



# Assessment of Public Perception of Media and Media Skills in the Republic of Moldova

## Analytical Report

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**Acronyms:**

AC – Audiovisual Council

EU – European Union

IJC – Independent Journalism Center

MEDIA-M – Media Enabling Democracy, Inclusion, and Accountability in Moldova

NGO – Nongovernmental Organization

TV – Television

USAID –United States Agency for International Development

# Executive Summary

## Background

*This analysis was carried out within the project "Media Enabling Democracy, Inclusion and Accountability in Moldova" (MEDIA-M), funded by USAID and the British Embassy in Chişinău and implemented by Internews in Moldova, which aims to promote the development of independent and professional media and create a media sector that is more resilient to political and economic pressures.*

In 2018, 2020, and 2022, with the help of the research company Magenta Consulting, Internews in Moldova conducted three surveys to assess media perceptions and media skills among Moldovan citizens.

The studies were carried out within the project "Media Enabling Democracy, Inclusion and Accountability in Moldova" (MEDIA-M), funded by USAID and the British Embassy in Chisinau and implemented by Internews in Moldova, which aims to promote the development of independent and professional media and create a media sector that is more resilient to political and economic pressures.

The results presented in this summary are based on data analysis from three surveys commissioned by Internews in Moldova in 2018, 2020, and 2022. The surveys assessed the population's perception of the media in Moldova, the level of trust in various sources, perceptions of the phenomenon of disinformation, and media skills among Moldovan citizens.

The conclusions and findings sought to highlight trends and developments in the perceptions of the population and specific groups according to demographic characteristics, primarily age, residence, education, and income. We sought to identify the links among various study variables and anchor the results in the specific social, political, and economic contexts of the Republic of Moldova at the time of the surveys. Detailed facts, figures, and illustrative graphs can be found in the chapters of this report. A summary of the main findings is presented below.

## Summary of Discussions and Findings

### Level of Information and Consumer Satisfaction with Media

- Surveys show us that there is an increase in people's perception of their level of information (an increase of 8%, from 55% in 2018 to 63% in 2022, for those who consider themselves largely or very informed).
- Those who say they are most informed are urban men. Age does not play an important role; respondents of all ages reported approximately the same level of informedness.
- People feel more informed, but not necessarily more satisfied with media sources in Moldova. Slightly more than half of respondents in the three surveys (56-57%) say they are dissatisfied with the media in Moldova.

## **Disinformation Phenomenon**

- Most of Moldova’s population (87-92%) consider distinguishing between manipulative news and disinformation essential.
- At the same time, few respondents believe that they get their information from independent sources (15-18%). Almost half of the respondents (49-56%) do not know or are unsure whether the sources they follow are independent.
- The gap between the importance of distinguishing between disinformation and uncertainty over the independence of information sources has remained wide over the years. More than a third of respondents (35-38%) express both sentiments.
- The general perception of the population is that news in Moldova is highly or very highly influenced by politics, peaking at 88% in 2022. Most citizens perceive that media organizations operate in an intensely politicized environment, making it difficult for many to identify and follow independent sources.

### People's Ability to Identify Disinformation and Manipulation in Media

- In 2022, just over half of the population believed themselves to be able to quickly identify manipulation in the media (53%), while only 23% thought that the rest of the public could easily spot fake news. The proportion of those who believe the Moldovan public would find it difficult to identify fake news is increasing, indicating an increasingly complex information environment.
- Although the proportion of those who know the terms “fake news” and “media propaganda” has increased steadily over the years (with a 20% increase from 2018 to 2022 for the term “fake news” and a 26% increase from 2018 to 2022 for the term “media propaganda”), the proportion of citizens who think they know the term “fake news” is higher than the proportion of citizens who think they know what “media propaganda” (a more complex phenomenon) means.
- The term “fake news” has a higher profile because it has been addressed exhaustively in the public space in recent years in the media (on the radio, TV, and internet) and through various information campaigns and media education activities. As for the term “media propaganda,” the same has not occurred.
- About one-third of Moldovan citizens say they know or have heard that they can write an official complaint if they see news that is not true, but when asked where they could report or file that official complaint, a good proportion do not know what their options are. The share of those unaware that they can report a fake news story remains high at over 60%.

## **Preferences for Information Sources**

### Use of Media Sources

- Television has remained the primary source of information for most Moldovan citizens over the years. Although it saw a slight decline in 2022, TV remains at the top of most people's preferences for information.

- The top sources of information are followed by online sources: social networks, websites, and YouTube channels. Each of these online sources has seen significant increases in information use.
- Radio is used by fewer people as a source of information, with this number falling by 8% (from 39% in 2018 to 31% in 2022 for those who listen to the radio at least once a week for information).
- Of all information sources, print media (newspapers and magazines) have the lowest frequency of use. Only 10-11% use newspapers at least once a week for information, while half as many use magazines.

### Trust in Media Sources

- There is a directly proportional relationship between the use of media sources and trust in those sources. Media sources that are used more often are more trusted. This relationship holds for most sources of information.
- Trust of Moldovan citizens in TV decreased by 7% from 2020 to 2022, while trust in social media has steadily increased. Trust in news websites and radio has seen a slight decrease.
- Certain demographic characteristics (age, rural or urban residence, education, and income) influence trust in various media sources.
- Adults and older people in rural areas trust TV more, while young people, especially those in Chisinau, trust online sources (news websites).
- People with higher education and incomes are likelier to trust news websites. In contrast, people with secondary education and lower incomes are more likely to trust TV as a source of information.

### TV Use Habits

- Although TV remains the primary source of information, TV use for information has declined by 8% from 2018 to 2022, and the number of people who intentionally watch TV news during prime time has declined by 12%.
- The majority of those who consistently watch TV news in prime time are over 65. In contrast, young people are not in the habit of intentionally watching TV news and prefer online sources of information.
- The most-watched TV channels for news in 2022 were Moldova 1, Jurnal TV, ProTV, Prime, and TV8, with audience shares ranging from 29-44% of viewers.
- We note that TV channels have a specific category of users who, although they watch those channels, do not necessarily trust them. All TV channels showed a difference between the frequency of news use and the trust viewers have. Jurnal TV has the smallest such deviation (only 3%), indicating that there is a loyal audience dedicated to this channel.
- Of the top five TV shows Moldovan citizens watch and trust, only two are analysis shows, while the others are entertainment shows. Entertainment shows are primarily watched in rural areas by Romanian-speaking adults over 45.

## Radio and Print Media Use Habits

- Radio use for information has steadily declined in recent years, falling by 8% from 2018 to 2022. Around a third of respondents listen to the radio at least once a week for information.
- Those who use information broadcast on the radio daily are more likely to be rural people with secondary or higher education and low incomes, pensioners, and farmers in individual households.
- We can highlight a category of consumers who listen to online radio. These are mainly youth and adults aged 26-45, regardless of their place of residence (rural/urban), but mainly from the North and South, with higher or post-secondary (college) education, and who are Romanian-speaking.
- The most listened-to radio stations for news in 2022 were Radio Noroc, Radio Moldova, Radio Plai, Jurnal FM, and Radio Chisinau, with a proportion of listeners between 32-11%. The most listened-to radio stations are also those which Moldovan citizens trust the most. Radio stations have a relatively loyal audience, and the discrepancy between frequency of use and trust is generally minimal.

## Print Media Use Habits

- Print media use for information in Moldova is lower than the use of information from other sources. The three surveys show that 10-13% of the population read newspapers at least once a week, and the proportion of those who do not read newspapers at all was 70% in 2022.
- *Ziarul de Gardă* (with an exponential increase, almost doubling from one survey period to another) and *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and *Argumenty I Fakty* (both with a slight decrease from previous years) were the most read newspapers in 2022.
- People who read newspapers daily or at least once a week are more likely to be over 65 years of age, regardless of education or place of residence (urban/rural) and more likely to be from the North and South regions (and less likely to be from the Center and Chisinau areas) with low incomes.

## Online Information Use Habits

- Moldova's residents' use of the internet is widespread. The proportion of those who use the internet at least once a month has steadily increased in recent years, as has the consumption of information from news websites (reaching 57% in 2022 for those who access it at least once a week).
- According to the 2022 survey, [Stiri.md](#), [Point.md](#), [Protv.md](#), [Zdg.md](#), and [Jurnal.md](#) are the most used news websites, with between 23-16% of the total number of people using news websites for information at least once a week.
- [Protv.md](#) and [Jurnal.md](#) are most trusted by the public (with a mere 5-6% discrepancy between trust and frequency of use). At the same time, we note that the level of trust for [Stiri.md](#) and [Zdg.md](#) corresponds to the frequency of use of these sources, indicating that these sources have a loyal audience. The most significant discrepancy between the frequency of use and trust is in the

case of [Point.md](#), where 5% of those who get information from this news website do not necessarily trust it.



# Introduction

## Purpose and Objectives of the Report

### Purpose of Final Analysis

- Identify and describe the main changes and impacts over time effected by Internews projects and activities in Moldova and outline the main recommendations for key partners as a result of the conclusions to be drawn.

The objectives of the three surveys were:

- Assess the level of information of media users on current events.
- Estimate potential levels of disinformation.
- Estimate the share of people who claim to be able to determine when the media is manipulating the public and when it is presenting objective data.
- Identify the most popular and preferred sources of information (TV/radio/internet/news, etc.) in the order each respondent ranks them.
- Identify target groups that are most vulnerable to false or misleading information.
- Determine which media sources are considered to be more credible: local or international.

## Methodology

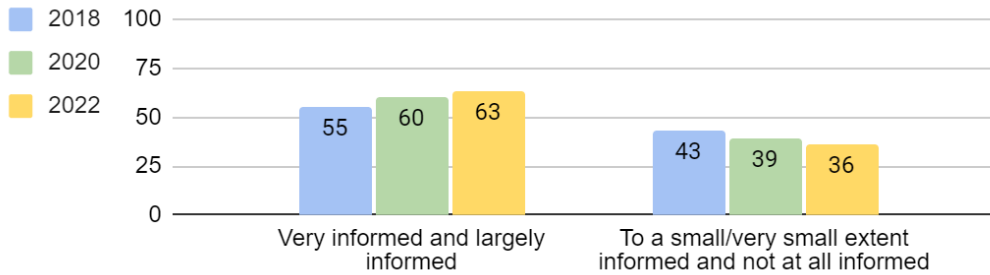
The results presented in this report are based on data analysis from three studies commissioned by Internews Moldova. The opinion polls were conducted during the periods listed below:

- Wave 1, 2018: June 15 – July 16, 2018.
- Wave 2, 2020: August 9 – 31, 2020.
- Wave 3 of 2022: December 15, 2022 – January 13, 2023.

# Chapter 1. Level of Information and User Satisfaction with Media

The self-perception of the population of the Republic of Moldova regarding the level of information has evolved over the years. The population feels more informed (up 8% from 2018 to 2022), while the feeling that they are under- or uninformed has decreased (down 7% from 2018 to 2022).

The evolution of the population's level of information (self-perception in 2022, 2020, and 2018; cumulative %).



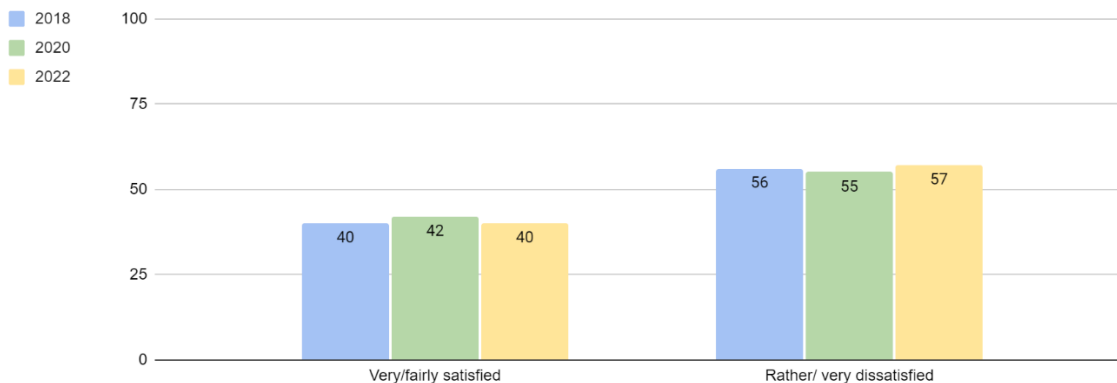
Q3. How informed do you feel about what is going on in Moldova in general?

Those who feel most informed (regardless of survey year):

- Urban compared to rural.
- Men (in the 2018 and 2020 surveys) compared to women.
- Age does not play a role; respondents of all ages reported roughly the same level of information.

Just over half of the population (55-57%) are generally dissatisfied with the media, and around 40% are satisfied. This perception has remained unchanged over the years, with an insignificant fluctuation of 1-2%.

The evolution of the satisfaction level towards the mass media in the Republic of Moldova (2022, 2020, and 2018; cumulative %).



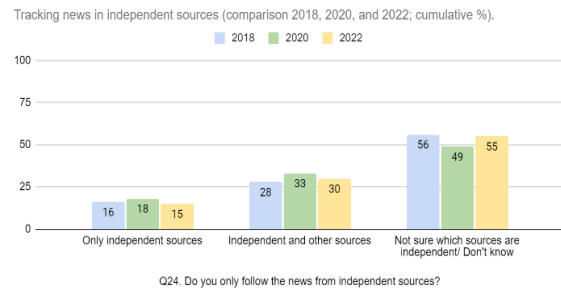
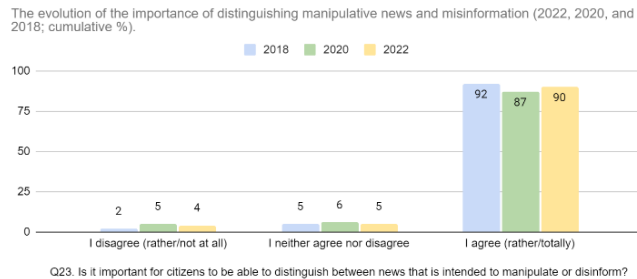
Q4. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the media in Moldova in general (TV, press, radio, internet news portals, etc.)?

In general, there is a tendency for people who feel more informed to also be satisfied with the media. The correlation between the two variables (*self-perceived level of information* and *level of satisfaction with the media*) is moderately positive and statistically significant ( $r=.243$ ,  $p=.001$  in the 2022 survey, and  $r=.222$ ,  $p=.001$  in the 2020 survey).

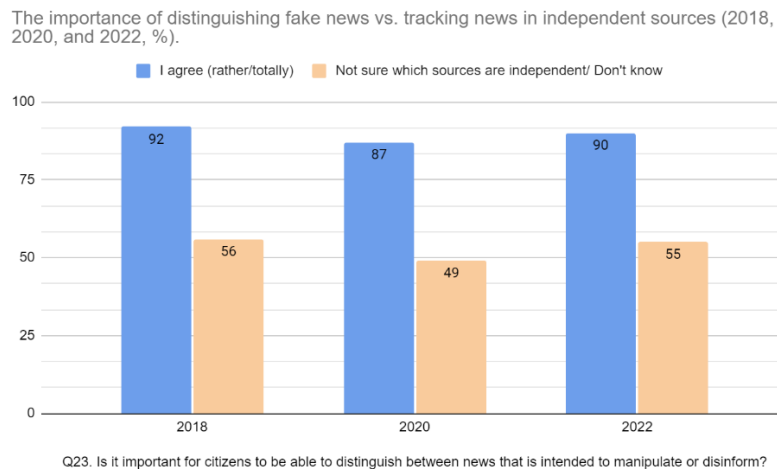
## Chapter 2. Phenomenon of Disinformation

### Importance of Distinguishing Between Manipulative News and Disinformation

Most of the Moldovan population (87-92%) consider it essential to be able to distinguish between manipulative news and disinformation. The percentage of those holding this view has mostly stayed the same over the years (with fluctuations of 3-5%).



We note, however, that while being able to identify disinformation and manipulative news is very important for most citizens, a small percentage of the population (15-18%) believe they get their information from independent sources. Almost half of Moldovans (49-56%) do not know or are unsure whether the sources they follow are independent.



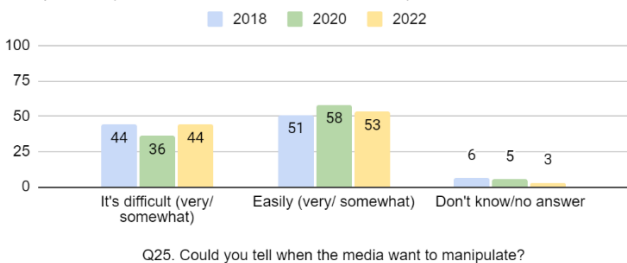
The gap between the importance of distinguishing between disinformation and the uncertainty about the independence of information sources has remained wide over the years. More than a third of the population (35-38%) express both sentiments.

The share of those unsure whether they follow news from sources that can be considered independent increases with age (from 41% for young people to 56% for those over 65).

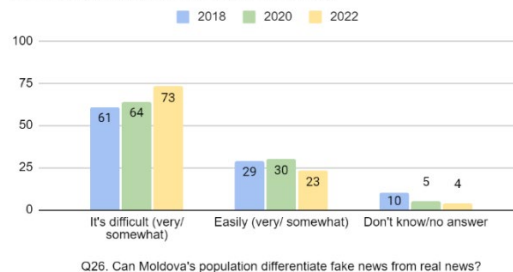
## Skills to Identify Fake News and Disinformation

Just over half of Moldovans (51-58%) believe they could quickly identify manipulation in the media. However, when they think of others, the majority believe that others would find it difficult to identify fake news.

The evolution of self-perception regarding the ability to identify media manipulation (2018, 2020, and 2022; cumulative %).



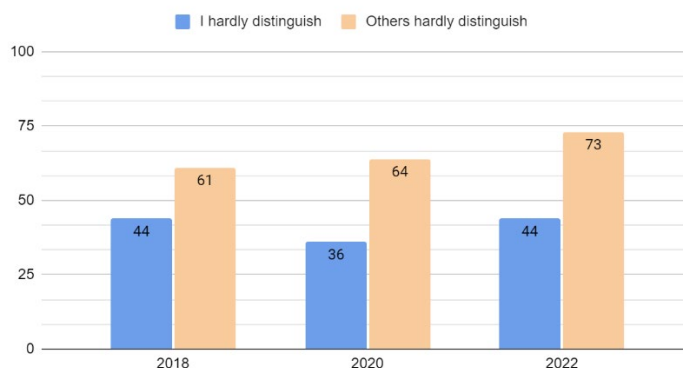
The evolution of the perception regarding the population's ability to identify fake news (2018, 2020, and 2022; cumulative %).



The share of those who believe that Moldova's population would find it difficult to identify fake news is increasing (from 61% in 2018 to 73% in 2022), indicating an increasingly complex information environment.

There is a gap between the perception of one's ability to identify manipulation and the ability of the general public to do the same. This gap has widened over the years due to the growing perception that others have difficulty identifying fake news. One possible explanation for this is the polarization of society (“me vs. others”).

The difficulty with which distinguish fake news compared to the rest of the population (2018, 2020, and 2022, %).



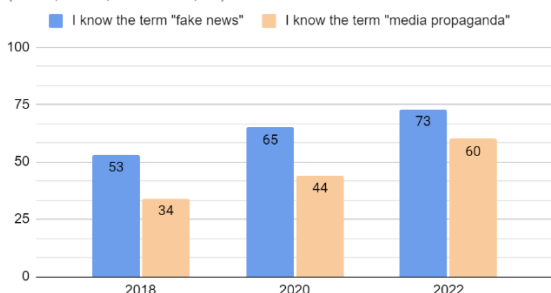
## People's Knowledge of “Fake News” and “Propaganda”

The share of citizens who think they know the term “fake news” is higher than that of citizens who think they know the term “media propaganda” (73% versus 60% in 2022, respectively).

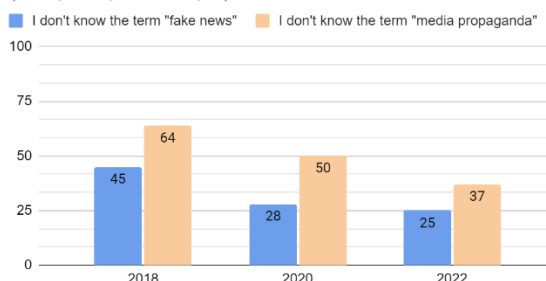
Although the proportion who know these terms has increased steadily over the years (with a 20% increase from 2018 to 2022 for the term “fake news” and a 26% increase from 2018 to 2022 for the term “media propaganda”), the gap between knowing the term “fake news” and the term “media propaganda” has remained prominent in all three surveys.

We see the same among those who do not know the two terms. The proportion of those who do not know the term “media propaganda” is higher than those who do not know the term “fake news” (17% higher on average).

Familiarity with the term "fake news" and "media propaganda" (2018, 2020, and 2022, %).



Unfamiliar with the term "fake news" and "media propaganda" (2018, 2020, and 2022; %).



It seems easy for most people to understand what fake news is. Many view fake news as presenting untrue and/or unverified information to promote one point of view.

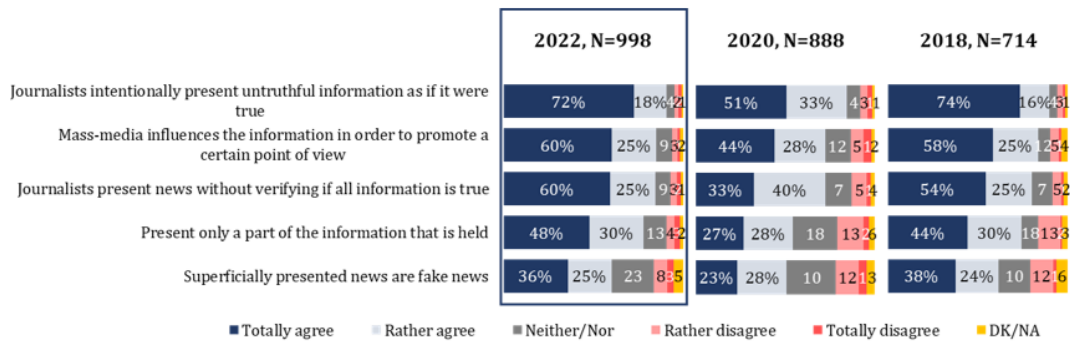
The term “fake news” has been addressed exhaustively in the public space in recent years, in the media (radio, TV, and internet) and through various information campaigns and media education activities. The main stakeholders have carried out awareness-raising campaigns on the fake news phenomenon, which evolved into projects and initiatives to combat it such as [StopFals](#). In recent years, several warnings and fines have been levied by the Audiovisual Council (AC) on Moldovan media operators.<sup>1</sup> All these publicly-accessible activities have led to a greater awareness of the fake news phenomenon.

However, as for the term “media propaganda,” the same thing did not occur. The term “media propaganda” is more complex for Moldova’s population. Propaganda involves influencing people's thoughts, opinions, and feelings to manipulate them for predetermined purposes, and manipulative techniques can be very diverse and challenging to identify. Those who claim to be able to define the term “media propaganda” often associate propaganda with promoting political ideas.

Although there is an increase in the proportion of those who say they know the term “media propaganda,” efforts to strengthen the ability of Moldovan citizens to recognize and combat this phenomenon must continue.

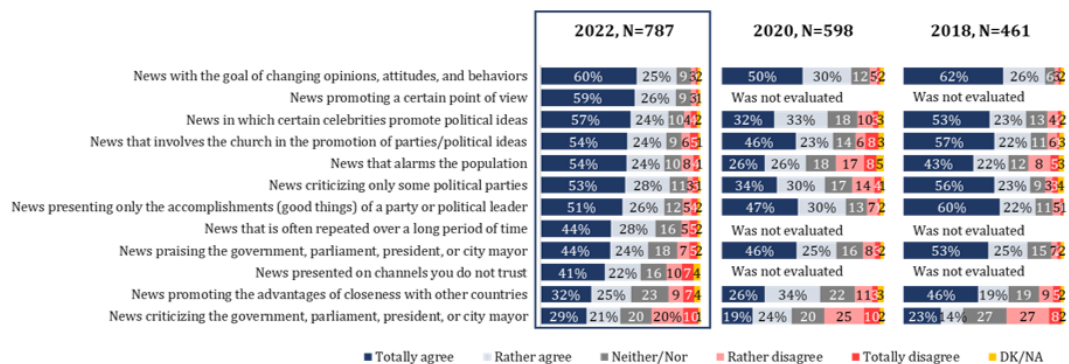
<sup>1</sup> <https://consiliuaudiovizual.md/news/ca-a-sanctionat-ntv-moldova-cu-o-amenda-de-18-mii-de-lei-si-2-avertizari-publice/>  
<https://consiliuaudiovizual.md/news/ca-a-avertizat-public-jurnal-tv/>  
<https://consiliuaudiovizual.md/news/sedinta-publica-a-consiliului-audiovizualului-din-02-februarie-2022/>  
<https://consiliuaudiovizual.md/news/lorem-ipsam-dolor-sit-amet-consectetur-adipiscing-elit-nam-non-condimentum-eros11/>

**Figure 2.2.2:** Respondents' perception of the concept of fake news. "Q29. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following statements describe fake news?" % of those who know what "fake news" is



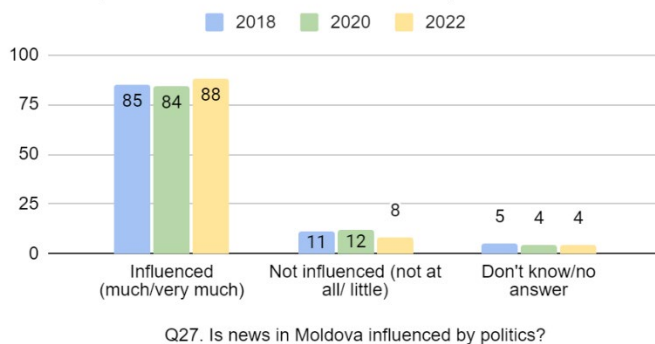
### Influence of Politics on News in Moldova

**Figure 2.2.4:** Respondents' perception of the concept of propagandistic news. "Q30. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the statements below describe propaganda news in Moldova?" out of those who know what "media propaganda" is



The general perception of the population is that politics heavily or very heavily influences news in Moldova. The proportion of those holding this view has remained high in all three surveys at over 80%, reaching a peak of 88% in 2022.

The evolution of the perception regarding the influence of politics on the news (2018, 2020, and 2022; cumulative %).



Most citizens perceive media organizations as operating in an intensely politicized environment, making it difficult for many to identify and track independent sources. The periods during which survey data collection occurred were eventful and especially politically charged. Between 2018 and 2022, Moldova went through several elections (the 2018 local elections, the 2019 parliamentary elections, the 2020 presidential elections, and the 2021 early parliamentary elections), a political crisis (2019), the Covid-19 pandemic (2020), Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine accompanied by geopolitical pressures and the refugee crisis (2022), and ongoing hybrid (information) warfare.

Below we have listed the events that took place in Moldova during that period:

- Survey 1, 2018: the suspension of President Dodon and the invalidation of local elections in Chişinău;<sup>2</sup>
- Survey 2, 2020: the Covid-19 pandemic, the billion-dollar theft investigation, and the pre-election period for the 2020 presidential elections;<sup>3</sup>
- Survey 3, 2022: the approval of Moldova's status as an EU candidate country,<sup>4</sup> threats to Moldova's security due to the war in Ukraine<sup>5</sup> (including energy security),<sup>6</sup> the suspension of licenses of 6 TV stations to eliminate propaganda,<sup>7</sup> and the approval of the new election code.<sup>8</sup>

## Moldovan Citizens' Awareness of Fake News Reporting

The Audiovisual Council (AC) of Moldova regulates audiovisual media services. In the event they identify news that is false, offensive, or infringes on human rights, anyone can submit a petition to the AC online on [AC's website](#). The AC states that it does not regulate print media and social networks.

According to [Mediacritica](#), other options exist for reporting news that is false or offensive or infringes human rights: in a podcast published in 2021, Mediacritica mentions the Independent Journalism Center (IJC), StopFals, the Press Council, and T(V)E Priveşte.

According to the surveys, about one-third of Moldovans (36% in 2018, 34% in 2022) say they know or have heard that they can write an official complaint if they see news that is untrue or offensive or violates human rights, but when asked where they could report or file that official complaint, a large proportion do not know how to answer the question (41% in 2018, 25% in 2022).

Those who know their options for reporting a fake news story mention the police, the Audiovisual Council, the Press Council, and even the media outlets that have broadcast that fake information.

Although media NGOs have worked hard to educate the public about the options for reporting fake news, only 4-5% would report to such an organization if they had identified fake news. We note, however, that the StopFals platform has become increasingly popular, growing from 3% of respondent mentions in 2018 to 12% in 2022.

The share of those who do not know they can report fake news remains high, with over 60% of citizens unaware that they have this option.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.e-democracy.md/elections/chisinau/2018/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://alegeri.md/w/Cronica\\_alegerilor\\_prezidentiale\\_2020#Perioada\\_preelectoral.C4.83](http://alegeri.md/w/Cronica_alegerilor_prezidentiale_2020#Perioada_preelectoral.C4.83)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/policies/enlargement/moldova/>

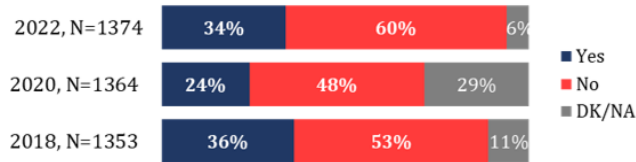
<sup>5</sup> <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/explozii-la-frontiera-de-nord-cu-ucraina-mai-multe-case-din-naslavcea-avariate/32108598.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/moldovans-urged-cut-electricity-use-after-missile-strikes-ukraine-hit-supplies-2022-10-12/>

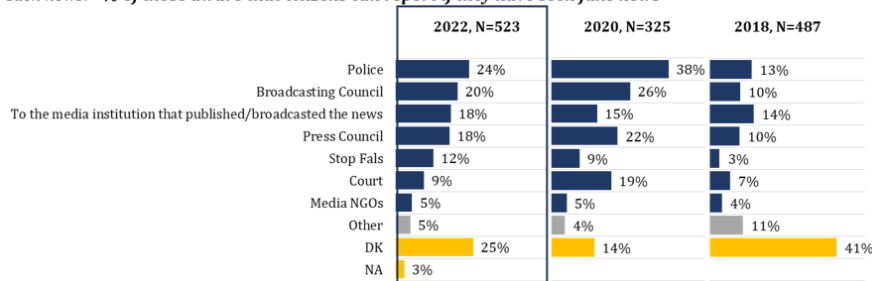
<sup>7</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-ilan-shor-tv-stations-licenses-suspended-russia-war/32180842.html>

<sup>8</sup> [https://a.cec.md/ro/noul-cod-electoral-al-republicii-moldova-a-fost-adoptat-2781\\_102845.html](https://a.cec.md/ro/noul-cod-electoral-al-republicii-moldova-a-fost-adoptat-2781_102845.html)

**Figure 2.3.1:** The share of citizens who claim to be aware of the possibility of reporting or writing a formal complaint when spotting a fake news story. “Q33. Based on what you know or have heard, can citizens of Moldova report or write an official complaint if they see news that is not true, is offensive, or violates someone’s rights.”



**Figure 2.3.2:** Respondents’ opinions about the institutions to which they can turn if they spot fake news. “Q34. Based on what you know or have heard, where can the citizens report or write an official complaint if they see such news?” % of those aware that citizens can report if they have seen fake news



Those who know about the option to report news that is false or offensive or violates human rights are:

- Youth (18-35 years old);
- In rural areas (5% more than urban areas);
- In the North and South of the country (6-8% less in the Center/Chişinău area)

**Annex 2.3.1:** The share of citizens who claim to know about the possibility of reporting or writing a formal complaint should they spot a fake news story.” Q33. Based on what you know or heard, can citizens of Moldova report or write an official complaint if they see news that was not true, is offensive, or violates someone’s rights”

		%, per row	Yes	No	DK/NA
<b>Total</b>		<b>1374</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>6%</b>
Gender	Male	657	30%	64%	6%
	Female	717	37%	56%	7%
Age	18 – 25 y.o.	112	42%	50%	8%
	26 – 35 y.o.	216	42%	53%	6%
	36 – 45 y.o.	231	31%	63%	6%
	46 – 65 y.o.	496	29%	65%	6%
	Over 65 y.o.	319	27%	66%	7%
Environment	Urban	608	31%	63%	6%
	Rural	766	36%	58%	7%
Region	North	389	37%	53%	10%
	Center	365	29%	64%	6%
	Chisinau	326	31%	66%	3%
	South	294	38%	58%	4%



# Chapter 3. Preferences for Information Sources/Media Use Habits

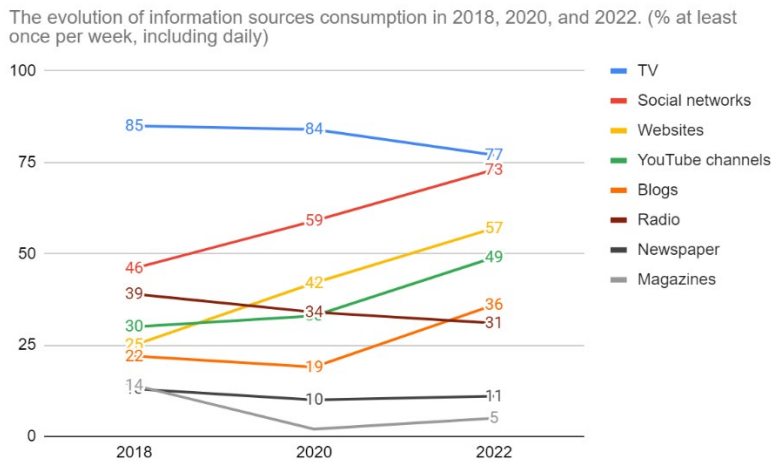
## Use of Media Sources by Moldovan Citizens

According to the three surveys, television has remained the primary source of information for most Moldovan citizens. Although it saw a slight decline in 2022, TV remains at the top of most people's preferences for information (77% of respondents said in 2022 that they use the TV at least once a week for information, and 59% use it daily).

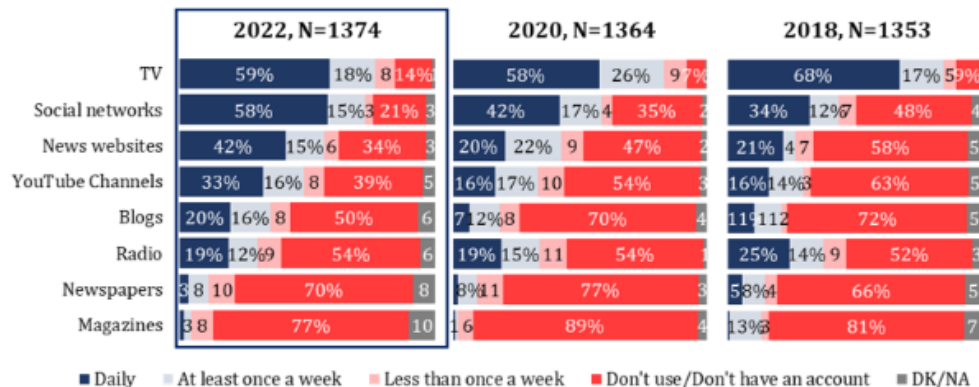
The next most popular sources of information are online sources: social networks, websites, and YouTube channels. Each of these online sources has seen significant increases in information use, while the number of those who do not use them has steadily decreased. The use of social media and news websites has increased by approx. 20% over the three surveys, and the number of those using websites and YouTube channels daily for information has doubled over the last two survey years (from 2020 to 2022).

Radio is used by fewer people as a source of information, with the number falling by 8% (from 39% in 2018 to 31% in 2022 for those who listen to the radio at least once a week for information).

Of all information sources, print media (newspapers and magazines) have the lowest frequency of use. Only 10-11% use newspapers at least once a week for information, and less than half that use magazines.



**Figure 3.1.1:** Frequency of use of media sources. "Q5. How often do you use the following sources to get informed?"



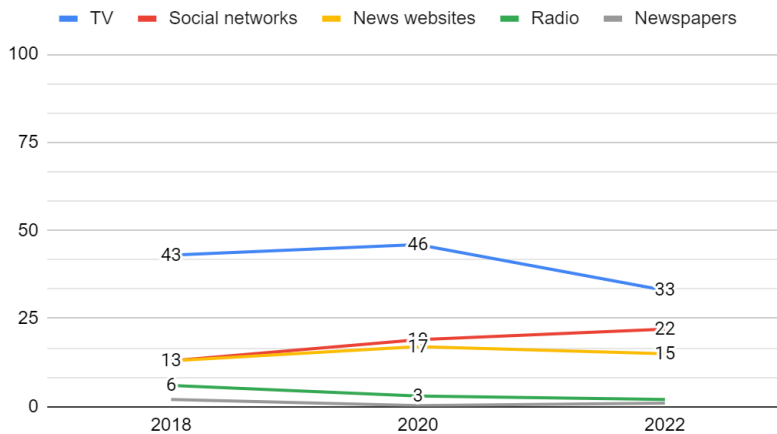
## Trust in Media Sources

Trust in Moldovans' primary source of information (TV) fell by 7% from 2020 to 2022, with a third (33%) trusting TV.

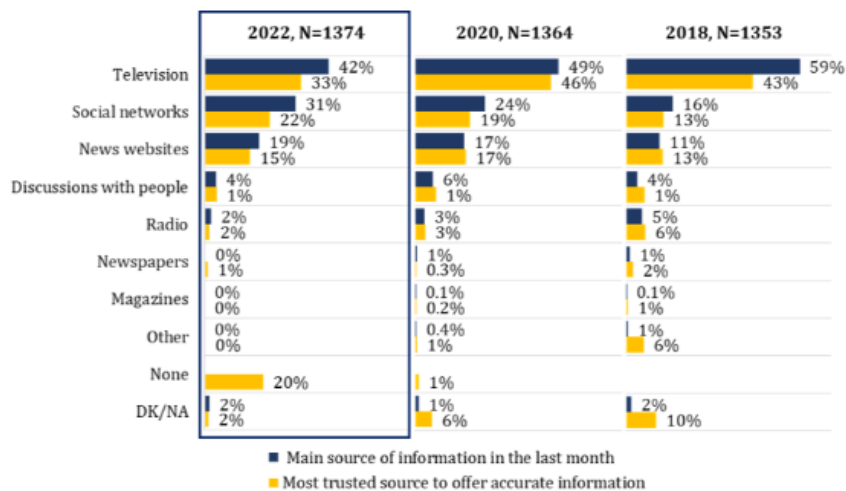
By contrast, trust in social media has increased steadily (from 13% in 2018 to 19% in 2020 and 22% in 2022), while confidence in news websites and radio has decreased slightly.

It is important to note that trust in any source of information is directly proportional to its use. Just as radio or newspapers (print media) have seen steady declines in informational use in recent years, we have also seen lower levels of trust in these sources.

The evolution of the trust level in 2018, 2020, and 2022. (%)



**Figure 3.1.2:** The citizens' primary and most trusted information source. Q6. "I will read you a list of information sources. In the last month, could you tell me what your main source of information for political news and events in the country was?" Q7 was: "Which sources do you trust most to provide accurate information?"



## Age and Trust in Information Sources

The 2022 survey data shows that trust in television as a source of information increases with age. The older people are, the more they trust television, compared to youth who trust online sources (social media and news websites).

Only 14% of 18-35-year-olds said they trust TV information the most, compared to 45% of those aged 46-65 and 60% of those aged 65 and over.

Young people's trust in online sources is higher. Forty percent of 18-25-year-olds and 35% of 26-35-year-olds trust social media information the most, while only 14% of 46-65-year-olds and 8% of those over 65 trust this source. We see the same trend for confidence in news websites.

Young people's preference for online sources is a global reality. Youth prefer online sources because of the speed and convenience of use and easy access to information. At the same time, unlike conventional sources of information, social networks offer youth the opportunity to interact by commenting, sharing, and liking content. However, social media is also a source of disinformation, manipulation, negative online behavior, and associated risks. For this reason, continued efforts to educate young people about information from online sources are necessary and welcome.

### **Urban Versus Rural Residence Environment and Trust in Information Sources**

We note differences between the trust in information sources of Moldovan urban and rural residents. The confidence that television would provide accurate information is 7% higher in rural than urban areas and 9-12% lower in Chişinău than in other regions. In contrast, trust in news websites is 8-12% higher in Chişinău than in the rest of the country (according to the 2022 survey).

The differences between rural/urban areas and Chişinău can be explained. Public, political, and cultural events are more intense in Chişinău, as the capital offers a rich information environment regarding information sources and contexts. Information sources in rural areas are usually more restricted (limited to a few TV stations, radio, and local newspapers), and access to events, levels of diversity in social circles, and information contexts are more limited.

Although internet access, including mobile data, is present in rural Moldova, access to technology can be more difficult compared to urban areas due to lower incomes and a lack of infrastructure. These factors limit online information sources (websites, social networks, podcasts, YouTube channels, etc.), and trust in these sources is lower in rural areas.

### **Education and Trust in Information Sources**

Trust in TV as a source of information is exceptionally high among those with secondary education. Forty percent of those with secondary education and 35% with high school or secondary vocational education trust TV information the most, compared to 25% of those with higher education that rely on TV as a source of information.

The trend is reversed for news websites. Nearly half as many of those with secondary education trust the information on news websites (11%) as those with higher education do (26%).

TV information is relatively passive and usually does not require any effort to seek out, consume, and analyze. Viewers often watch the news while doing other things simultaneously. Information from news websites seems to be more accessible to those with higher education who focus their attention on deliberately seeking out information, browsing articles online, and analyzing data.

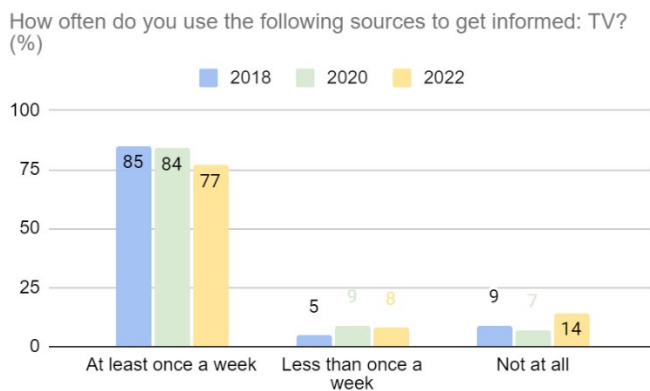
## Income and Trust in Information Sources

Television is the most trusted source for low-income people. Of those with incomes below 5,000 lei, 42% said they trusted TV information the most, compared to those with incomes above 10,000 lei per month, 21% said they trusted TV as a source of information.

The trend is reversed for news websites. High-income people are more likely to trust information on news websites. Of those with incomes above 10,000 lei per month, 30% trust this source, compared to 16% of those below 5,000 lei, and only 4% of those with incomes below 3,000 lei per month trust information on news websites.

## Habits of TV Use as a Source of Information

Although TV remains the primary source of information, TV use for information has fallen by 8% from 2018 to 2022, with the most significant drop in the last two years (from 84% watching TV at least once a week for information in 2020 to 77% in 2022). The decreasing trend of TV use as a source of information is also confirmed by the increasing number of people who do not use TV at all for information (9% in 2018 and 14% in 2022).



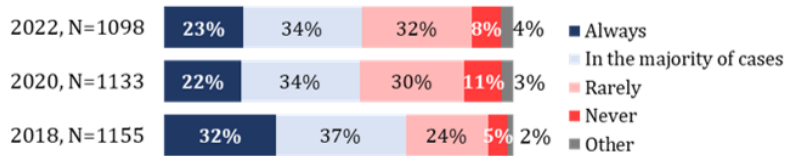
The number of people who intentionally watch news on TV during prime time has decreased by 12% (from 69% in 2018 to 56-57% in 2020 and 2022)<sup>9</sup>. Due to the diversification of news sources and the increased accessibility of online sources at any time of the day, 40% of viewers rarely or never intentionally watch TV news. Young people, in particular, are not in the habit of intentionally watching TV news during prime time.

Most of those who consistently watch TV news in prime time are over 65 (44%). Only 3% of those over 65 never intentionally watch the news, and 6% of 46-65-year-olds, compared to 19% of 18-25-year-olds who never intentionally watch the news. Almost half of 26-35-year-olds (47%) rarely intentionally watch TV news during prime time.

The proportion of those who usually watch an entire newscast on TV without doing other things in parallel has remained the same over the last two years at 38%, down 10% from 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Data refers to viewers who use TV as a source of information at least once a week (2022 survey, N=1098).

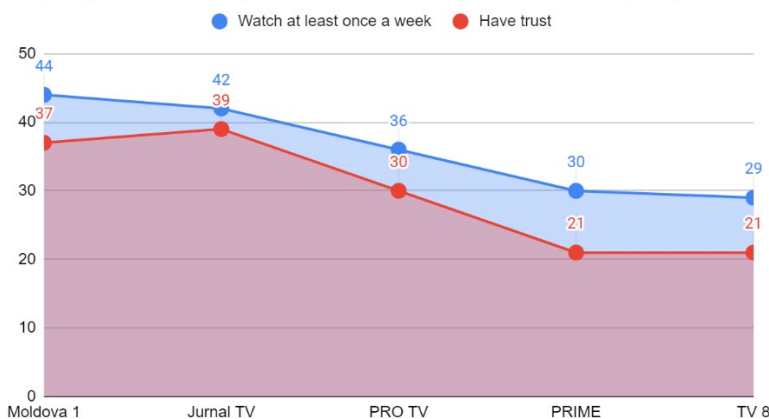
**Figure 3.2.2:** Frequency of respondents' intentional watching of news. "Q10. When it is news time, for example, 19:00, 20:00, or 21:00, how often do you switch on the TV or change the channel specially to watch the news from Moldova?" % out of those who watch TV at least once a week



The most-watched TV channels for news in 2022 were Moldova 1, Jurnal TV, ProTV, Prime, and TV8, with audience shares ranging from 29-44% of viewers. The most-watched channels are also those which Moldovan citizens trust the most. All the channels listed above, except Prime, have seen increasing levels of trust (with a 10-15% increase on average) over the years. Trust in Prime TV decreased by 11%, from 32% in 2018 to 21% in 2022.

We see a discrepancy between the frequency of TV news use and the trust viewers place in TV channels. Jurnal TV has the smallest such discrepancy, with a difference of only 3% between those who watch this channel at least once a week (42%) and those who said they trusted Jurnal TV (39%). For the other TV channels, the discrepancy varies from 6-9%. We believe this gap is represented by people who, although they watch the news on a TV channel, they do not trust it. In the case of TV channels for which the discrepancy between those who watch a TV channel and those who trust that channel is smaller, we find a loyal audience that considers the information that is broadcast credible (as with Jurnal TV).

Frequency of media consumption for TV channels vs. trust in TV channels. (2022, %)



Of the top five TV shows Moldovans watch and trust,<sup>10</sup> only two are analysis shows: “În profunzime” with Lorena Bogza (ProTV) and “Cutia neagră” with Mariana Rață (TV8). The rest are entertainment shows. Entertainment shows are watched mainly in rural areas (65% in rural areas compared to 34% in urban areas for entertainment shows they watch and trust) by adults 45 and over (39% of adults aged 45 and over

<sup>10</sup> According to the 2022 survey, of those who watch TV at least once a week, they trust and watch the following shows:

- “Vorbește Moldova” with Natalia Cheptene (Prime) – 38%;
- “Ora de ras” with Cheianu and Durbala (JurnalTV) – 29%;
- “În profunzime” with Lorena Bogza (ProTV) – 22%;
- “O seară perfectă” with Anișoara Loghin (ProTV) – 21%;
- “Cutia neagră” with Mariana Rață (TV8) (21%).

compared to 14% of adults aged 35-44 and only 5% young people aged 25-34). Those who watch and trust entertainment shows are more likely to be Romanian speakers (41%) than Russian speakers (8%) and 12% more likely to be women than men (56% women versus 44% men).

## Habits of Use of Radio and Print Media as Source of Information

### Radio

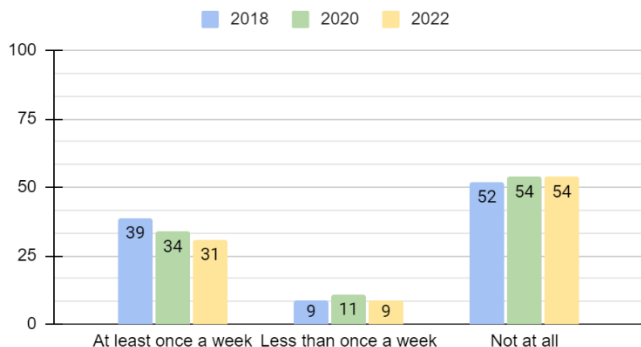
Radio use for information has steadily declined in recent years, falling 8% from 2018 to 2022 (from 39% in 2018 to 31% in 2022 for those who listen to the radio at least once a week for information). Just over half of respondents (52-54%) in all three surveys said they did not listen to the radio for news.

Those who use radio information daily are more likely to be rural people regardless of geographical region (7% more rural than urban), men (5% more than women), those with secondary or specialist education (6% more than those with higher education) and low-income (11% more people with incomes below 3,000 lei use radio information than those with incomes above 3,000 lei).

Use of information broadcast on the radio increases with age: of those over 65, 29% listen to the radio daily for information, compared to only 6% of 18-25-year-olds. Pensioners and farmers in individual households also made up the highest proportion of those who listen to the radio daily for information (the difference is at least 10-16% compared to the other professional categories), which confirms the finding that the *elderly* and *those in rural areas* are loyal listeners of radio stations.<sup>11</sup> These trends are also observed in the 2020 and 2018 surveys.

It is important to note that of those who use the internet, 17% listen to Moldovan radio stations on the internet. These are mainly young people and adults aged 26-45 (3-6% more than other age groups), regardless of their place of residence (rural/urban), mainly from the Northern and Southern regions, with higher or post-secondary (college) education, and Romanian-speaking (15% more than Russian speakers).

How often do you use the following sources to get informed: radio? (%)

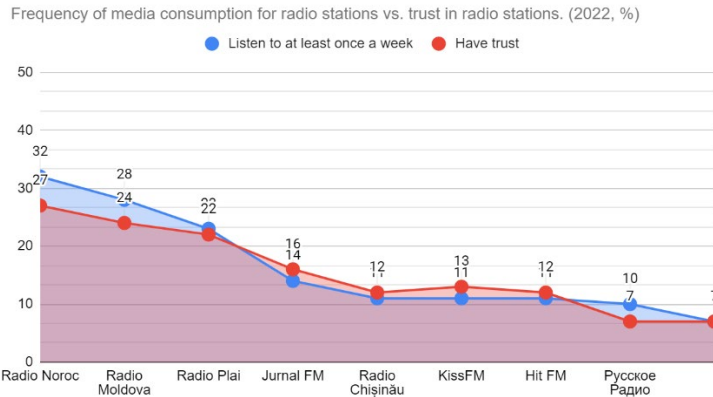


The most listened-to radio stations for news are<sup>12</sup> Radio Noroc, Radio Moldova, Radio Plai, Jurnal FM, and Radio Chişinău, with a proportion of listeners ranging between 32-11%. The most listened-to radio stations are also those which Moldovan citizens trust the most.

<sup>11</sup> Data refer to the survey of 2022, N=1374.

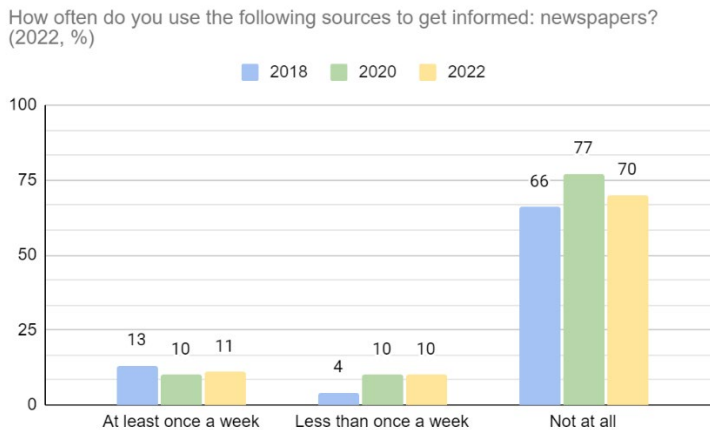
<sup>12</sup> Data refer to listeners who use radio as a source of information at least once a week (2022 survey, N=1098).

The discrepancy between those who listen to certain radio stations for information and those who trust those radio stations is 5-3%, with the most significant difference being for Radio Noroc, Radio Moldova, and Russkoye Radio. We also note that, for some radio stations, the level of trust slightly exceeds the frequency of use (by 1-2%). This is true for Jurnal FM, Radio Chişinău, Kiss FM, and Hit FM. We can see that some listeners, even if they trust them, do not consume very much information broadcast by these stations.



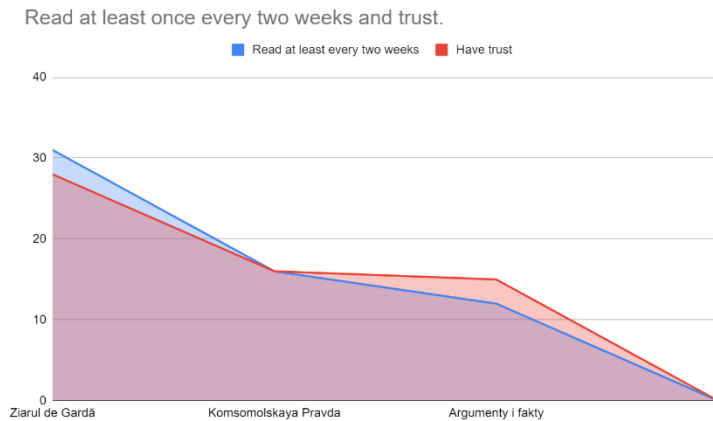
## Print Media (Newspapers)

The use of print media for information in Moldova is lower than the use of information from other sources. The three surveys (2018, 2020, and 2022) show that between 10 and 13% of the population read newspapers at least once a week, while the proportion of those who do not read newspapers at all was 70% in 2022.



*Ziarul de Gardă*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and *Argumenty i Fakty* were the most-read newspapers in 2022. The latter two are Russian-language newspapers, and the proportion of those who read them for information at least once every two weeks decreased by 2-3% compared to previous surveys in 2020 and 2018. In contrast, *Ziarul de Gardă* saw an exponential increase, almost doubling from one survey period to the next in terms of those who read it at least once every two weeks (from 8% in 2018 to 16% in 2020 to 31% in 2022)<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> We need to be careful how we interpret this data. In absolute terms, this concerns a fairly small number of newspaper readers. According to the 2022 survey, those who read newspapers at least once every two weeks are 180 respondents out of a total sample of 1,374. When we say that 31% read *Ziarul de Gardă* at least once every two weeks, we mean 31% out of 180 respondents (which equals 56 respondents).



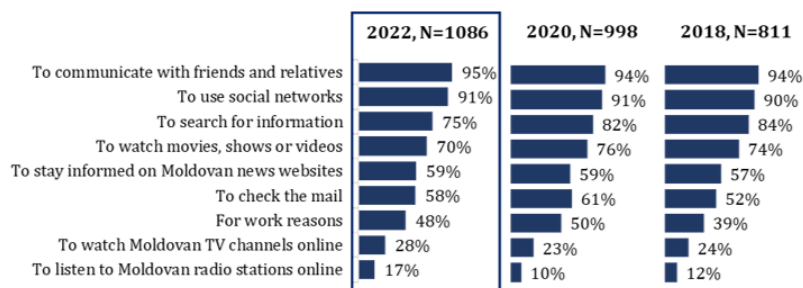
People who read newspapers daily or at least once a week are more likely to be over 65 years old (9%) than 18-25 (2%), regardless of education or residence (urban/rural), and are more likely to be from the Northern and Southern regions (less so from the Center and Chişinău, with a difference of 2-4%). Those who read newspapers are also more likely to be low-income people.

## Online Information Use Habits

Moldovans' use of the internet is widespread. The proportion of those who use the internet at least once a month has increased steadily in recent years, reaching 84% in 2022, up from 60% in 2018.

The main reason for using the internet is to communicate with friends and relatives (95%), primarily through social networks (91%). Three-quarters of those who use the internet do so to search for information, and 59% to get information from Moldovan websites.

**Figure 3.5.3:** Purposes for using the internet. "Q20. For which of the following purposes do you use the internet? (one possible response per line)" % of those who use the internet at least once a week.



## Social Networks

Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Telegram are the most used social networks. They have seen increases in the proportion of users over the years, including decreases in those who do not have an account or never used them.



Each network has a target group based on demographic characteristics. For example, women use Facebook more (8% more than men). Young people and adults aged 26-45, rural (6% more than urban), and Romanian speakers are the primary Facebook users (23% more than Russian speakers).

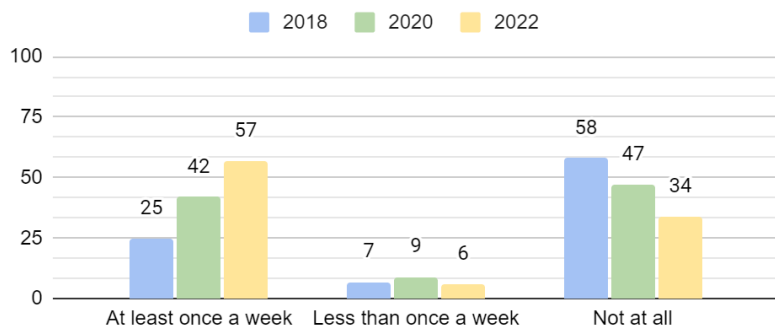
Instagram, TikTok, Telegram, VKontakte, and Twitter are predominantly used by 18-25-year-olds. Men use TikTok and Telegram more than women (10% and 5% fewer women use these social networks, respectively)<sup>14</sup>.

Russian speakers use Telegram, Odnoklassniki, and VKontakte more than Romanian speakers.

## News Websites

The use of information from news websites has grown steadily in recent years (from 25% in 2018 to 57% in 2022, for access at least once a week). The proportion of those who do not use news websites for information has also decreased.

How often do you use the following sources to get informed: news websites? (cumulative %, 2022)

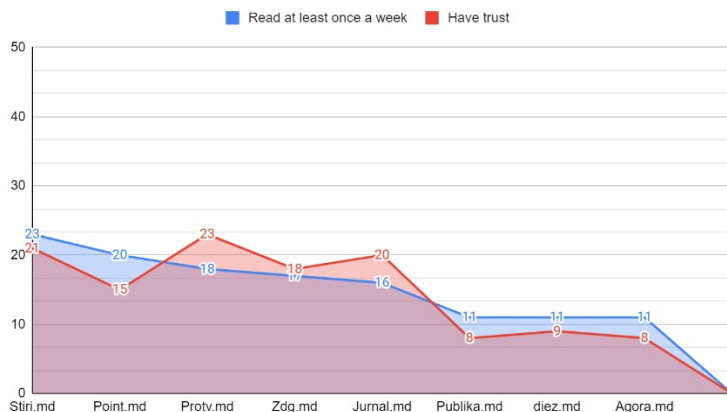


Those who predominantly use news websites to get information are young people and adults up to 45 years old in Chişinău (10% more than in other parts of the country) with high incomes (30% of those with incomes up to 3,000 lei, compared to 52% of those with incomes over 10,000 lei) and higher education (almost twice as much as those with secondary education).

According to the 2022 survey, [Stiri.md](#), [Point.md](#), [Protv.md](#), [Zdg.md](#), and [Jurnal.md](#) are the most used news websites, with between 23 and 16% of the total number of people using news websites for information at least once a week. Publika, [Diez](#), and [Agora.md](#) are next, mentioned by 11% of respondents. The use ratio of these news websites has remained roughly the same over the years, except for [Zdg.md](#), which has seen exponential growth from 4% in 2018 to 17% in 2022.

<sup>14</sup> According to 2022 survey data.

Frequency of media consumption for news websites vs. trust in news websites. (2022, %)



[Protv.md](#) and [Jurnal.md](#) are the most trusted by the public (5-6% more frequently used than others). At the same time, we note that, for [Štiri.md](#) and [Zdg.md](#), the level of trust corresponds to the proportion of use of these sources, indicating that these sources have a loyal audience. The most significant discrepancy between the frequency of use and trust is in the case of [Point.md](#), where 5% of those who get information from this news website do not necessarily trust it.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

## Combating Disinformation and Media Literacy

- It is gratifying that the vast majority of the Moldovan population considers it important to be able to distinguish between manipulative news and disinformation. People want to be informed by credible sources. At the same time, almost half of them find it difficult to identify independent sources of information. Many believe that news is politically influenced. Combined with the fact that only 23% of respondents believe that Moldovans would easily spot fake news, we can see that, although they want to, many cannot parse disinformation and manipulation in the media.
- It is thus recommended that media organizations, supported by partners, donors, and NGOs, undertake measures to enhance their credibility, such as:
  - increase transparency of funding,
  - increase professionalism and quality of content,
  - monitor the news for fairness, and
  - develop a relationship of trust with the audience through community building and engagement in events/activities and interactions to build loyalty.
- To strengthen efforts of media education of the population, the following are needed:
  - media education activities that should focus beyond the subject of fake news on issues related to recognizing and combating media manipulation;
  - developing and implementing media education strategies by involving relevant actors (NGOs, state institutions, education institutions, donors, international partners, and media organizations) in initiatives aimed at educating audiences of all ages;
  - run information and awareness-raising campaigns tailored to be accessible to and impact target groups, especially adults.

Efforts to teach civic-mindedness by promoting tools and options for reporting false, offensive, or rights-violating news must continue.

## Preferences for Online Information Sources

- Widespread use of the internet by Moldovans means that a large sector of the population gets its information online (from social networks, news websites, podcasts, and YouTube channels). Online information sources (social media, news websites, and YouTube channels) have seen significant increases in frequency of use at the expense of conventional media sources (TV, radio, and print). There is a steady increase in the use of and trust in social media as a source of information.
- This state of affairs, despite its benefits (accessibility, speed, and reduced costs), can put some users in challenging situations. The groups most at risk online, such as teenagers and the elderly, people with low levels of education, and those with low levels of digital literacy, should be included in education programs and campaigns to develop the skills needed to navigate the online sphere safely. Media organizations publishing online content should follow the same ethical and professional rules and principles as conventional sources of information. Media partners, donors,

and NGOs should consistently support media organizations' efforts to maintain high quality standards in online reporting.

- Social media can be beneficial for both consumers and media organizations. While many media organizations have official pages, groups, or channels on various social media platforms (including messaging apps), the general public produces and distributes a lot of information.
- Unlimited access to social media makes these platforms tools for manipulation, propaganda, and disinformation. The actions and behaviors of malicious individuals and organizations can manifest themselves through the distribution of fake news, discrimination, scams, intimidation, etc., the victims of which may be not only young people (who are considered to be the primary users of social networks), but also adults and the elderly. For example, of those who use Facebook for information, 73% are aged 46-65, and 50% are over 65.
- Consistent actions are needed to educate the public on the following:
  - Identifying and reporting false and manipulative content, including on social media;
  - Knowing the risks associated with using social media and how they can avoid exposing themselves to risks.
- It is also necessary to promote official pages and channels, and presenting the public with truthful and unbiased or primary-source information is also essential.

### Television as a Source of Information

- Although declining in frequency of use, television remains the primary source of information for Moldovans. It is notable that the habits of consuming information broadcast on television have not changed significantly over the years. Approximately one-third of the population watches a newscast in its entirety without doing other things simultaneously, and the majority of those who intentionally watch the news on TV during prime time are people over 65.
- Of the top five TV shows that people who watch TV at least once a week watch and trust, only two are analysis shows (the rest are entertainment shows).
- To increase viewer interest, trust, and loyalty, it is recommended that TV stations:
  - broadcast short programs/newscasts that may be aired at different times, not only during prime time;
  - create analytical/political/education programs in which the audience can interact with the anchors/guests;
  - create entertaining and informative programs reflecting the lives of ordinary people and their challenges (especially for rural audiences over 45); and
  - encourage the creation of communities of viewers according to areas of interest in various ways.

### Radio as a Source of Information

- Although radio use has been decreasing in recent years, a new category of radio listeners is emerging: those who listen to radio online (17% of internet users listen to Moldovan radio stations on the internet).
- If the audience of conventional radio is more likely to be rural people with secondary or specialized education and low incomes, pensioners, and farmers in individual households, then online radio is more likely to be listened to by young people and adults, regardless of their place of

residence (rural/urban), with higher or post-secondary (college) education, and who are predominantly Romanian speakers.

- The content of radio broadcasts should meet not only the needs of conventional radio listeners, but also those of this specific group of online radio listeners.

#### Print Media Use

- Although a small number of people use print media (10-13% of the population), it is an essential source of information for the elderly (over 65) and one of the few alternatives to TV news.
- The following is recommended:
  - continue publishing and distributing newspapers in a physical format even if it is costly, especially considering that the leading group of newspaper readers are low-income people;
  - support the efforts of local and national newspaper editorial offices to publish and distribute newspapers, mainly where people have limited access to other sources of information;
  - attract other age groups/target groups to use (even occasionally) information from newspapers through promotional campaigns and by developing a culture of newspaper readership;
  - develop strategies to mitigate adverse environmental impacts (due to the use of paper in the production of physical newspapers) and initiate discussions in the public space about the beliefs/perceptions that exist among the population (especially young people) on this topic.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

- Consistently conducting media studies is a welcome and recommended practice. Research is necessary for all media stakeholders to develop strategies and action plans and make evidence-based decisions.
- The studies on which this report was based assessed public perception of the media in Moldova, the degree of trust in various sources, perceptions of disinformation, and media skills among Moldovan citizens. It would be recommended that future research should focus on:
  - the information needs of the public;
  - the lifestyles of different categories of users (preferences in terms of activities, values, and aspirations);
  - difficulties in accessing information;
  - preferences for using multiple platforms to access different types of content by other target groups.