diagnosing such addiction is also notable. Anxiety can be noticed in people who are addicted to social media, especially when social media are not available; they constantly check their phones when the notification sound comes on; when posting a picture on social media, comments and likes are constantly checked: using social media is the first and last thing in the day, i.e., a normal routine; events are rated by how "postable" they are.

The survey questionnaire was conducted in the period from December 2023 to March 2024 on a sample of 345 respondents aged 18 to 29, with different demographic and socio-economic characteristics (Secondary school (vocational and non-vocational) students, university students, unemployed and employed). The survey is part of a more comprehensive research which, in the next phase, involves the application of an experimental method, in order to obtain deeper insights to determine the relationship between the habits of media consumption, the ability to recognize disinformation, personality traits, the value system, attitudes, cognitive reasoning and civic and political engagement among young people.

The research is part of the project "Fact-Based Journalism for Raising Awareness and Countering Disinformation in the Media Space in North Macedonia (Use Facts)", which is supported by the British Embassy in Skopje.

2 WHAT ARE YOUNG PEOPLE'S MEDIA AND NEWS CONSUMPTION HABITS?



The analysis of the answers shows the habits of media and news consumption among young people in Macedonia, including an analysis of the sources through which young people get informed, which social media they use most often to follow news, whether they passively or actively search for (online) news and what topics interest them or which topics they avoid.

THE VAST MAJORITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE CHOOSE SOCIAL MEDIA AS A SOURCE OF INFORMATION!

Social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, YouTube...) are by far the most frequently used sources of information about events in our country and in the world for young respondents (for 72.5% of them). Next in line in terms of commonly used sources of information for young respondents are:

- ✓ family, friends and colleagues (for 42% of young people),
- ✓ news generators (by 40.9%) and
- ✓ experts with their own public profiles (for 39.4%).

38.8% of young people listed traditional media, i.e., TV, radio and newspapers as their sources of information.

The least frequently used sources of information for young people are people who post on social media, i.e., influencers and YouTubers (31.1%) and specialized websites or scientific/professional magazines for certain fields and interests (28.4%).

Among the other sources of information mentioned by young people are: the Telegram social network, media corporations that have profiles on social media and a subscription-based version of GPT, i.e. an advanced virtual interlocutor that uses artificial intelligence in order to search for specific information of interest and verify the validity.[1]

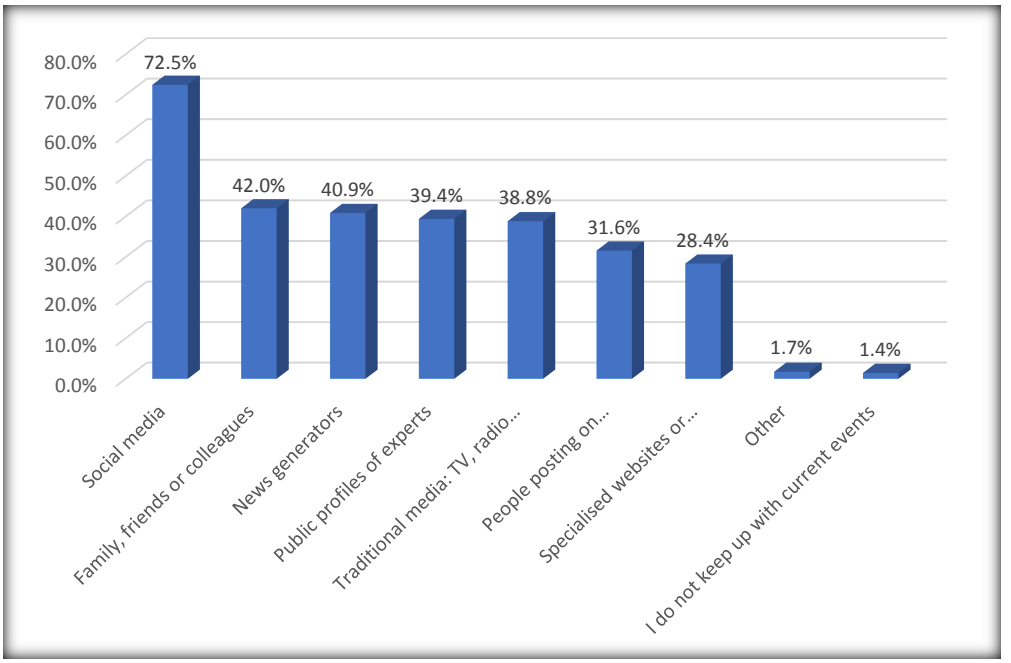
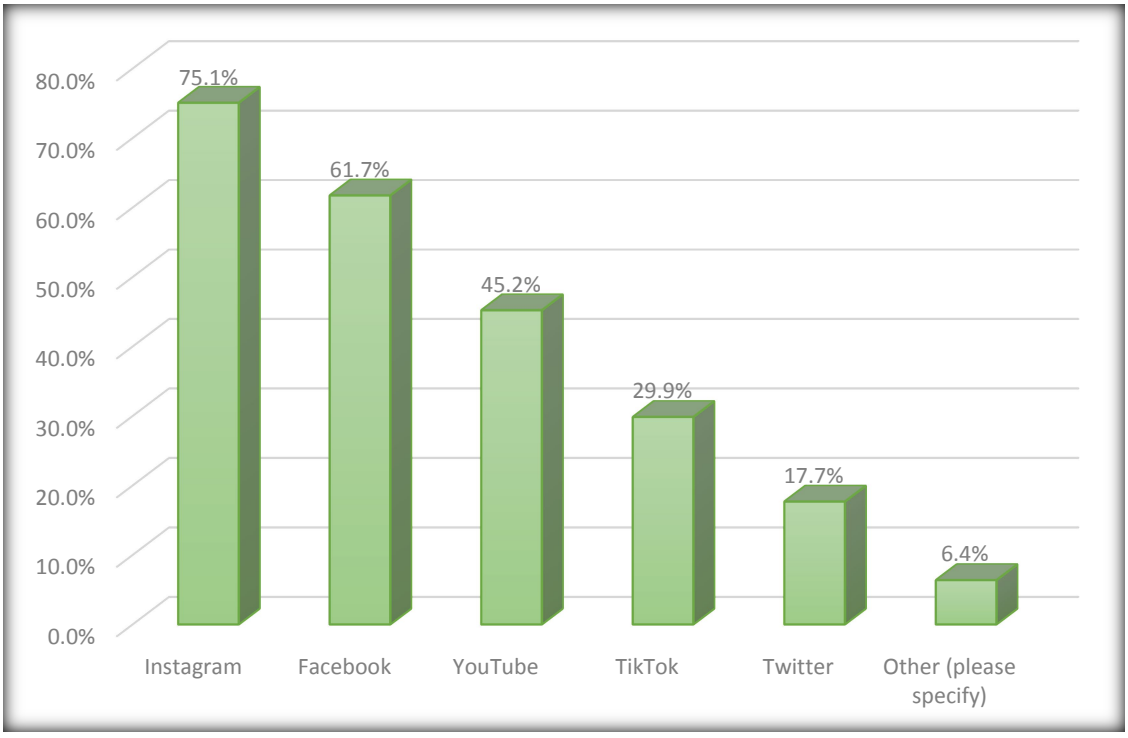


Chart 1: Sources from which young people get informed about the developments in our country and in the world

1 Respondents had the opportunity to choose multiple options. Two respondents did not choose any of the options offered, but they also did not specify which other channels they use.

INSTAGRAM AND FACEBOOK ARE THE MOST INTERESTING FOR KEEPING UP WITH THE LATEST EVENTS!

The social media that young people use most often to keep up with the news are Instagram (73.8%) and Facebook (61.7%), while YouTube is in third place (45.2%). Next in line of social media used for getting news is TikTok (29.3% of young people), and the least used is X (X, formerly Twitter). The youth also mentioned other media, such as: Google, LinkedIn, Telegram, Reddit, Snapchat, Spotify, Revista Online, Time.mk and other internet sites as sources for getting informed on the latest developments[2].



Graph 2: Which social media do young people use to stay informed?

2 Four respondents said that they do not use social media to follow the news, with one specifically explaining that they do not use social media for news because they are "unreliable, often biased, and vulnerable to cyber attacks."

ONCE AGAIN, SOCIAL MEDIA ARE MOST OFTEN THE WAY TO ACCESS ONLINE NEWS, DELIBERATE SEARCH AND SELECTION OF NEWS ARE VERY RARE!

The same trend was confirmed when respondents were asked what was the source of online news that they used the most in the previous seven days. More than half, i.e. 53%, used social media to find news online, 13.9% accessed a news generator and 8.4% went directly to a news website or app.

A much smaller number of respondents searched for a specific topic, case or news online, i.e. only 7.5% usually accessed the news by entering a keyword for a specific news item, 4.3% searched for a keyword on a website and 3.2% made a selection of the information through the news notifications they received on their mobile device (phone/tablet). Only two respondents answered that they get news via e-newsletter and e-mail and three answered that in the last seven days they "have not searched for news", "heard about the news at school" and "read the news on a website".

ACTIVE ACCESS TO NEWS AND INFORMATION (SEARCHING) IS UNCOMMON FOR YOUNG PEOPLE!

63.7% declared that they most often come across news while doing other things, and 36.3% actively search for news and information, thus confirming the trend of more passive consumption of news than actively searching and checking information.

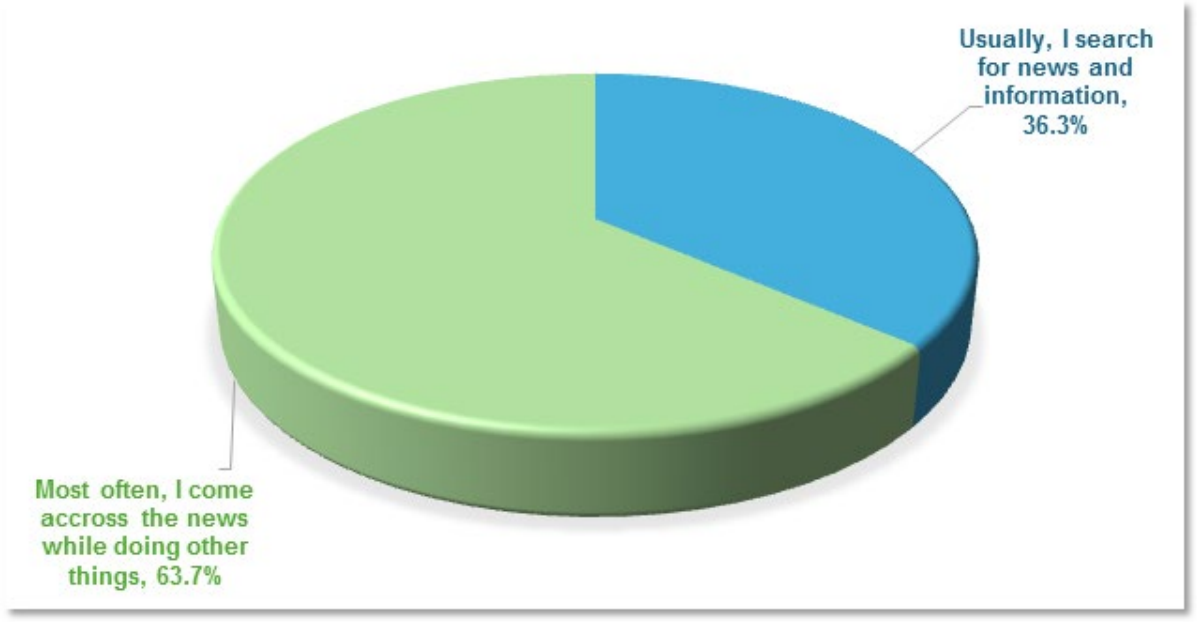


Chart 3: Active or passive receiving of information

YOUNG PEOPLE MOSTLY WANT TO TALK TO THEIR FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES ABOUT THE NEWS THEY FOLLOW

It can be concluded that, for young people, reading news often leads to them later on sharing it verbally or online with friends and colleagues and they usually read other people's comments on the news, but it is not as common for them to directly and publicly react, i.e., write their own comment about a certain news item, yet it is important to note that commenting is more common on social media compared to websites.

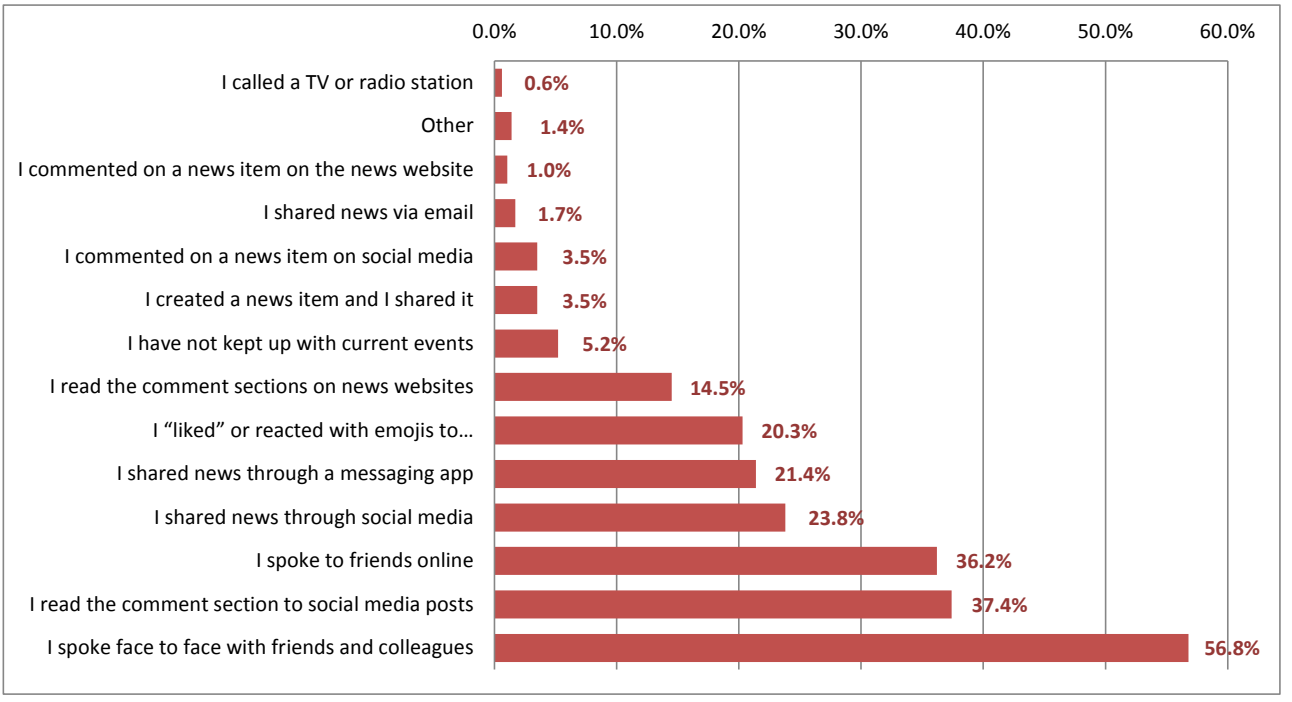


Chart 4. Behaviour of young people when reading the news

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY NEWS - THE MOST ATTRACTIVE, AND SPORTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE NEWS - THE LEAST ATTRACTIVE TO THE YOUTH

The answers indicate that **there is less interest among young people in the political developments in the country, the economy and social justice, while the focus on topics of interest to them is on education, technology, culture, local news, health, but also on crime and corruption.**

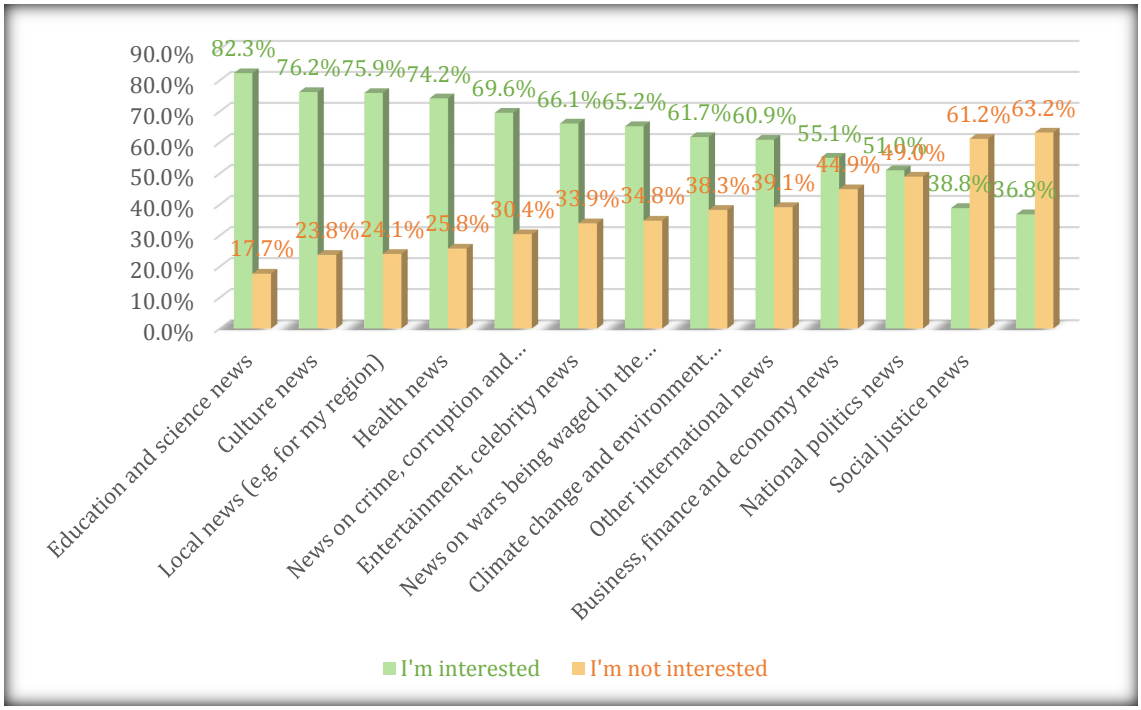


Chart 5: Types of news that young people are interested in or avoid

POLITICS - THE SOURCE OF THE LARGEST NUMBER OF MISINFORMATION OR DISINFORMATION!

Finally, the most common topics selected from the list, on which the young respondents noticed misinformation or disinformation, were about politics (62.3%) and celebrities (57.1%). The next topics on which young people notice incorrect information are crime and corruption (44.3%), health (39.4%), education (37.1%) and topics about the cost of living (34.5%). According to young people, misinformation or disinformation in the news related to climate change and the environment is the least common (28.7%).

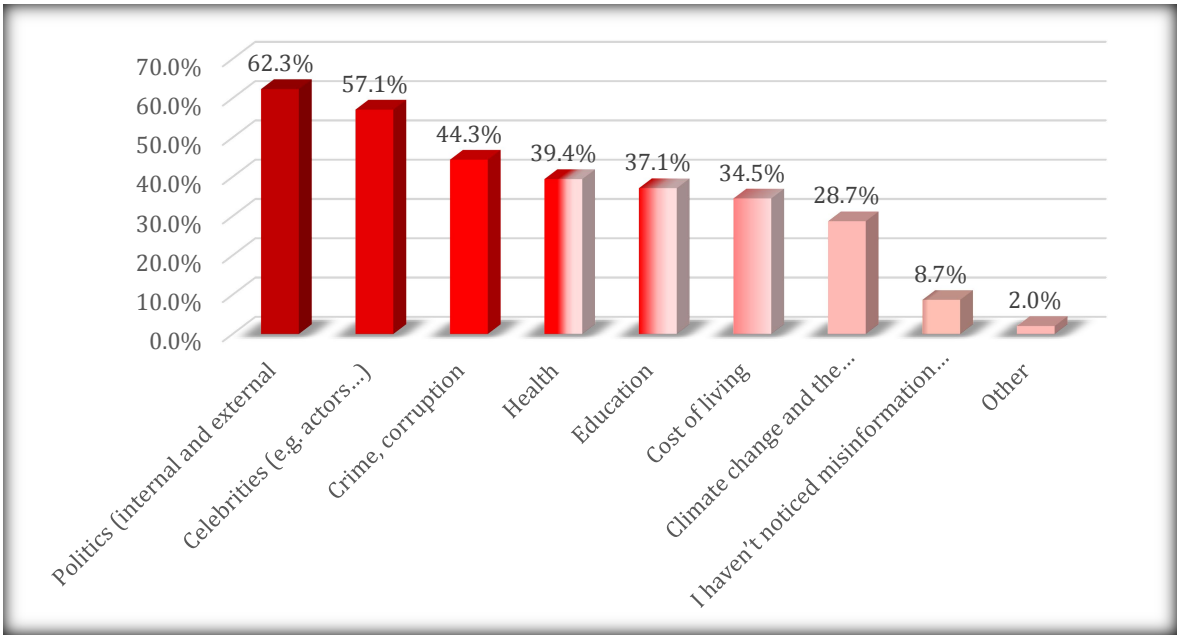


Chart 6: Topics about which the respondents noticed incorrect or misleading information

3 HOW YOUNG PEOPLE ASSESS WHETHER THE INFORMATION IS TRUE



The second part of the research determines how young people assess the veracity of news, as well as their attitude towards the process of receiving news. Respondents answered whether they check the timeline, source, accuracy and purpose of information[3] to gain insight into how they approach fact checking and estimating the value of online news[4].

3 The respondents were given the CRAAP instrument/scale (acronym of the first letters for Currency, Relevance, Authority (source), Accuracy and Purpose), which was originally created by Sarah Blakeslee of California State University. The research does not include the Relevance dimension, which refers to the verification of scientific or professional texts, because it is not the subject of analysis in this research.

4 Checking each of the instrument's scales showed high reliability (internal coherence). The value of the reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of the individual scales ranges from 0.7 to 0.8 (for the first scale A-actuality, it is 0.70, for the second A-authority, it is 0.72, for the third A-accuracy it is 0.79 and for the fourth P-purpose it is 0.74, while on the whole scale the coefficient is 0.85.

DO YOUNG PEOPLE CHECK WHETHER THE INFORMATION IS CURRENT (CURRENCY)? THE LARGEST PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG PEOPLE SAID SOMETIMES!

This refers to whether the respondents check the time when the news was published when reading it, whether it is updated and whether the specified links are functional. The table below shows the way in which respondents answered the three questions related to how current the news is. **Among the young respondents, there is a lower tendency to always or very often check whether the news is up to date and whether the links work, and there is a more intense tendency to check when the news was published.** Respondents mostly choose the answer "sometimes", that is, **they sometimes check when the news was published, whether it has been updated and how functional the links are.**

Table 1: Presentation of the answers given on the scale A-Currency expressed in %

Questions from the A-Checking the timeline	Never	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
When was the information published?	4.2	28.4	27.8	13.7	25.8
Has the information been revised or updated?	13.1	43.5	22.9	13.1	7.5
Are the links functional?	5.6	32.7	29.1	19.0	13.7

DO YOUNG PEOPLE CHECK THE SOURCE OF THE INFORMATION?
A VAST MAJORITY OF THE RESPONDENTS SAID SOMETIMES!

This refers to the habit of the young respondents to check the source of the information, that is, whether, when receiving the news, attention is paid to who the author is, who published the news (publisher) and whether the news is sponsored by someone. As can be seen from table 2 below, more than half of young people only sometimes or never check who is the author, source or sponsor, which indicates that this habit has not been adopted by the youth to a satisfactory level.

Table 2: Presentation of the answers given on the scale A- Authority expressed in %

Questions from the Authority scale	Never	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
Who is the author? (what are his qualifications, organizational affiliation, is he/she qualified to write on the topic)	**18.0**	**37.3**	**18.0**	**11.4**	**15.3**
Who is the publisher / source? (are there data for contact, email address)	**19.6**	**36.9**	**14.7**	**11.8**	**17.0**
Is it sponsored, and if so, by whom?	**21.2**	**32.4**	**18.0**	**11.8**	**16.7**

DO YOUNG PEOPLE CHECK THE TRUTH AND ACCURACY OF THE CONTENT THEY READ?
YOUNG PEOPLE OFTEN CHECK THE TRUTH AND ACCURACY OF THE CONTENT THEY READ, BUT NOT THE EMOTIONAL TONE!

The "Accuracy" aspect refers to the tendency to check whether the news is supported by evidence, whether it is correct, what the tone of the news is, and whether there are spelling errors. According to the answers, it can be concluded that **the respondents more often pay attention and check whether the news is backed up by evidence, whether the information is correct and whether it is properly spelled, than they focus on checking the tone of the news, whether it is neutral or emotionally coloured.**

Table 6: Presentation of the responses given on the Accuracy scale expressed in %

Accuracy scale questions	Never	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
Is the information backed up by evidence / arguments and does it share different points of view that are relevant to the topic?	**4.6**	**24.8**	**22.9**	**20.6**	**27.1**
Is the information correct, comparing it to another source or from personal knowledge?	**2.9**	**24.5**	**25.5**	**19.9**	**27.1**
What is the tone of the information - emotional or neutral?	**12.4**	**31.4**	**29.4**	**13.4**	**13.4**
Are there typos, grammatical or spelling mistakes?	**11.1**	**25.2**	**18.0**	**17.6**	**28.1**

It can be concluded that young people are aware that information can be false, i.e., they have a critical attitude towards the truthfulness of the information that is published. This can be seen in their tendency to check whether the information is supported by evidence and whether it is correct.

It is particularly important to highlight the tendency of young people to pay attention to spelling.

The reduced focus on identifying the emotional tone of the news, on the other hand, is something that should get more attention in media literacy education.

DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK ABOUT THE PURPOSE WITH WHICH A NEWS STORY WAS PUBLISHED OR SHARED?
AGAIN, MOST OF THEM ANSWERED SOMETIMES!

This dimension refers to the habit of thinking, questioning why the news is published or shared, i.e. whether young people think about the purpose of the news, whether it contains any kind of prejudice, i.e., if it is biased, and whether the content of that news will have a negative impact on those who read it. **Young respondents occasionally check with what purpose the news is shared with the public, because the answers "sometimes" and "often" are predominant on all three questions.** They most frequently answered "always" to the question "What is the purpose of the information?". About 10% of the young respondents never check what the purpose of the news is, whether it contains any bias and whether anyone will be affected by the shared news.

Table 3: Answers given on the Purpose scale expressed in %

Questions from the Purpose scale	Never	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
What is the intention of the information? Is it to inform, to educate, to sell, to entertain or to convince?	**8.8**	**25.8**	**25.5**	**16.0**	**23.9**
Is there political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional or personal bias in the text?	**8.2**	**23.9**	**24.5**	**23.2**	**20.3**
Who is affected by the information and what are the consequences of it?	**9.8**	**28.8**	**27.8**	**20.3**	**13.4**

YOUNG PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT THEY ARE ABLE TO RECOGNIZE DISINFORMATION IN THE MEDIA!

In addition, the youth's personal assessment of their ability to recognize disinformation was also examined.

To the question "How do you assess your ability to recognize disinformation that is published by the media?", the vast majority of the respondents declared that they were able to recognize the disinformation, whereby 28.8% of them declared that they "can fully recognize it", and 57.2% that they can "partially" recognize it, or 86% in total. Only 3.2% declared that they are unable to recognize them (of which 2.2% declared that they could "partially" recognize them, and 1% said that they "cannot recognize them at all"). The answers to this question indicate that **young people think they are successful in recognizing disinformation.**

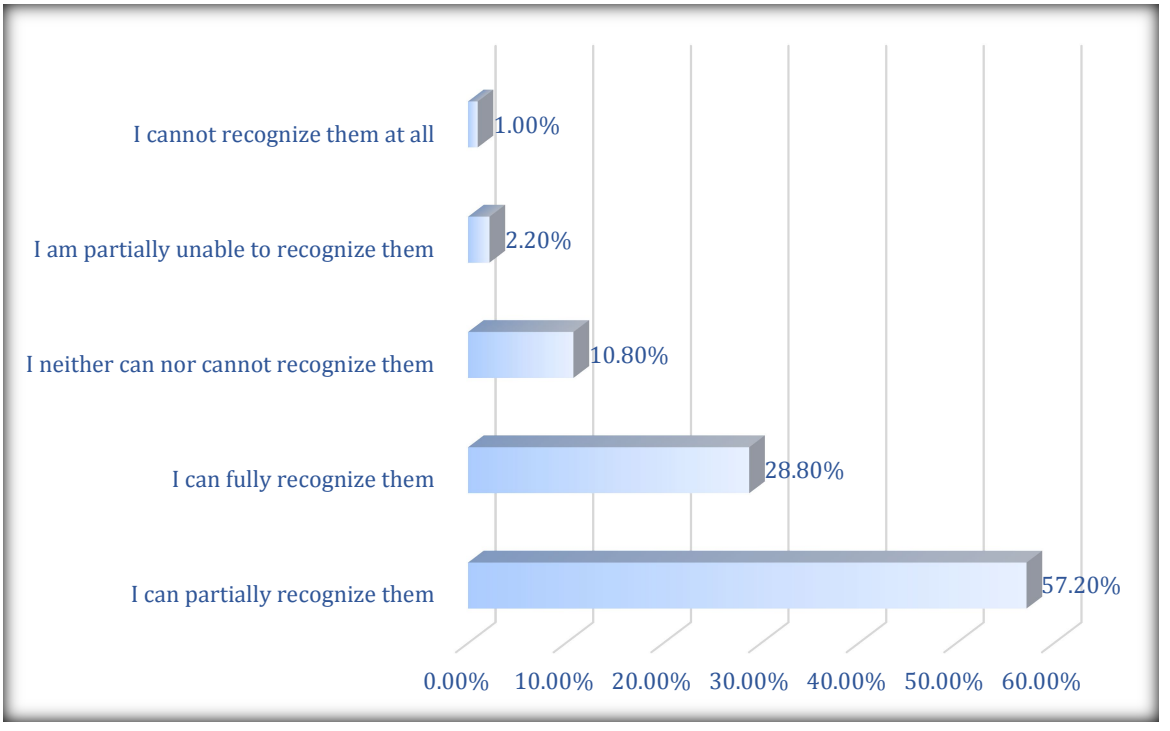


Chart 9: Ability to recognize disinformation

YOUNG PEOPLE KNOW WHERE TO REPORT DISINFORMATION IF THEY SEE IT ON SOCIAL MEDIA, AND MORE THAN A THIRD OF THEM HAVE ALREADY REPORTED DISINFORMATION IN THE MEDIA!

In order to delve deeper into the issue of the ability to recognize disinformation, the respondents were asked if they know how to report disinformation depending on the media where they noticed it. **Most of the respondents declared that they know where to report disinformation if it appears on social media (79.1%), and what most of them didn't know was where to report false information if it is aired on the radio (19.9%) or in a newspaper (19.6%)).**

Table 4: Knowledge of how to report disinformation depending on the media outlet

Type of media	Answer: Yes, I know (in percentage)
Social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc.)	79.1
Web platforms	40.2
Television	24.8
Radio	19.9
Print media	19.6

The answers to the following question speak to the context of initiative and responsibility of young people to report the propagation of disinformation by the media. To the question "Have you reported disinformation so far?", **only 34.3% answered that they had reported disinformation in the media.**

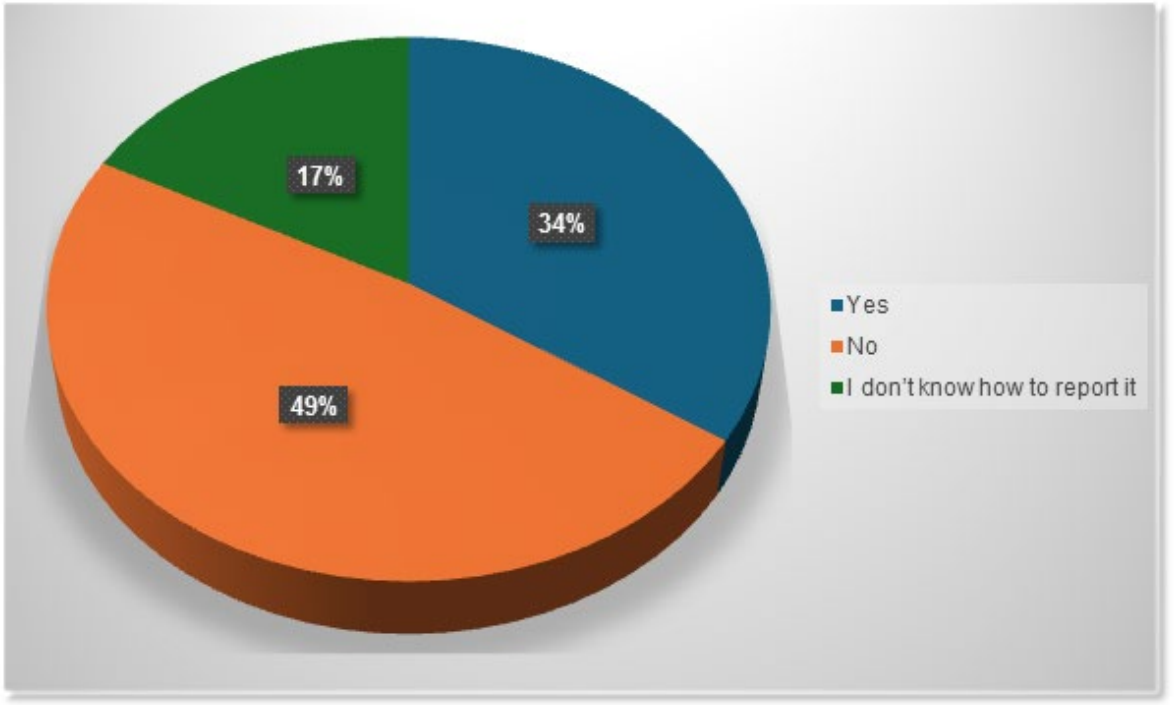


Chart 7: Reporting disinformation in the media

SOCIAL MEDIA - THE MOST COMMON SOURCE FOR KNOWLEDGE ON RECOGNIZING DISINFORMATION

Taking into account the high percentage of answers indicating that the young respondents know how to recognize disinformation in the media, it is interesting to gain insight into how they acquired this knowledge. **When asked: "What sources did you use to gain knowledge on how to recognize disinformation?",** where they could choose multiple answers, **the highest percentage stated that they used social media (46.7 %) before organized education (38.3 %), family and friends (35.1 %), books/textbooks (22.6 %) and video sharing platforms (7 %).**

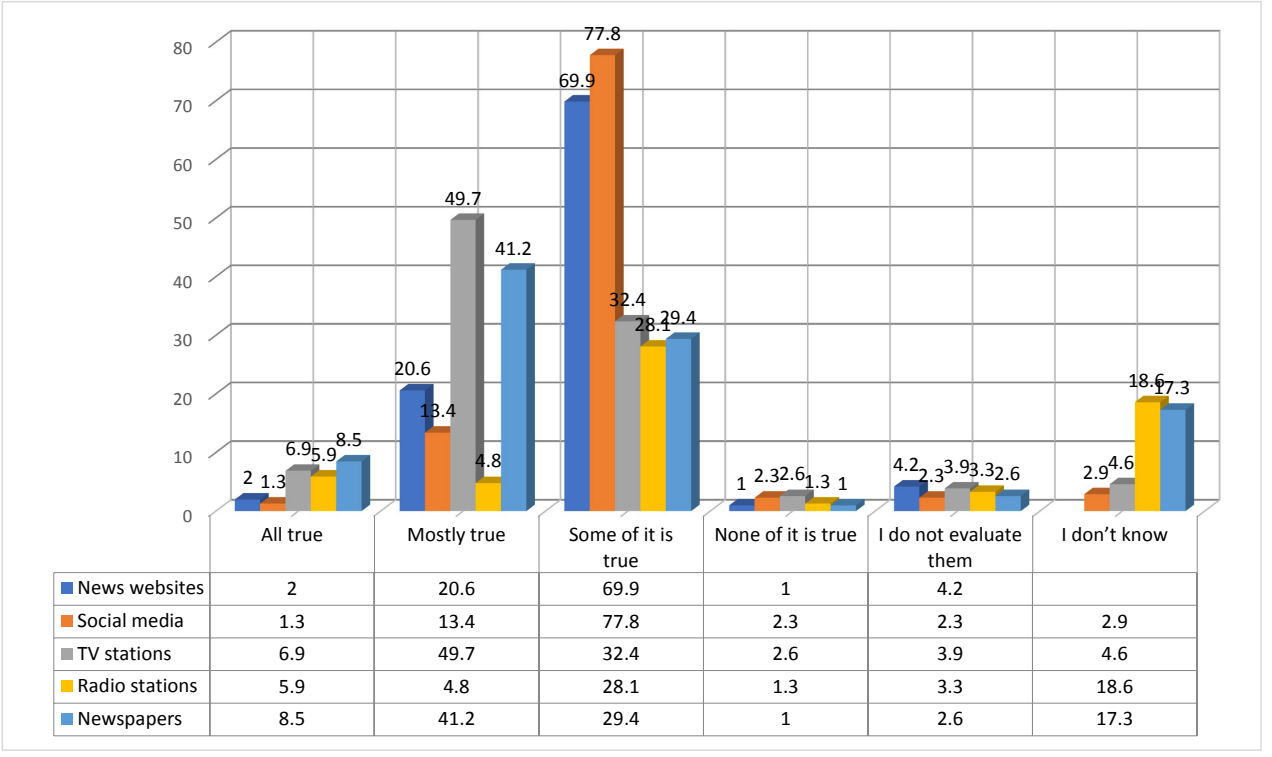
Table 5: Sources of knowledge acquisition for disinformation recognition

Sources	Percentage
Social media	46.7%
Organized education (trainings, workshops, seminars...)	38.3%
Family / friends / acquaintances	35, 1 %
Books / textbooks	22.6 %
Video sharing platforms	15.9 %
Neither one / I don't need to learn how to recognize disinformation	7.0%
Other	3.2%

It is interesting to note the answers that were given as "other". The answers refer to logical-critical thinking and personal experience as factors for recognizing disinformation: "Logic and previous personal experiences, the context of the news is very important", "Nothing specific, only logical connection", "Critical thinking through comparisons and forming one's own point of view by reading multiple sources for the same news", "My critical thinking, "...I have simply relied on logic, experience and knowledge acquired for a different purpose".

A TYPE OF MEDIA WHERE MOST OF THE INFORMATION IS TRUE IS TELEVISION, AND THE MEDIA WHERE ONLY A PART OF THE INFORMATION IS TRUE IS SOCIAL MEDIA, ACCORDING TO YOUNG PEOPLE!A TYPE OF MEDIA WHERE MOST OF THE INFORMATION IS TRUE IS TELEVISION, AND THE MEDIA WHERE ONLY A PART OF THE INFORMATION IS TRUE IS SOCIAL MEDIA, ACCORDING TO YOUNG PEOPLE!

The analysis showed that, for young people, **television and newspapers are media where most of the information is true (**almost 50% of the young respondents think so). Only 20.6% of respondents stated that most of the information shared by news websites is true, while most of the information on social media is the truth for an even smaller percentage of respondents (13.4%).



	All true	Mostly true	Some of it is true	None of it is true	I do not evaluate them	I don't know
News websites	2	20.6	69.9	1	4.2	
Social media	1.3	13.4	77.8	2.3	2.3	2.9
TV stations	6.9	49.7	32.4	2.6	3.9	4.6
Radio stations	5.9	4.8	28.1	1.3	3.3	18.6
Newspapers	8.5	41.2	29.4	1	2.6	17.3

Graph 8: Accuracy of information in the media

POLITICAL PARTIES – MAIN CREATORS OF DISINFORMATION!

The most common answer to the question "Who are the main creators of disinformation?" (respondents had the opportunity to choose three from several options offered) was "political parties" (64.6%), that is, **almost 2/3 of the young respondents believe that political parties are one from the creators of disinformation.** According to the subjective perception of the respondents, **in addition to the political parties, the main creators are domestic media (36.2% of the respondents), the Government (31.9%), and ordinary citizens (31%). The smallest percentage of answers** when it comes to the main creators of disinformation, was **"foreign embassies" (5.5%) and non-governmental organizations (7%).**

Listed as "Other", the following answers were provided: "everyone who has an agenda and profits from spreading it", "everyone in accordance with the needs", "all of the above can in a certain situation present unsubstantiated information", "media belonging to the political parties".

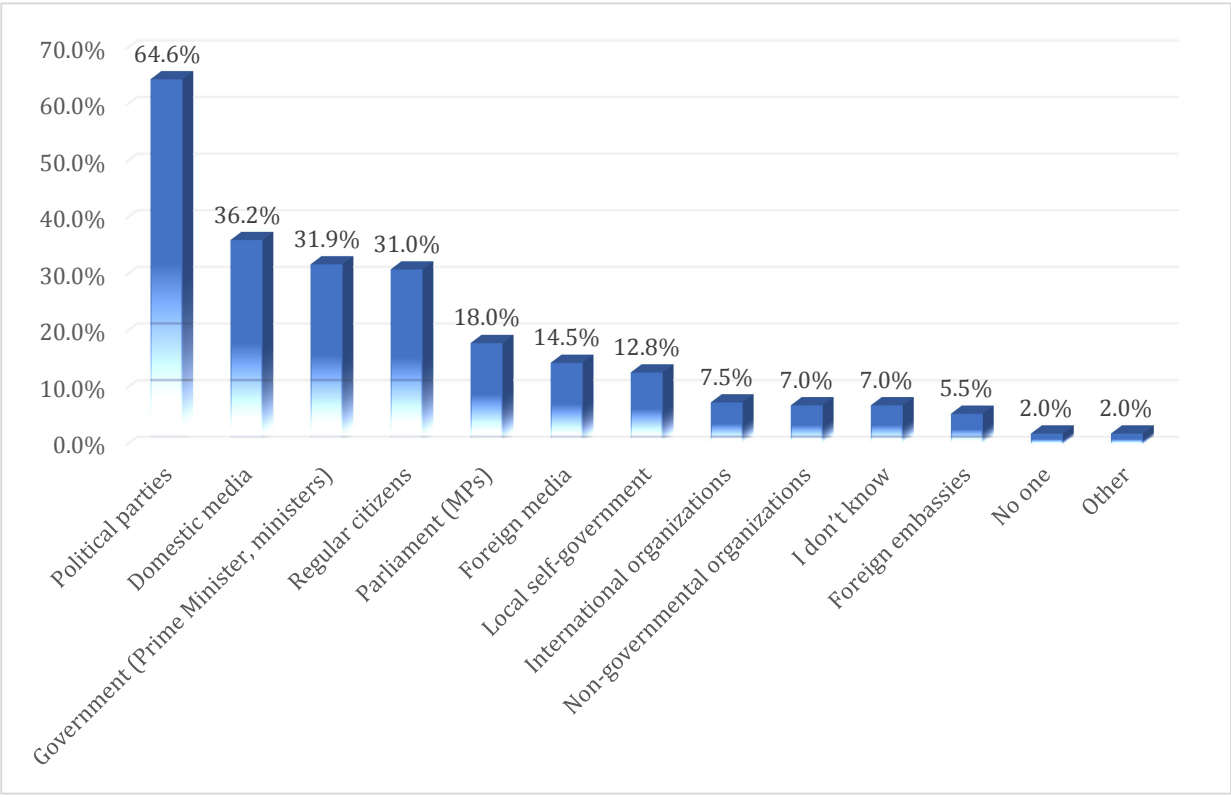


Chart 9: Main creators of disinformation

MORE THAN HALF OF YOUNG PEOPLE SAID THEY MAY HAVE SHARED MISINFORMATION WITHOUT KNOWING IT!

When asked “Have you ever shared misinformation?”, only 7.8% are sure that they shared misinformation, but approximately half (51%) declared that they might have shared it without knowing it was misinformation. This data deviates from the fact that almost all respondents (86%) agreed that they recognize misinformation well.

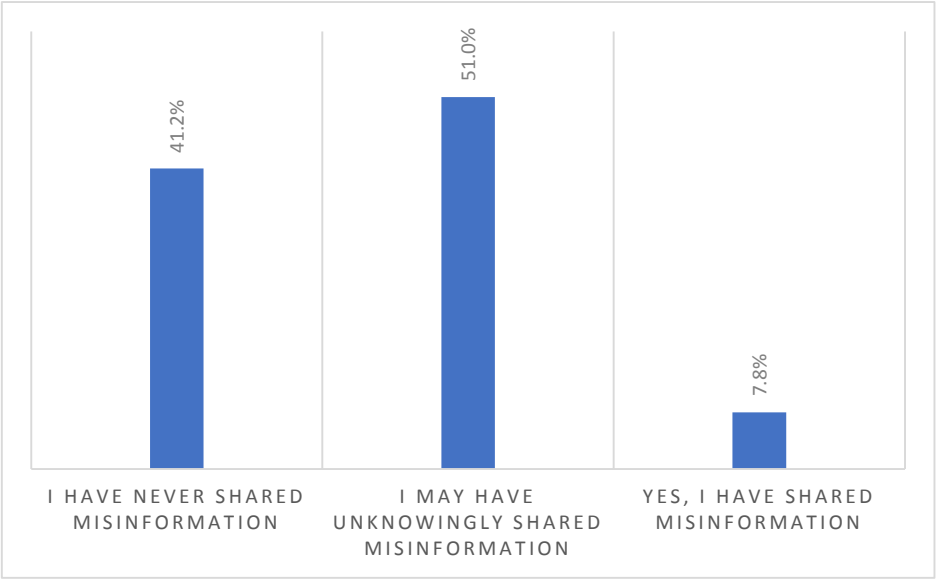


Chart 10: Sharing misinformation

4 CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OF THE YOUTH

The third part of the survey concerns the involvement of young people in public life - the community to which they belong and society in a broader perspective. To determine if and how young people demonstrate civic and/or political activism, parts of the Civic and Political Engagement Index were used (Andolina et.al, 2003). One part of the questions refers to civic engagement, others examine electoral engagement and the third part of the questions measure the "political voice" dimension, which refers to the way young people express their attitudes towards important social issues and developments.

LOW LEVEL OF CIVIL ACTIVISM OF THE YOUTH!

In order to get a general impression of the willingness of young people to volunteer, a general question was first asked: "Have you ever worked informally with someone else or with a group to solve a problem in the community where you live?". **About half (53%) of the young respondents were involved in some kind of volunteer activity aimed at solving local problems.** Of them, 29% had such engagement in the past year (the last 12 months), and 24% in the period before the last 12 months.

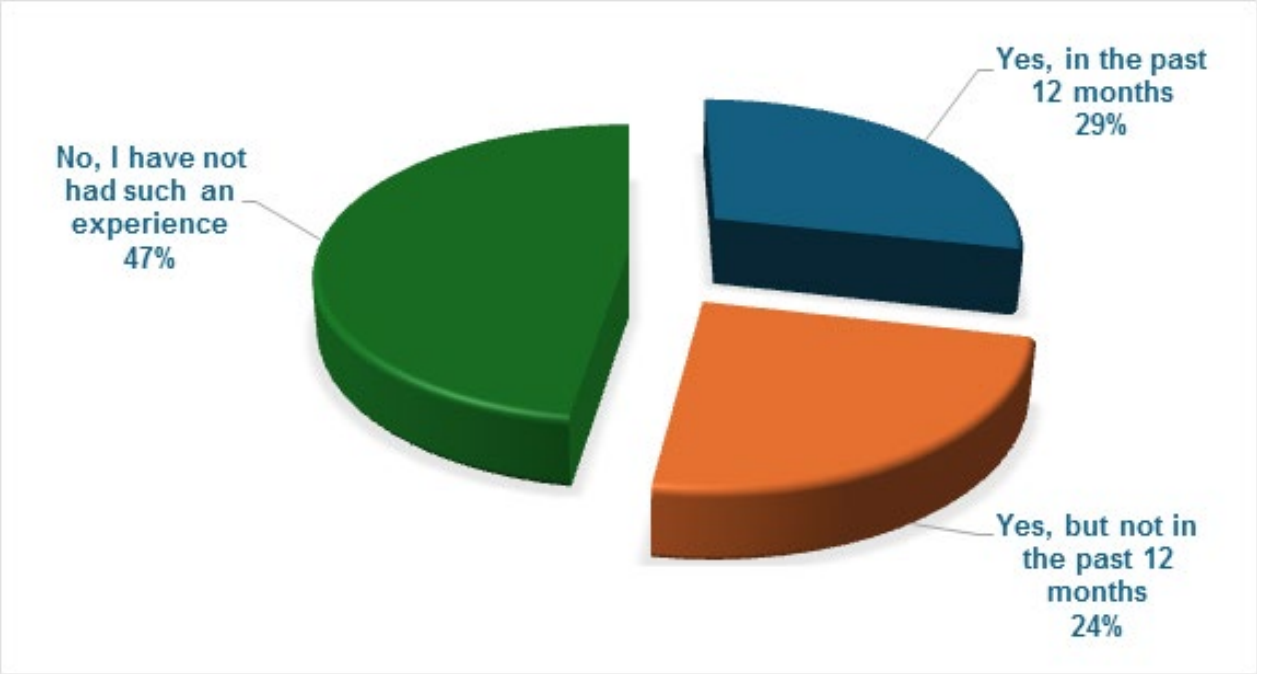


Chart 11: Informal local-problem-solving engagement

Organizations for youth, children and education are typically groups where more than half (58.5%) of the respondents have volunteered. As organizations in which they participate, the respondents indicated the following: **"**research organization, educational workshops", "local media", "Mlad ZNAK", "Youth Educational Forum", "Red Cross", "student organization" "informal group of citizens" ", "organization for cultural activities", "non-governmental organization for Roma", "journalistic forum".

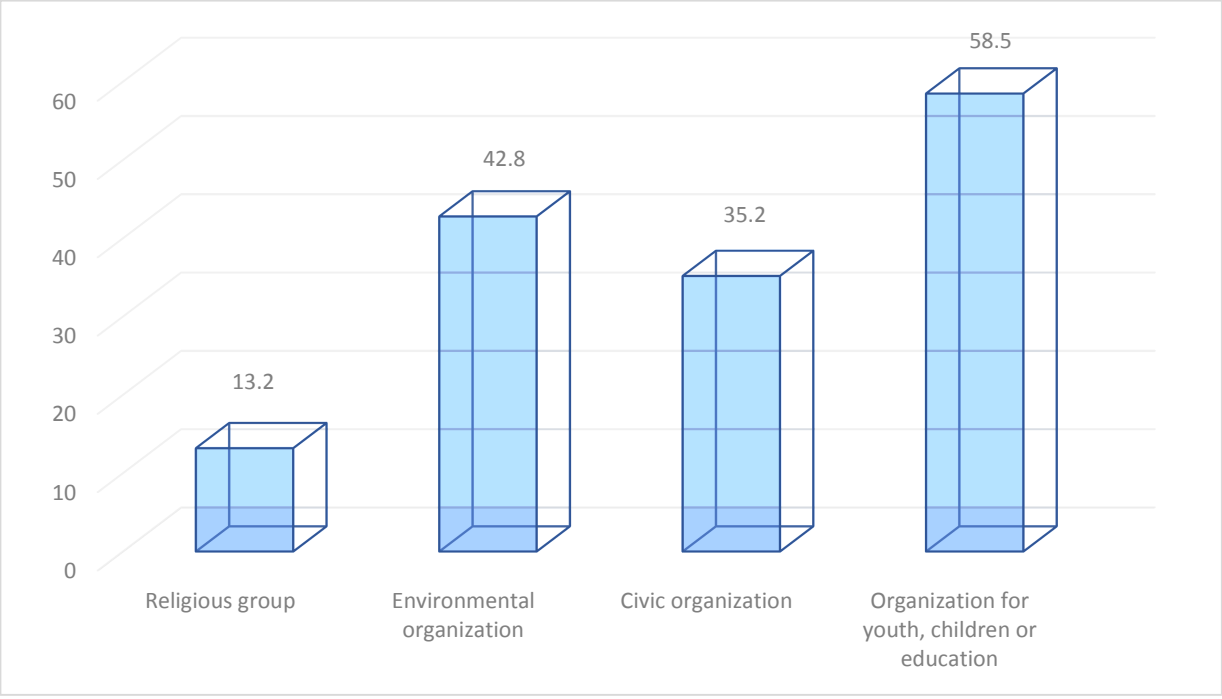


Chart 12: Volunteer engagement in different types of groups

When asked how regularly they volunteer, **a quarter (26.4%) of the respondents who declared that they were involved in some kind of volunteering are regularly involved in the activities of organizations for youth, children and education, 13.8% regularly volunteer in the activities of civil organizations in the field of health and social services, 12.6% in environmental organizations, and 8.2% in activities of religious organizations.** 64.2% of respondents volunteered occasionally or not at all in any of the indicated groups.

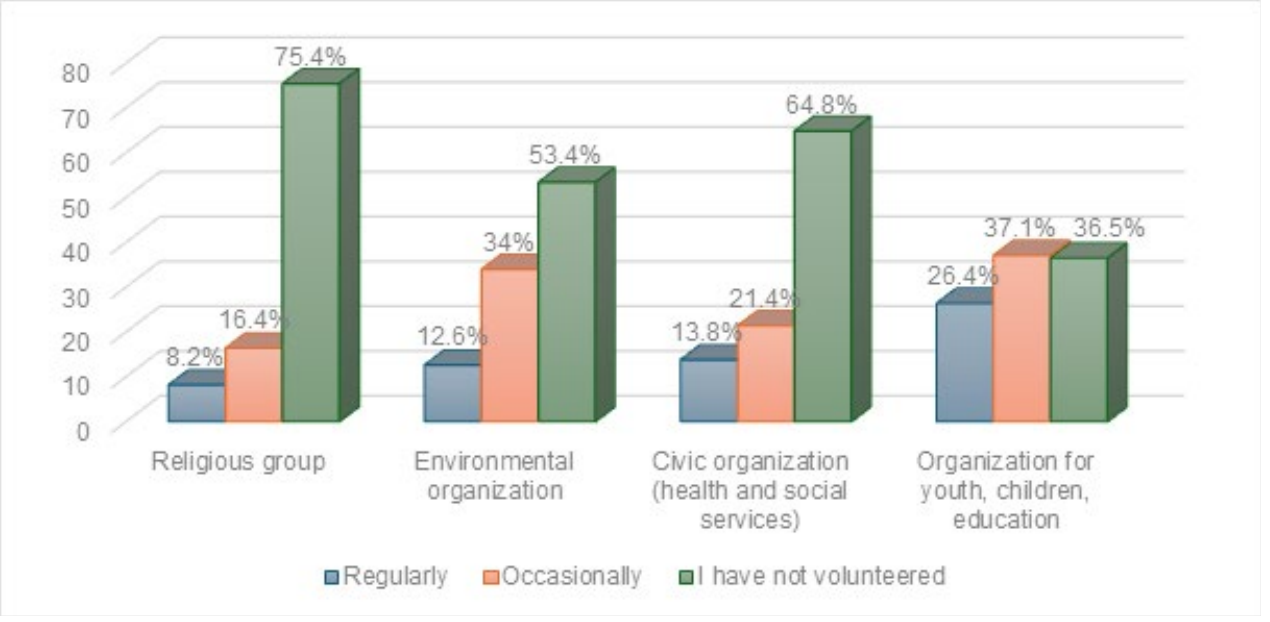


Chart 13: How often young people are involved in the work of groups/organizations

HOW ACTIVE ARE YOUNG PEOPLE IN ELECTIONS?

When asked: "How often do you vote in local, parliamentary or presidential elections?", **39.8% of respondents who answered the question declared that they vote regularly, 16.7% sometimes vote, and 12.6% never.** 29.9% have not exercised the legal right to vote due to age and 3% stated other reasons for the impossibility of exercising the right to vote.

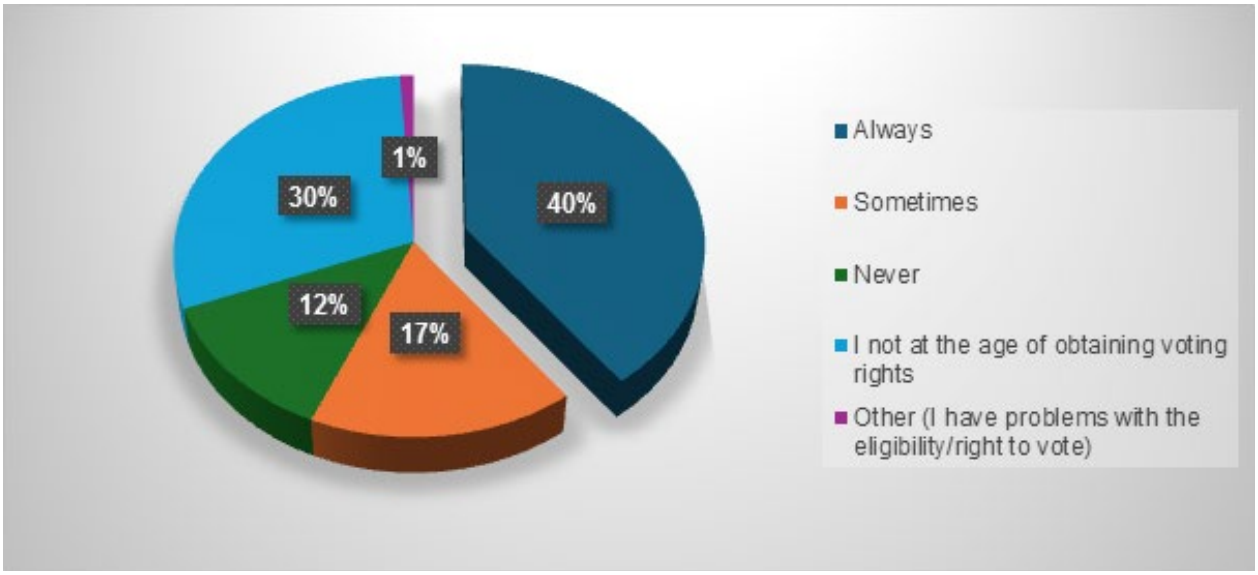


Chart 14: Participation in local, parliamentary or presidential elections

The activities of persuading people to vote for some political option is an indicator of voter engagement. Hence, the question of **whether through conversation they tried to convince someone to vote for a certain political option** was also part of the questionnaire**.** To this question, **half of the respondents answered negatively,** while of the remaining half, 25% declared that they did not have the legal right to vote until now, and 22% answered positively.

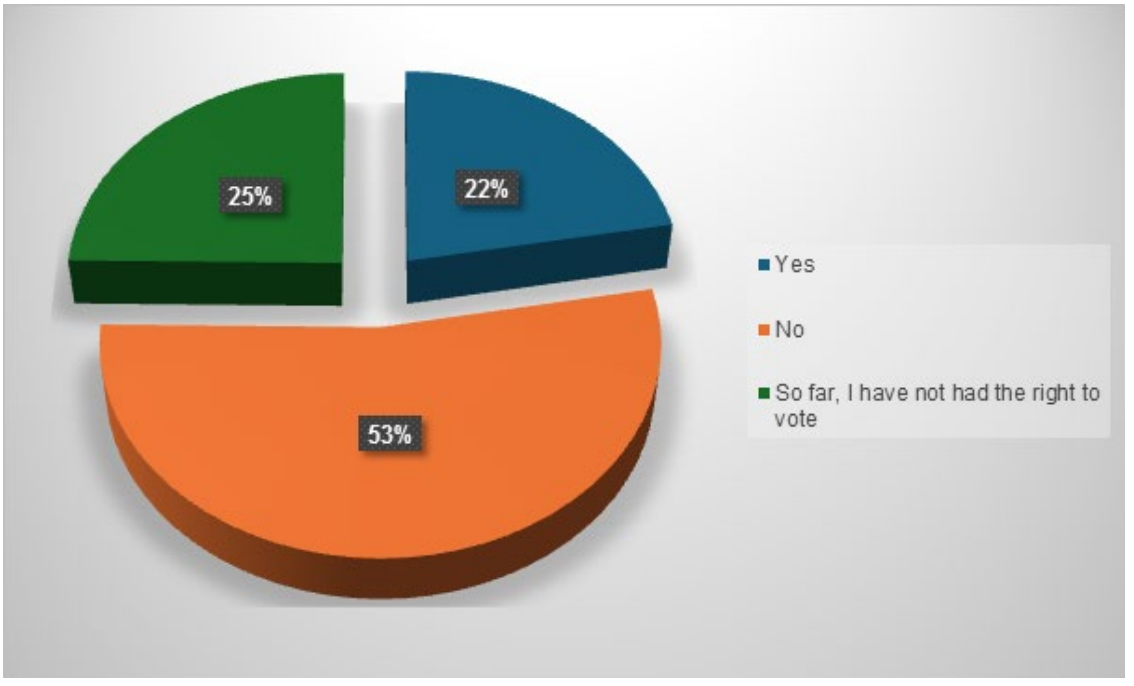


Chart 15: Persuasion of citizens to vote for a certain political party

Financing an election campaign or working on an election campaign of a political party/candidate is another indicator of election engagement. The data show that this way of demonstrating electoral involvement is not characteristic of young people aged 18 to 29. **In the past 12 months, only 5.8% worked for or donated money to a candidate, political party or organization that supports a certain political candidate.**

Table 6: Financing elections of political candidates/parties

Answer	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Yes	17	5.8
No	277	94.2
Total	294	100

THE POLITICAL VOICE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IS NOT HEARD!

The last aspect, "political voice" refers **to a series of activities that represent the demonstration of political attitudes in relation to certain social events. The most common answer** for each of the types of activities offered (see the table below) **is "No, I have not done that".** Active involvement in volunteer activities is particularly evident from the option "Yes, I have done it in the past 12 months". Although the percentages are significantly low, it is noted that **in the past year, young people were most often involved in actions to collect funds for charitable purposes (24.8%), followed by approximately 20% of the respondents who refused to buy, i.e., bought something from a certain manufacturer because they did not agree, i.e. they liked the company's social or political values, 16.7% participated in a protest, march or demonstration, around 11% walked, ran or cycled for charity purposes or contacted/visited a political official, and the least percentage signed a written petition (8.5%).**

Table 7: Types of activities aimed at expressing attitudes

Types of activities	No, I haven't done that (% of respondents)	Yes, I have, but not in the last 12 months (% of respondents)	Yes, I have done that in the past 12 months (% of respondents)	I have done it, but I don't know if in the last 12 months or not. (% of respondents)
Have you contacted or visited a political official?	78.9%	8.2%	11.2%	1.7%
Have you participated in a protest, march or demonstration?	59.5%	19.7%	16.7%	4.1%
Have you signed a written petition (on paper)?	78.2%	10.2%	8.5%	3.1%
Have you boycotted, i.e., NOT BOUGHT something from a specific manufacturer because you disagree with their social or political values?	67.7 %	6.5 %	18, 7 %	7.1 %
Have you PURCHASED a product or service because you like the social or political values on the company?	66.3%	8.2%	19.0%	6.5%
Have you walked, ran or cycled for charity purposes?	73.8 %	13.3 %	11.9 %	1 %
Have you ever done something for charity fundraising, other than donating money?	38.1 %	27, 6 %	24, 8 %	9.5 %

Among the respondents, there is a marked interest in the developments in the government or public affairs. 65.4% showed interest, of which 27.6% most of the time, and 37.8% sometimes. It can be concluded that there is a gap between interest and activities related to the demonstration of personal attitudes about social events (see table 7)

Table 8: Interest in developments in government or public affairs

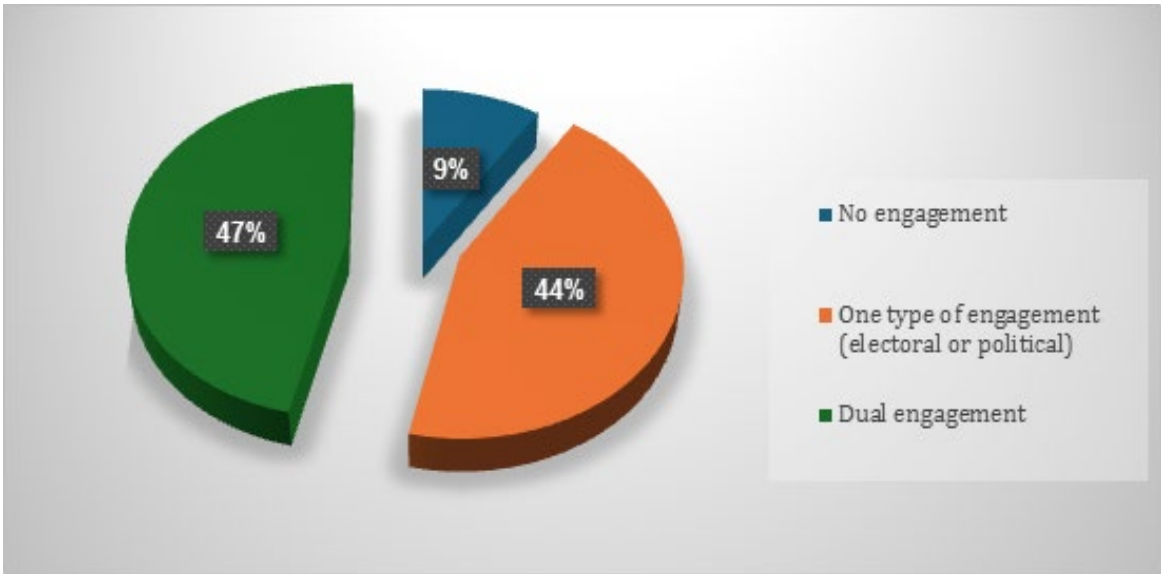
Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
27.6 %	37.8 %	21, 1 %	13.6 %

INTENSITY OF ENGAGEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE

In order to determine the way in which the young respondents who have shown any civic or political engagement are actively involved; an analysis was made of the answers to the two "gatekeeping" questions:

1. For civic engagement: "Have you ever worked, informally, with someone else or with a group to solve a problem in the community in which you live?" (where the following answers were taken into account: "yes, in the past 12 months" and "yes, but not in the last 12 months") and
2. About election engagement "How often do you vote in local, parliamentary or presidential elections?" (where the answers "always" and "sometimes" were taken into account).

46.4% of the respondents demonstrated dual engagement, which means both civic and electoral engagement, 44% demonstrated one form of engagement - either electoral or civic, and 9.3% of respondents did not show any kind of engagement at all - neither civic nor political.



Graph 16: Intensity of engagement (civic and political)

According to the index that was used to identify civic and electoral engagement (Andolina et al., 2003), young people were grouped into four categories: disengaged (that is, young people who showed neither civic nor electoral engagement), the so-called "election specialists" (youth who have only had electoral engagement), "civic specialists" (youth with only civic engagement) and "dual activists" (youth demonstrating both types of engagement). Most of the surveyed youth are in the category of "dual activists", i.e. they are engaged in civil, but also in political or electoral activities, and one third are members of the "election specialists" category, i.e. they are engaged in the electoral activities of political parties.

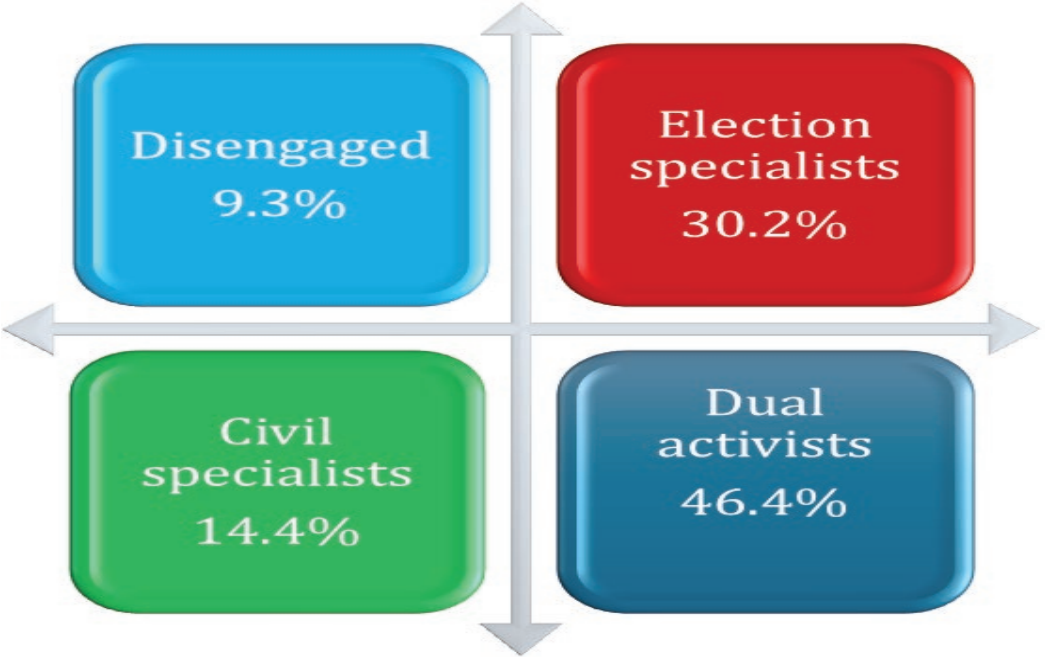


Chart 17: Categories of activism

At the same time, it should be taken into account that the sample is intentional and it mainly included young people who are both political activists and engage in civic activity. The survey will be followed up with a second part of the research, where the connection on civic and political activism and coping with disinformation will be looked into in more detail.

5 WHEN DOES USING SOCIAL MEDIA BECOME DANGEROUS?



Disinformation is mostly spread on social media, so the intensive exposure of young people to social media can be a factor for susceptibility to uncritical consumption of disinformation.

Research has confirmed that social media platforms drive surges of dopamine to the brain to keep consumers coming back over and over again. According to Nancy DeAngelis, director of the Behavioral Health Services, "social media is designed to 'get our brains hooked', and teenagers are especially susceptible to addiction" (The Addictiveness of Social Media: How Teens Get Hooked | Jefferson Health, n.d.). The shares, likes, and comments on these platforms trigger the brain's reward centre, resulting in a high similar to the one people feel when gambling or using drugs, DeAngelis explains. A recent study (Riehm et al., 2019) found that teenagers who use social media for more than three hours a day may be at increased risk of mental health disorders (increased depression and anxiety, low self-esteem, eating and sleep disorders, as well as a body dysmorphia).

This type of addiction falls under the category of behavioural addiction. Among young people, the habit of using social media is increasingly moving towards the stage of addiction, so researchers around the world are developing different scales to assess such addiction. Among people who are addicted to social media, the following patterns of behaviour can be observed: the appearance of anxiety, especially in the case when there is no access to social media; constantly checking the phone when the notification sound is heard; when posting a picture on social media, comments and "likes" are constantly checked: using social media is the first and last thing in the day, that is, a common routine; events are rated by how "postable" they are. Close ones notice that the person spends more time on social media than on actual socializing with them (IVimala, 2024).

ALMOST A QUARTER OF YOUNG PEOPLE SPEND A DISCONCERTINGLY LARGE AMOUNT OF TIME ON SOCIAL MEDIA!

The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) was used in this survey, according to which a score of 24 or higher is considered the optimal clinical cut-off for diagnosing social media disorder, especially among adolescents.

5% of the respondents belong to the critical group of high dependence on social media, but the percentage of respondents (19%) who are close to the critical result for diagnosing such dependence is also notable.

Table 9. Distribution of scores on the social media addiction scale

Results	Percentages of respondents
6-11	29
12-17	47
18-23	19
Over 24	5

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The survey questionnaire consists of four groups of questions and a total of 31 closed type questions (with one or more answer choices). During its preparation, questionnaires that were used in other researches of a similar nature were taken into account and a pilot study was first conducted to determine the appropriateness of the content of the questionnaire. The survey questionnaire covers the following areas:

- **What are the media and news consumption habits of young people in Macedonia?** This part of the questionnaire aimed to find out whether, in what way and how often young people consume news; through which media; how often they check the news; whether they actively seek it or passively consume it; and what type of news and media content is of interest to young people. The questions were taken and adapted from the Reuters Institute's 2023 *YouGov* online survey of digital news consumption (Newman et al., 2023).
- **How do young people recognize disinformation in the media?** The respondents were asked if and how they recognize disinformation, but also what kind of behaviour it provokes in them. Blakeslee's CRAAP test was used to evaluate currency, relevance, authority, accuracy and purpose of the information (Blakeslee, 2004). The Relevance dimension, which refers to the verification of scientific or professional texts, was not included because it is not the subject of analysis in this research. Each question is answered with one of the following alternatives: "never", "sometimes", "often", "very often" or "always". The rest of the questions in this section referred to young people's ability to recognize disinformation that is spread through the media and whether they have shared misinformation, whether they know how to report it and whether they have reported misinformation, how they acquired the knowledge to recognize misinformation and disinformation and, according to them, how accurate is the information received through the media and who are the main creators of disinformation.
- **In what way do young people in Macedonia demonstrate civic and political engagement?** The questions in this section referred to the respondents' own insight into their civic and political engagement and activism, including voting in elections, engagement in non-governmental and activist organizations and volunteering focused on solving social and political issues. The questions were derived from the Index of Civic and Political Engagement (Andolina et al. 2003). *Civic engagement* includes voluntary engagement aimed at solving problems for the community and individuals, such as maintaining and developing the local community, solving local problems through organized activities or through the provision of certain resources. Indicators of civic engagement are: active membership in a group or organization; fundraising for charitable purposes; regular volunteering; community problem solving; participation in organized citizen awareness (or fundraising) activities such as running/walking/cycling. *Electoral engagement* includes voting in elections and activities related to election campaigns, which are aimed at promoting and supporting a certain party or a certain party candidate. Indicators of electoral engagement in this survey are: regular voting, persuading others to vote for a particular candidate or party, donating to a campaign, party or group; volunteering for a candidate or

political organization. The survey also includes the "political voice" aspect, which refers to how active citizens are in expressing their views regarding social developments. Indicators of "political voice" are: boycotting; signing written petitions; contacting officials; signing petitions via e-mail; contacting the media; protesting.

- **Addiction to social media.** The last question is taken and adapted from the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) which measures young people's habits and extent of social media use. The scale consists of six questions and it was shown that it has solid psychometric characteristics on a Macedonian sample (Cronbach's alpha=0.77, the scale is saturated in one factor and a high item-total correlation was determined).

The questionnaire was designed to be completed on a voluntary basis and anonymously, by a selected sample of subjects, in the form of an online questionnaire, in sessions organized by the Institute of Communication Studies.

SAMPLE

The sample is apposite and consists of 345 respondents aged 18 to 29. It covers four groups of young people to cater for variations of different subgroups of young people according to key demographic and socio-economic factors, namely:

- 2 groups of secondary school students aged 18 (third and/or fourth year): a group of high school students from state secondary (grammar/non-vocational) schools (30), a group of high school students from vocational secondary schools (30); total: 60 respondents aged 18.
- 3 groups of participants aged 19 – 22/23: social science group (political and legal studies) (30), science group (sciences and mathematics) (30) and computer science group (30); total: 90 respondents aged 19-22/23 years.
- 1 group of unemployed, aged 19 – 29 years: a total of 30 respondents.
- 4 groups of employees, aged 22/23 - 29 years: public administration (30), private sector (30), non-governmental sector (30), political parties (30); total: 120 respondents.

Demographic variables in the questionnaire include: age, gender, ethnicity, place of residence, region of residence, educational background, and employment status.

Out of the total number of respondents, 130 (37.7 %) are male, 213 (61.7 %) are female, one respondent chose the option "Other", while one respondent refused to answer.[5]

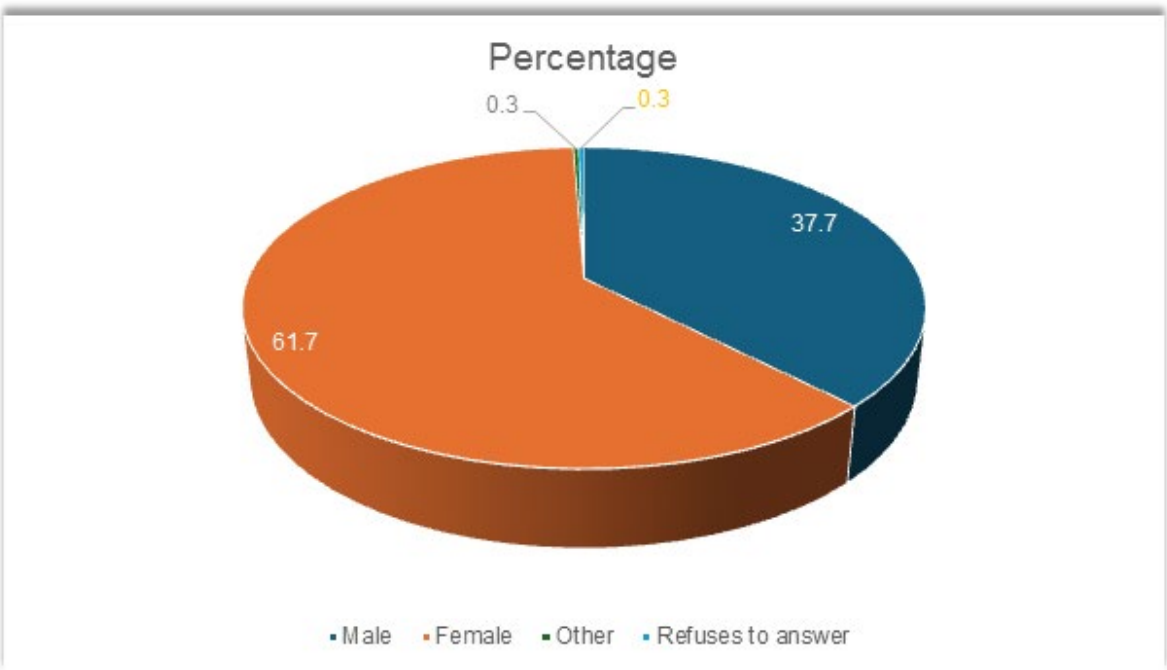


Chart 18. Percentage representation of males and females in the sample

5 The total resident population of the Republic of North Macedonia as at September 5, 2021 was 1,836,713 inhabitants. Of them, 50.4% are women and 49.6% are men. Source: State Statistical Office, https://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/2022/2.1.22.10-mk.pdf, 2021

In terms of age, about a third are 18 years old (19.1%) and 19 years old (16.2%). The smallest portion of respondents were 28 years old (4.6%), 29 years old (4.9%) and 26 years old (4.9%).

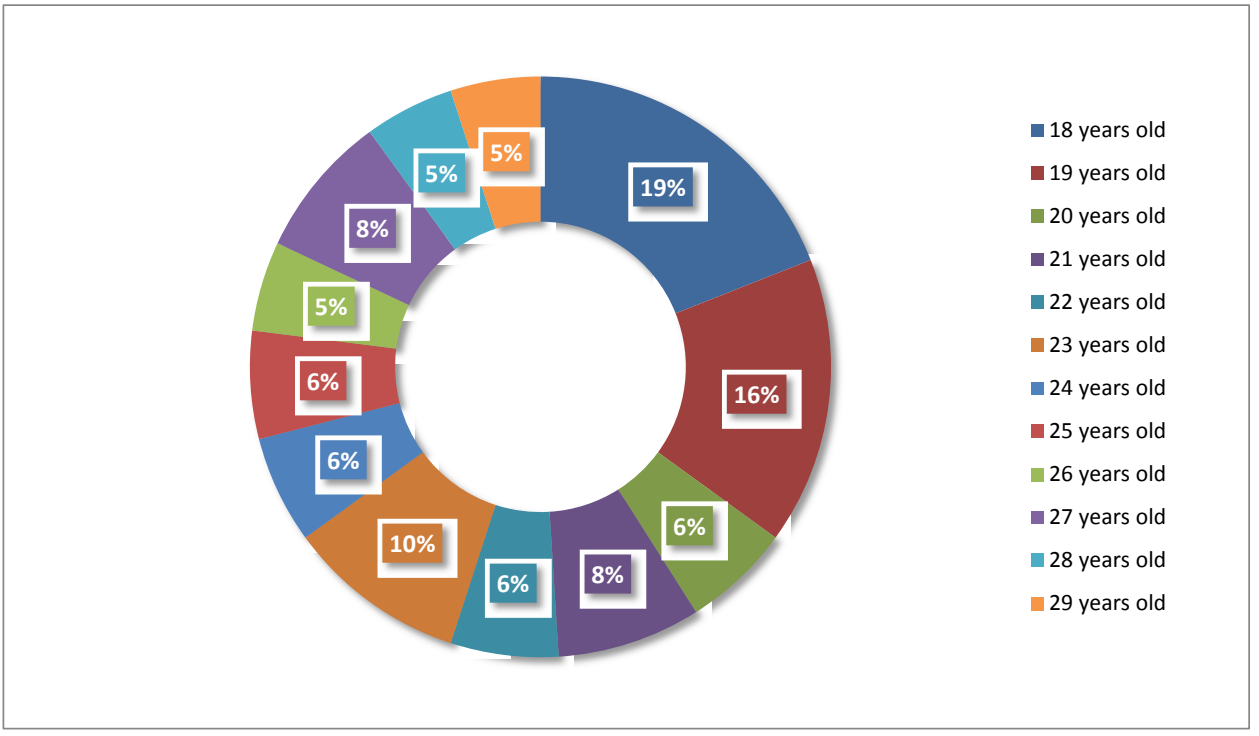


Chart 19: Percentage representation of the age of young people in the sample

From the percentages of the ethnicities represented in the sample of 345 respondents, it can be noted that the majority (78.6%) are Macedonians, followed by Albanians at 13.9%. The lowest (0.6) is the percentage of representation of Serbs, Vlachs and other ethnic groups that are not specified in the answer options. In any case, the sample contains responses from respondents from all key ethnic groups in our society.[6]

Table 10. Percentage representation of ethnicities in the sample

Belonging to an ethnic group	Frequency	Percentage
Other (specify):	2	0.6
Macedonian	271	78.6
Albanian	48	13.9
Turkish	5	1.4
Roma	4	1.2
Serbs	2	0.6
Bosniaks	9	2.6
Vlach	2	0.6
I belong on two or more ethnicities equally	1	0.3
I refuse to answer	1	0.3
In total	345	100.0

6 At the last census in the country, according to the declaration of ethnicity, 58.44% of the population declared themselves as Macedonians, 24.30% as Albanians, 3.86% as Turks, 2.53% as Roma, 0.47% as Vlachs, 1.30% as Serbs and 0.87% as Bosniaks and others. Source: State Statistical Office, https://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/2022/2.1.22.10-mk.pdf , 2021

According to the place of residence, 86.4% (298 respondents) live in cities, while 13.6 % (47 respondents) are from rural areas, distributed in different regions of the country, presented in detail in Table 4 below. More than half of respondents live in the capital Skopje (56.8%), and the smallest number of respondents are from the northeastern part of the country. It is important to note that the sample includes respondents from all eight planning regions in the country.

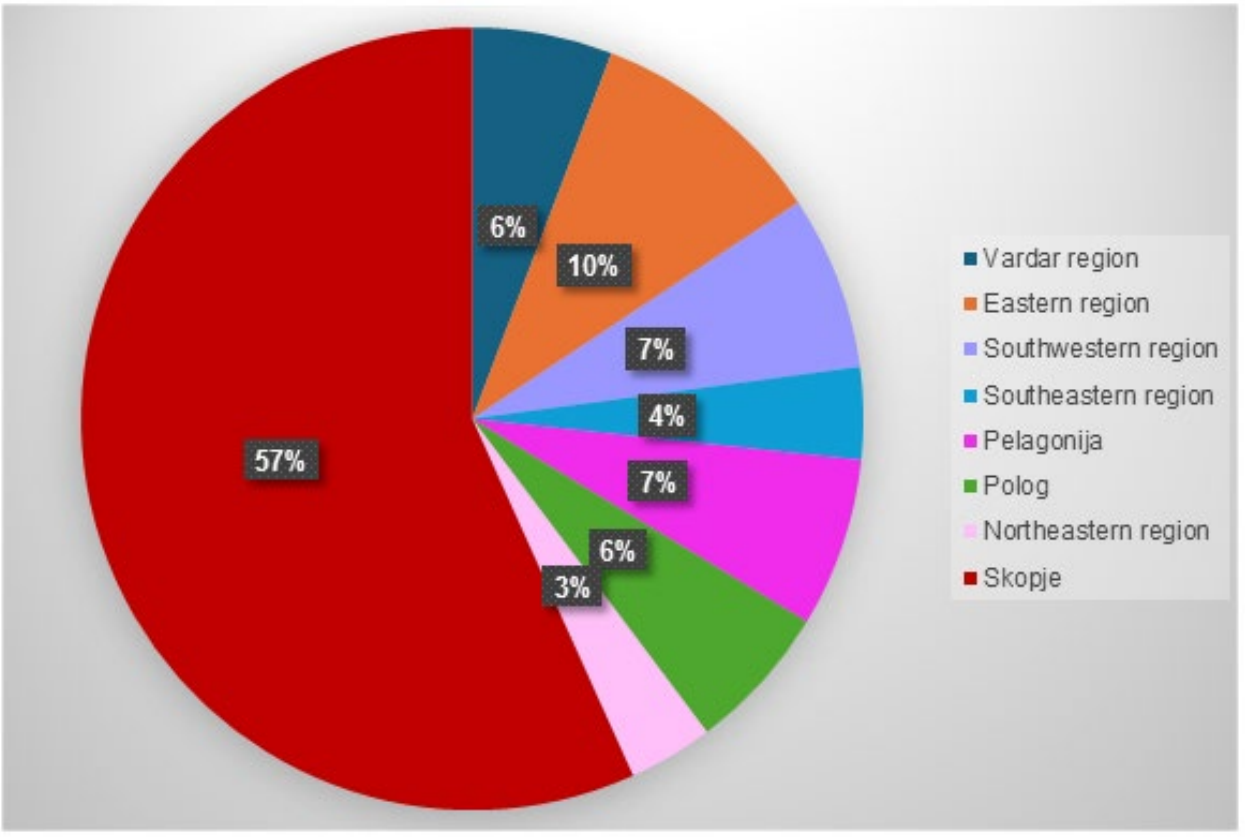


Chart 20. Percentages according to the place of residence by planning regions

According to the highest level of education they have, the largest number of respondents in the sample have completed secondary education – non-vocational, i.e., grammar school (31.6%). Next in the sample were respondents who have completed undergraduate studies (24.9 %), completed vocational secondary education (4-year education) (23.8 %), completed postgraduate master's studies (9.9 %), completed primary education (4.9 %), completed postgraduate specialist studies (2.6 %). In addition, there were two respondents in the sample who have the title of PhD, as well as respondents who have completed vocational secondary education (3-year education), respondent(s) who have completed half of primary education and two with no education.

Table 11. Level of education of respondents

The highest educational degree obtained	Frequencies	Percentages
No education	2	0.6
Fourth / fifth grade of primary school	2	0.6
Primary education – 8 or 9 years	17	4.9
Secondary education, vocational school – 3 years	2	0.6
Secondary education, non-vocational school – 4 years	109	31.6
Secondary education, vocational school – 4 years	82	23.8
Undergraduate studies	86	24.9
Postgraduate studies, residency programs – 1 or 2 years	9	2.6
Postgraduate studies, master's studies – 1 or 2 years	34	9.9
PhD	2	.6
Total	345	100.0

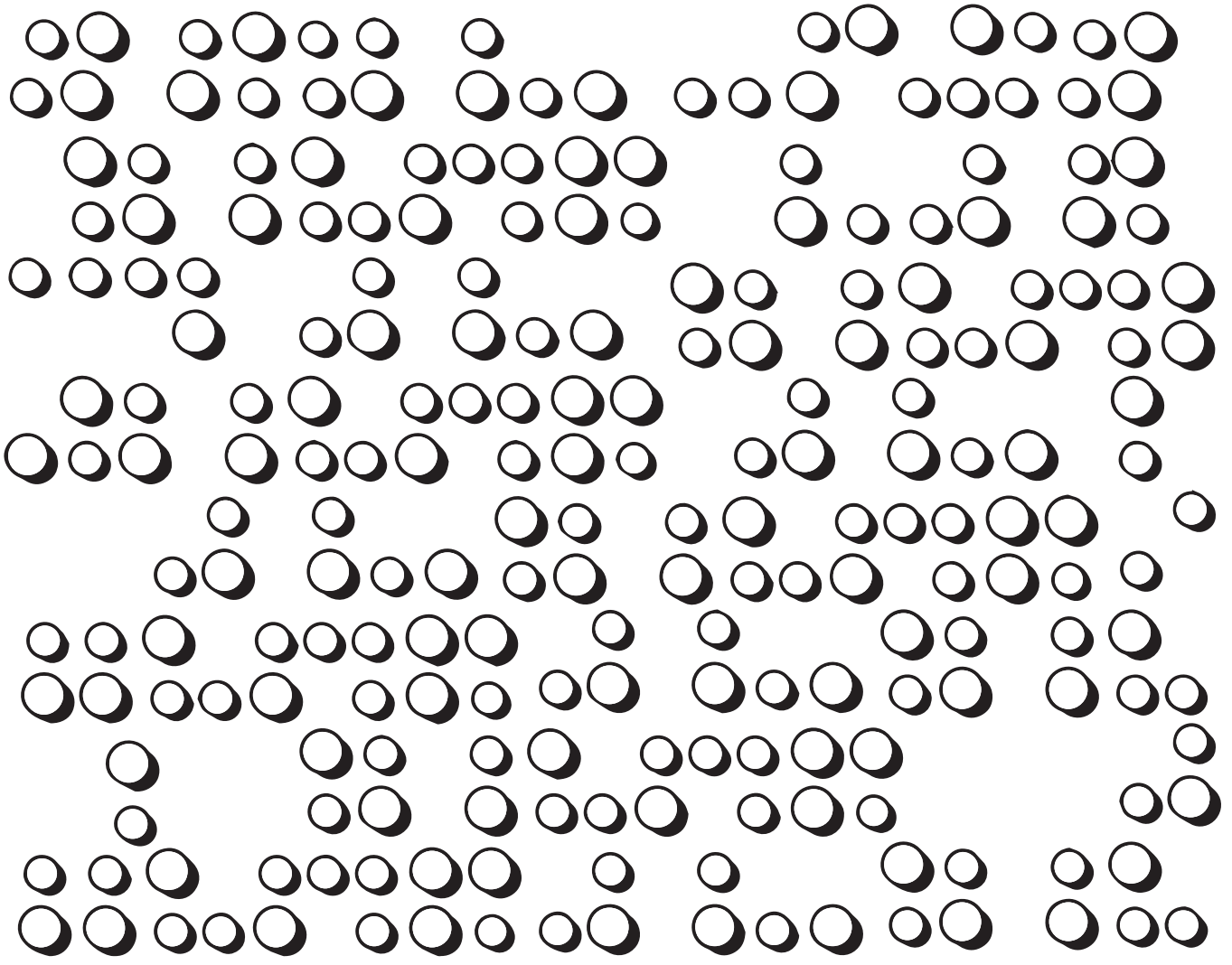
At the time of filling out the questionnaire, most of the respondents were undergraduate students (32.8%) and employed young people (32.2%), while the lowest number of respondents were students of specialists, people with master or doctoral degrees (1.7 %) and other (1.7%), i.e., a category that is not mentioned in the status list. Around 10% of the sample is comprised by the group of unemployed persons, students from grammar schools (general secondary education) and students from vocational secondary schools.

Table 12. Current status of respondents in the sample

Current status	Frequencies	Percentage
Employed	111	32.2
Unemployed	35	10.1
Student (secondary (non-vocational) education)	38	11.0
Student (secondary (vocational) education)	36	10.4
Student (undergraduate)	113	32.8
Student (residency, masters studies, doctoral studies)	6	1.7
Other	6	1.7
Total	345	100.0

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Institute of communication studies

Institute of Communication Studies
St. Jurij Gagarin 17-1-1, 1000 Skopje
info@iks.edu.mk; ww w.iks.edu.mk;

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