

## CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

- As the Ministry of Culture is responsible for developing and implementing mass media policy, promoting media literacy among the inhabitants of Latvia has been set as one of the priorities of mass media policy.
- The Mass Media Policy Guidelines of Latvia for 2016-2020 and their Implementation Plan are the first policy planning documents in Latvia that include activities devoted to the promotion of media literacy.
- The Ministry of Culture supports and cooperates with several partners promoting media literacy of different social and age groups, for instance, with the National Library of Latvia, the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments and with several NGOs. The Ministry of Culture organises regular meetings of the partners (~30) promoting media literacy, thus enhancing cooperation among the involved parties. We have supported further education and training measures for teachers, librarians, youth specialists of local governments, debates for pupils, we have also ensured the creation of materials promoting media literacy and organised conferences.)

### **Research on the Media Literacy of Children and Adolescents Aged 9-16 in Latvia (2017)**

The research on the media literacy of the inhabitants of Latvia carried out by the Ministry of Culture during the summer of 2017 showed that a half of the inhabitants of Latvia consider the media to be like a mirror of the world, meaning that, if a piece of information has been published/broadcasted, it can be trusted. Without evaluating information critically, people run the risk of believing in false, fictitious messages.

It was concluded that young people aged 15-24 **trust information available in the social media more than older respondents** (54 %) and 40 % of the representatives of this age group **share information online without verifying it**.

Considering the amount of time that the younger generation spends in the digital environment and taking into account all the risks that are currently linked to consuming information, the Ministry of Culture initiated and financed a research that is specifically focused on the media literacy of children and adolescents.

The research was carried out by the UNESCO Chair on Media and Information Literacy of the University of Latvia. During autumn 2017, **1203 children and adolescents aged 9-16 all around Latvia** were surveyed after conducting 16 in-depth interviews (each an hour long).

## Main Results and the Risks and Concerns Observed

### OVERALL INTERNET USAGE

**Almost all respondents (92 %) possess a smartphone** and use it for internet intensively: 88 % of the surveyed adolescents aged 13-16 and 66 % of the children aged 9-12 use internet on smartphones every day. **78 % of the respondents also use internet on smartphones at school or in other education institutions.**

Accessing internet on computers is less frequent and even less so on tablets (only 11 % of the respondents use internet on them every day), although the number of children and adolescents, who indicated, that they own a tablet, is significantly larger (48 %).

**RISK No. 1: Internet is used for no less than 3 hours per day by 57 % of the surveyed:** a third (33 %) of the children aged 9-12 and more than two thirds (76 %) of the adolescents aged 13-16.

However, the majority of **the activities done on the internet are for entertainment purposes or purposeless.**

Only a few read books on the internet or look for information for school or hobbies. 40 % of the respondents have indicated that they surf the internet and spend time online aimlessly every day, 32 % play different games on the internet and only 23 % look for information that is necessary for school.

When evaluating the frequency of use (for activities that are done every day), they are ranked as follow:

- watch videos on the internet (70 %);
- use the internet to send messages (68 %);
- use social media sites (66 %);
- listen to music on the internet (58 %);
- surf the internet, spend time online aimlessly (40 %);
- play different games on the internet (32 %);
- watch films and series on the internet (29 %);
- look for information that is necessary for school (23 %);
- look for information that is necessary for hobbies (16 %);
- read online news portals (16 %);
- read different blogs (15 %);
- download music on the internet (14 %);
- use internet to communicate via e-mail (14 %);
- post and edit photographs on the internet themselves (11 %);
- post and edit videos on the internet themselves (7 %);
- download films on the internet (6 %);
- read books on the internet (5 %);
- blog, write blogs on the internet themselves (3 %);
- read online versions of printed magazines (3 %).

The most popular internet platform of those that are used daily is **YouTube**: almost all of the respondents tend to use it and 78 % of them do it every day. The next most popular internet platform is **E-klase**, 69 % of the respondents use it every day. These platforms are followed by **Google and WhatsApp** that are used by 63 % of the respondents daily.

**RISK No. 2: A lot of time is spent on YouTube.** Almost a fifth (19 %) of the surveyed respondents have stated that they use YouTube for more than 5 hours per day. Moreover, another 38 % have indicated that they use YouTube for more than 3 hours per day.

A half (50 %) have indicated that they watch **music and song videos** every day. Videos with the **participation of vloggers and youtubers** were named as the next most popular YouTube content (watched by 43 % of the respondents every day). Mostly all the children and adolescents surveyed in the in-depth interviews are well informed about the activities of youtubers and vloggers, they can also successfully characterise the specific nature of the activities performed by these internet “celebrities”. Almost all of the respondents have heard about the business activities of youtubers and a part of the interviewees believes that they have a good understanding of the basic commercial principles of this platform.

A part of the children and adolescents acknowledge the specific nature of the YouTube celebrities' activities and product commercialising, nevertheless the perception of the media operating framework, sources of financing and the role of advertisements in the media business is unclear and often wrong.

Approximately a **third** of those surveyed in the quantitative research (34 %) have indicated that they **watch funny videos, jokes and challenges on the YouTube platform every day** and almost the same number of people (33 %) - that they watch **videos that show others playing different games**. In comparison, films are mentioned less frequently, 19 % of the respondents watch them daily, and 16 % of the respondents watch How-to and DIY videos on a daily basis. 15 % watch cartoons/animated films every day, while 16 % watch videos made by their friends and acquaintances.

**RISK No. 3: 89 % of the respondents have stated that they tend to use social media sites on the internet, but** a part of the children and adolescents tend to use social media sites for **even more than three hours per day**.

- ✓ 14 % of the respondents use Instagram for more than three hours per day,
- ✓ 11 % of the respondents – Snapchat,
- ✓ 30 % of the children and adolescents, who mostly speak Russian at home, use vk.com (vkontakte.ru) for more than three hours per day.

**The most popular social media site is Instagram: it is used by 73 %** of all the respondents. It is used even more by the audience aged 13-16 – 82 % of all the representatives of this age group tend to use it.

**Facebook is used by 69 % of the surveyed, but only 24 % use it every day.**

**Snapchat is used by 57 % of the respondents.** Those aged 13-16 use it to a larger extent (49 % use it every day).

**The most popular social media site for the surveyed children and adolescents, who mostly speak Russian at home, is vk.com (vkontakte.ru). 72 % of the representatives of the target audience tend to use it.**

The social media site **draugiem.lv, which was developed in Latvia and was once very popular, is used by 41 % of the surveyed children and adolescents.** In comparison, quite a few respondents have stated that they use draugiem.lv every day: they form 7 % of all the respondents. A part of the respondents have deleted their draugiem.lv profile, another part consider doing it, others keep their profile to occasionally correspond with someone who still uses draugiem.lv actively, to “play some games” or to check “whether someone has a birthday or a name day soon”.

**RISK No. 4:** Despite the fact that Facebook has imposed an age restriction before one can create an account (13 years old), 56 % of the children aged 9-12 have stated that they use this site. Thus the knowledge of media literacy must be acquired starting from an early age.

**RISK No. 5:** Non-critical searching and evaluation of information on the internet: the interviews suggest that **search is often limited to the first page appearing on Google.**

Girl, 14:

*“I don't really pay that much attention. I sometimes don't care, the main thing is that I have something to write in my homework, for example. But generally I don't pay much attention.”*

During the interviews, there respondents were asked about why the first results found in the search engine are presented first. The majority of the respondents answered that the websites appearing first in the Google search engine are the most visited, nevertheless sometimes it was assumed that the first selected results are shown because the websites are the most trusted and the safest.

Google is one of the most visited online sites by children and adolescents. 94 % of the respondents have indicated that they generally tend to use this platform. The results of the qualitative phase of the research confirm that in most cases children and adolescents are aware of the fact that not everything that can be found on the internet can be trusted and, in order to assess the reliability of information, different websites are compared. However, the representatives of the target groups, especially younger children, often do not pay attention to the reliability of information and do nothing to verify if it is reliable. During the qualitative survey, only a half of the children aged 9-12 (50 %) stated that they know how to compare

different websites and home pages to find out whether the information they contain is true. The answers adolescents gave to this question are notably different: 80 % of all the respondents have indicated that they know how to compare different websites and home pages to find out whether the information they contain is true.

**RISK No. 6: Younger children have a more limited knowledge (self-assessment) about internet safety:**

Only 50 % of the children aged 9-12 (and 80 % of the adolescents aged 13-16) consider that they can compare different websites and home pages to find out whether the information they contain is true.

Only 51 % of the children aged 9-12 consider that they can control who can see the information they have posted online (manage their privacy settings). In comparison, 77 % of the respondents aged 13-16 consider that they can do it.

67 % of the respondents from the younger group consider that they can block messages from people with whom they do not wish to communicate (against 93 % of the respondents aged 13-16).

Generally the highest self-assessment scores were given regarding the skills needed to delete internet browsing history. 93 % of the older respondents and 69 % of the younger respondents have answered positively when asked about this skill.

**RISK No. 7:** Mostly the interviewed respondents have stated that **the kind of skills that could be useful for daily internet use are taught very little at school, and almost nothing is taught about using social media sites and recognizing fake news. During the interviews, it has been repeatedly stated that adolescents see their skills as superior to those of their parents and teachers, that is why none of them are considered to be good advisers.** Certain respondents have stated that their parents, mostly father, have helped them acquire some of the skills (mainly the use of specific devices). The skills and competencies necessary for using internet are mostly self-taught.

**Teachers have a more significant role concerning the use of internet among the older group of respondents (13-16)** by providing different advice. As to the younger respondents (aged 9-12), parents have provided more support of this kind.

With a few exceptions, almost all of the respondents surveyed in the qualitative research have stated that the kind of skills that could be useful for daily internet use are taught very little at school, and almost nothing is taught about using social networks.

- ✓ *Boy, 15: They haven't taught us too much about it at school. They teach us something about Excel and PowerPoint in Computer Science... As to social media sites, I learn about them myself, nothing about that at school, I learn while I'm using them. There are a lot of sites on the internet that show you how.*

- ✓ Girl, 14: *They kind of have taught us about safe online behaviour, but mostly they talk about not humiliating others online and stuff like that.*
- ✓ Boy, 14: *My mum has told me a bit about it [privacy settings]. They should teach us more about it at school. At first, my Instagram profile wasn't private. I simply found a video myself where they tell you how to set it. I found it on YouTube, my cousin had it and he told me that you can find it on YouTube.*

Most of the respondents have indicated that **safe and advised use and dissemination of personal information online must be specifically taught** at school. The participants of the interviews have repeatedly stated that some children and adolescents have limited knowledge about these topics and that they have often observed an unskillful and careless approach to the questions of privacy policy of social media sites and other internet platforms, as well as ignoring the risks related to it. It is specifically attributed to younger school-age children.

Around a third (32 %) of the adolescents aged 13-16 have indicated they their parents mostly know a lot about what they do on the internet. The rate is much higher for younger children, more specifically, 50 % of all the respondents have said that their parents know a lot about what they do on the internet. However, **almost a fifth (19 %) of the younger children have indicated that they would like their parents to be more interested in what they do on the internet.**

The analysis of the results of the qualitative research have led to the conclusion that in terms of internet use there are different models of child-parent relationship. A part of the respondents, especially older children, are independent from their parents as to their activities online and their decisions about internet use. Younger respondents have indicated more often that parents supervise and have an influence on what is done online by paying more attention to the people their children communicate with, as well as to compliance with personal information safety and privacy. The answers of younger respondents indicate that parents also give other kind of advice, which might be useful to children in their internet use, nevertheless the knowledge of parents is not always sufficient for them to be considered good advisers.

A comparatively **small part of the respondents (15 %) has stated that they have received advice about the safe use of internet from librarians.** A positive answer to this question was given more frequently by those respondents who **live in the countryside (21 %).**

#### *USE OF TRADITIONAL MEDIA*

The information acquired both during the qualitative and quantitative phase of the research shows that **children and adolescents mostly use media in the digital environment.** The use of traditional media like television, radio, magazines and newspapers takes up significantly less time. The analysis of the results of the quantitative survey show that most frequently respondents find information about all the topics that interest them on different online platforms as the traditional

media cannot compete with them to satisfy the needs for the content that interests this audience. The use of television, but in particular written media and radio is irregular and mostly related to the content that interests not the respondents themselves, but other family members; the choice of the format and the content of the media is mostly done by their parents and/or grandparents.

**RISK No. 8:** A significant part of the respondents, namely **25 %**, have indicated that **they are not interested in the topic – the current events in Latvia – at all**. Both the qualitative and quantitative research included questions about children's and adolescents' understanding of news and their news consumption, paying specific attention to the news about events taking place in Latvia. The results of the quantitative survey show that **the most significant channels to obtain news about Latvia are television** (38 % of all the respondents obtain news on TV) **and internet** (36 % of all the respondents obtain news there). According to the majority of the surveyed respondents, the rest of the media channels have a minor role in obtaining news about Latvia. Only 10 % have indicated that they obtain news about events in Latvia by listening to the radio, 9 % - by reading printed magazines and 8 % - by reading printed newspapers.

*Girl, 15: If I go to my granny's, she usually has news in the background, at least there I hear something about what's going on.*

*Boy, 15: I mostly pay attention to what's going on online, about the newest things. About technologies and also about other countries and their politics. Not that much about Latvia.*

*Girl, 16: I don't know almost anything about the current events in Latvia. Only when I want to log onto my profile on E-klase, there are some articles on their homepage.*

Respondents were asked to answer a question about where on the internet they usually obtain information about the current events in Latvia:

- ✓ More than a half of all the respondents (**53 %**) have noted that they obtain **this information on news websites and almost a quarter (22 %) gets it on social media sites.**

The participants of the interviews could mostly characterise the objective of news, but often **watching, listening to and reading news was related rather to the generation of parents or even grandparents, not to respondents themselves.**

The interviewed adolescents understand the concept of fake news and a part of them can explain why they are being disseminated. Nonetheless, the majority have indicated that **at school nothing is taught about issues related to fake news and that they have mostly gained understanding about how to recognise fake news by themselves.** At the same time, respondents recognise the fact that it is necessary to teach about fake news at school.

## UNDERSTANDING OF ADVERTISING, MEDIA BUSINESS AND ITS FINANCING

**RISK No. 9:** The interviewed children and adolescents have an unclear and often wrong perception of the traditional media operating framework and sources of financing. Only some answers mention advertising as one of the sources of media income. The majority of respondents have indicated that nothing is taught about it at school; a part of them admits that it would be important and interesting to learn more about it.

- ✓ *Boy, 15: How are the media sustained? From the fund of Latvia. When they sell stuff and something like that, for example. That fund belongs to the Members of Parliament.*

Respondents have a comparatively better understanding about the advertisements that are placed on different internet platforms, including social media sites, but not all of the respondents interviewed during the qualitative research could describe the way these advertisements work and the way they are related to the private information of the users of social media sites. A large part of the respondents does not fully understand the business principles of social media sites, and almost all of them admit they are not taught at school.

The quantitative research included questions about the self-assessment of children and adolescents regarding their skills of evaluating and determining which online information and videos are advertisements. Respondents are confident about their skills and the vast majority or 80 % of all the respondents (87 % of the teenagers aged 13-16 and 71 % of the children aged 9-12) confirm that they know how to evaluate and determine which online video is an advertisement.

## COMMUNICATION ON WHATSAPP

16 % of the respondents have indicated that they use WhatsApp for more than three hours per day, 18 % use it for one to two hours per day.

The results of the interviews show that WhatsApp is intensively used as a communication platform not only to communicate with peers like friends, schoolmates, hobby-mates, but also with parents and other family members, as well as with teachers. This platform is used both individually and for communicating in groups. WhatsApp groups are made to communicate with classmates, they are used to chat about studies, homework and free time activities like camps, sports, different events, classroom parties and organising them. There are separate groups to communicate with classmates where teachers are included and others without teachers.

**RISK No. 10:** When children adolescents communicate on WhatsApp, they often exchange pictures and different videos. Adolescents have also mentioned some negative experiences:

- *Boy, 16: They send you different videos about other countries where people are killed, enslaved. There is both sex and violence. I don't download them, I simply*



*delete them. Now I'm not in that many groups of that kind, I am leaving them, because my phone's memory is lagging. They send you a bunch of recordings, songs, videos and pictures that I don't need.*

**Certain respondents have indicated in their answers that the communication on WhatsApp can also be unfriendly or even hateful.**

*TO SUM UP*

Similar trends have been observed across Europe, but it is important to react to them by addressing this issue **in school curricula, families and in the media** (it must be noted that the consumption of the traditional media is low).

The results show that a part of the children and adolescents have insufficient knowledge and skills necessary for consuming, creating and sharing different types of information safely and competently.

We invite those in charge of school curricula to take into account these results **so that the school curricula could help** in supporting children and young people of each age group to improve their knowledge about the smart consumption, creation and sharing of media and other information.

**NB!** For a full presentation of the results of the research (in Latvian), see: <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/mediju-politika/medijpratiba/bernu-un-pusaudzu-medijpratibas-petijums>

*CONTINUATION*

The Ministry of Culture wishes to develop its cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science that would be a sustainable partner to educate children and adolescents in the field of improving media literacy.

We appreciate that the issue of media literacy is included among the digital skills of the project on Competency-based Curriculum or *Skola2030*, nevertheless, in the light of the importance of media literacy in today's society, we **suggest placing additional emphasis on the importance of media literacy and reinforce the role of media literacy in the school curricula** (not only as a part of the digital skills). **We recommend that the school curriculum addresses not only the issues of critical evaluation and analysis of the media and other information, but also topics like the role and the importance of media in sustaining freedom of speech, diversity of opinions and democracy, the media as the fourth power, their influence on our agenda, political and other processes.**

**Proposals of the Ministry of Culture to the Project on Competency-based Curriculum (*Skola2030*):**

- We perceive the improvement of media literacy as one of the horizontal competencies that is developed in several classes.
- Whereas the topic of the media as the fourth power, the role and the importance of media in democracy could be added to the block of social and civic

studies along with the discussion about the other three powers and other socially and nationally important questions.

**In the view of the Ministry of Culture, the school curriculum should be elaborated in a way that enables the graduates of secondary school to have the below mentioned skills, knowledge and attitudes towards the creation, use, publishing and sharing media and other information:**

**Skills:**

- distinguish between facts and opinions;
- can evaluate information, decode its content and message regardless of the channel through which the information has been received (including social media);
- recognise hate speech, prejudice, stereotypes or other manipulative information;
- understand how social, economic, political, professional and technological powers can influence the content of the media;
- can identify the objectives, intentions and the values expressed by the information provider;
- compare several information sources, choose the most reliable ones and shape one's opinion (from one's knowledge and understanding about a topic);
- can use information verification methods when necessary;
- can distinguish between materials produced by reliable journalism and public relations (e.g., press release), can recognise sponsored information and different types of advertising (direct, hidden advertisement), can recognise advertisements in the social media content and elsewhere;
- can distinguish between scientifically proven knowledge and pseudoscience popularised by the media, sensational discoveries or fictitious statistics;
- can distinguish between fashion and lifestyle influencers (self-)popularised in the social and traditional media and true experts of different fields;
- use the internet safely and meaningfully (can use the internet and digital technologies to ensure one's ability to act, broaden one's possibilities safely and in accordance with the legal regulations of media environment use);
- can create and share (multimodal) media content in different formats, including video.

**Knowledge:**

- acknowledge and understand the difference between reality and reality depicted by the media;
- know the factors influencing how an event/process/person is depicted in the media;
- know that the same event/process/person can be depicted differently in various media;
- know the different ways of manipulation that can be used to distort information;
- be informed about the phenomenon of fake news, understand the reasons (intentions) of their creation and the mechanisms of their dissemination;

- acknowledge the role and the importance of media in sustaining freedom of speech, diversity of opinions and democracy; understand the importance of the media as the fourth power, their influence on the public agenda, political and other processes;
- know about the echo chambers; acknowledge the factors that influence one's personal information space, understand the necessity to increase the number of information sources and to pay attention to their quality and reliability;
- acknowledge that the selection of social media content is largely determined by algorithms and that the selected results that are offered by search engines are not neutral; acknowledge that the results that are offered as the first may not be the most reliable; apply this knowledge in one's everyday life when making decisions about reliable/unreliable information sources;
- be informed about the specific nature of influencers' activities, including the way the social and traditional media influence the formation of influencers' popularity.

#### **Attitudes:**

- do not take part in the creation of information including hate speech, promoting prejudice and stereotypes or is manipulative in any other way;
- when facing the above mentioned information, perform actions to prevent this information from being shared and disseminated further on;
- use, publish and share opinions and information ethically and responsibly without infringing copyright and with respect to other members of society;
- participate in the creation of knowledge and opinions responsibly, thus becoming an author of media content by decreasing insufficient awareness and lack of understanding about socially important issues;
- be interested in socially important, including political, issues taking place in the local community, country, Europe, world and express one's opinion about the above mentioned processes.

#### *IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA LITERACY*

- Media literacy is one of the life skills that is related to the capacity to understand the society and its processes, the skill to participate in them as a representative of the civil society, to create and share information, make decisions justly and wisely.
- **It is important not only in terms of making personal everyday decisions (trust or disbelieve pseudoscientific articles, unfounded advertising promises or conspiracy theories), but also in terms of functioning democracy (for example, decisions during elections, civic engagement) and the general securitability of the country and society.**
- On the other hand, it is important for pupils to get to know the operational system of the media to be able to orient themselves safely and confidently in the vast amounts of information. For example, they should understand the nature of the journalist activities (and the way it differs from the activities of video bloggers or celebrities), know the types of media in terms of financing (public media, commercial media), their functioning in the advertising market, as well as

different advertising strategies, including hidden marketing.

- Media literacy is essential in this ever-changing world where the fight for control is not only about the way people will spend their money, but mostly for control of their minds, beliefs, thoughts and values.