RiSE

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Youth online behavior, risks and avenues for mitigating them

National report: Germany

RISE

Project Title: **Action-Based Approach in Addressing and Mitigating Risks of Young People in Online Social Networks**

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EU Programme: **KA2 – Cooperation partnerships in youth**

Contents

1. Introduction

RISE – Action-Based Approach in Addressing and Mitigating Risks of Young People in Online Social Networks is a 24 months project financed by European Union's Erasmus+ Programme under the KA2 – Cooperation partnerships in youth that aims to create a framework where young people feel safe in their online communities, through developing methodologies and services to prevent and combat the risks of digitalisation, and especially of social media exposure. Six partner organizations from six EU countries (Romania, Cyprus, Italy, Germany, Finland and Greece) are working together in order to address the following needs:

- Lack or limited knowledge among young people of the underlying risks and threats of social networks, especially in the post-Covid-19 era
- Information overload and misinformation, fake news spread, cyber propaganda etc.
- vulnerability of young people to social media
- educating and training youth workers and youth trainers to address social media risks of young people for professional use
- Increasing the quality of relevant youth education learning with regards to social networks.

1.1. Overview of Project Result 1 (PR1)

PR1 aims to improve the vigilance of young people in online social networks in the partner countries, and to create a framework where young people feel safe in their online communities. This will be achieved through development and promotion of the methodologies and services to prevent and combat the risks and implications of digitalization.

2.1. Methodology

The national report includes all findings and results of the primary and secondary research conducted during the months of September - December 2022 by BK, following the guidelines and timeline given by the lead partner of this PR (CLNR). Its main aim is to present and examine the impact of the main demographic characteristics of German youth aged from 16-30 years old, more specifically age, gender, socio-economic background, level of education and ethnicity upon the online behavior, existing preventive behaviors as well as the manifestation of risks associated to internet use, in the post COVID-19 era. Furthermore, this report showcases the attitude of youth towards global threats such as pandemics, international politics, armed conflicts and refugees, in order to identify their likelihood to believe in and share fake news and misinformation, as well as other relevant risks.

In order to spot and recruit youth workers and young people willing to participate in the surveys, BK activated its official network and took advantage of the personal communication and social channels of the employees, as well. We invited them by sending an official email to organizations and stakeholders mentioning all the necessary details regarding the purposes of the RISE Project, the aim of the survey and interviews, the type of participants we are looking for (young people, youth workers). We asked them to distribute the online questionnaire to their employees or beneficiaries or to ask them if they are interested to give us an interview.

Particularly, during the implementation of PR1, BK came in contact with:

- Educational Providers
- NGOs
- Local Associations
- Individuals (young people between the ages of 16-30 and youth workers / youth trainers).

This report consists of data collected from both quantitative and qualitative tools. In total, BK collected 40 responses from the quantitative tool (questionnaire) circulated through Google Forms and filled in on a voluntary basis. The questionnaire included 29 questions in the form of multiple choice focusing on examining demographic characteristics, online media use and online habits, preventive behavior, manifestation of associated risks, attitudes towards current situations in specific regions and critical reading skills.

For the qualitative analysis were carried out 4 private sessions (interviews) with youth workers and youth trainers in Germany with an average of 5 years of experience in the field. The interviews were conducted in remote and online ways (such as via telephone or via Zoom) due to the COVID-19 restrictions and protection measures. The employees who have conducted the interviews used the tools, methodology and knowledge developed during the previous stages of the project in order to evaluate the experience of the youth workers / trainers interviewed.

The modern way of life, computerization and the influence of Internet lead to the change of way of life from the earliest age. Despite the many opportunities of being online, digitally engaged children and young people are exposed to various cyber risks. Exposure to sexual, violent or hateful content and risks associated with personal disclosure (e.g. giving out personal information) appear quite frequently. Contact as well as conduct risks vary in incidence. While bullying (online or offline) and receiving or sending sexual messages seem quite normal, meeting online contacts offline is less common. However, only 9% of adolescents and young people (aged 12-25) state that, in the past year, they have been bothered or upset by something they experienced online. On the contrary, meeting an online contact in real life was a pleasant experience for the majority of them (63%).

Moreover, given the simple and practically unhindered admittance to virtual entertainment applications including long range informal communication destinations like Facebook, video/photograph sharing stages like Instagram or TikTok, and moment couriers like WhatsApp (Aichner and Jacob, 2015), (Wegmann, Ostendorf, Brand, 2018) social cooperations are to a great extent occurring on the web. By sharing by and by pertinent data by means of message, voice messages, photographs, and recordings, people can speak with others, express and present themselves, fabricate and keep up with connections, or see social help and connectedness (Allen, Ryan, Dark, McInerney, Waters, 2014), (Cheung, Lee, Chan, 2015). According to Allen, Ryan, Gray, McInerney, and Waters (2014), young people in particular appear to value the opportunities to socially interact through online applications because doing so can improve their sense of belonging. 95% of over 1200 German children and adolescents between the ages of 12 and 19 reported owning a smartphone, according to research (Feierabend, Rathgeb, Reutter, 2018). The authors of the most recent EU Kids Online reports (Smahel, Machackova, Mascheroni, Dedkova, Staksrud, lafsson, Livingstone, Hasebrink, 2020) also note that the majority of young people say they use their smartphones almost constantly, with adolescents between the ages of 15 and 16 spending approximately twice as much time online as children between the ages of 9 and 11. In addition, according to German adolescents in 2018, the most important media activities they engaged in during their leisure time included using the Internet in general, using a smartphone, and listening to music (Feierabend, Rathgeb, and Reutter, 2018). According to Feierabend, Rathgeb, and Reutter (2018), communication took up the majority of Internet usage time, followed by entertainment and games. WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat were the most frequently used communication applications. According to a number of authors (Guedes, Sancassiani, Carta, Campos, Machado, King, Nardi, 2016), (Alzougool, 2018), and (Pertegal-Vega, Oliva-Delgado, Rodrguez-Meirinhos, 2019), one of the primary reasons people use social networks is to stay in touch with others. Following Pertegal, Oliva, and Rodrguez-Meirinhos (Pertegal, Oliva, and Rodrguez-Meirinhos 2019,) additional research identified two significant motivations for very young people: from one viewpoint acquiring social acknowledgment, and then again having a place with a web-based local area.

Other than a few benefits of such applications, research has likewise basically brought up that the utilization of informal communities can have undesired and disadvantageous outcomes too. These incorporate, for instance, turning into a cyberbullying casualty, being compromised by others, or encountering issues in regular day to day existence because of an uncontrolled utilization (Aharony, 2016). Based on the 11th revision of the International Classification of Diseases, including the characterization of gaming issue as an issue because of habit-forming ways of behaving, specialists likewise examine the dangerous utilization of interpersonal organizations as possible habit-forming conduct (Wegmann, Müller, Ostendorf, Brand, 2018). Despite the fact that this term has not yet been included in classification systems, we use the term "social networks use disorder" to describe an uncontrolled and problematic use of online communication applications. This depicts the encounters of unfortunate results due to, and the decreased command over the utilization of, informal communities, by which

the open and social perspective is considered as the key component the clients are dependent on instead of a specific gadget or stage (Wegmann, Brand, 2019).

A recent study with a representative sample of German adolescents reported an estimated prevalence of 2.6% for problematic social network use, which is consistent with the European-wide prevalence rates of 0% to 2.1% (Smahel, Machackova, Mascheroni, Dedkova, Staksrud, Iafsson, Livingstone, Hasebrink, 2020). With respect to age, being younger was associated with a more problematic social network use and an addictive/problematic smartphone behavior. The findings emphasize the significance of studying this phenomenon in young people. In addition, they emphasize the significance of examining potential mechanisms that contribute to the emergence and persistence of such behaviors, particularly in younger individuals, in order to ascertain potential implications for preventative measures. Brand and partners (Brand, Wegmann, Obvious, Müller, Wölfling, Robbins, Potenza, 2019) proposed a hypothetical model (Connection of Individual Influence Insight Execution; I-PACE) to specify the mechanisms that are involved in addictive behaviors like problematic social network use. The I-PACE model accepts that particular thought processes, needs and further private inclinations incorporating social lacks communicate with emotional and mental cycles (e.g., Web related mental predispositions like explicit anticipations) as well as leader parts (e.g., decreased inhibitory control) and encounters of delight and pay in the turn of events and upkeep of habit-forming ways of behaving. The aforementioned processes may lead individuals to use particular social network services, resulting in experienced gratification and/or compensation (supposedly depending on the individual's addiction stage) and possible reinforcement processes, potentially intensifying a problematic/addictive usage colleagues in light of the development of a (potential) social network use disorder (Brand, Wegmann, Stark, Müller, Wölfling, Robbins, Potenza, 2019). As one further expansion of the turn of events and support of an informal communities use jumble, Wegmann and Brand (Wegmann, Brand, 2019) indicate the compulsion interaction and accept that particularly people with explicit necessities (e.g., high need to have a place) or social deficiencies might be defenseless against fostering a tricky utilization of interpersonal organizations, since the experience of delighted social requirements might build up unambiguous hopes and adapting styles, and may prompt the repetitive choice to utilize those applications to reinforce a feeling of having a place.

As a fundamental human motivation, the need to belong is generally regarded as a driving force behind the use of social networks like Facebook. A dual-factor model of Facebook use is proposed by the authors, which includes two primary social needs: the need to have a place, addressing a characteristic drive to reach out and interface with others, and the requirement for self-show, comparing to impression the board processes. The need to belong's proposed role was confirmed by a study by Beyens, Frison, and Eggermont (Beyens, Frison, and Eggermont, 2016), which found that it is linked to increased Facebook use. In addition, Martin (Martin, 2018) found a positive correlation between a person's need to belong and the intensity and frequency with which they use social media platforms. The need to belong was even found to moderate the relationship between addiction and self-esteem by Wang and colleagues (Wang, Zhao, Wang, Xie, Wang, Lei, 2017). Montag, Wegmann, Sariyska, Demetrovics, Brand, 2019 called this phenomenon "adolescent smartphone addiction." According to Brand and colleagues' I-PACE model (Brand, Wegmann, Stark, Müller, Wölfling, Robbins, Potenza, 2019), the findings demonstrate that the need to belong effect as a risk factor interacts with additional variables. Brand and colleagues (Brand, Wegmann, Stark, Müller, Wölfling, Robbins, Potenza, 2019) also point out that the impact of predisposing variables like usage motives on the tendency to engage in additive behavior is linked to additional affective and cognitive responses like Internet-related cognitive biases. According to several studies (Laier, Wegmann, and Brand, 2018), online addiction is linked to the interaction of these Internet-related cognitive biases and predisposing variables.

Self-regulative competences as a subdomain of Internet literacy had a negative effect on the symptom severity of a social-networks-use disorder and, moreover, partially mediated the relationship between psychopathological symptoms and symptom severity, according to Wegmann, Stodt, and Brand (Wegmann, Stodt, Brand 2015). According to Wegmann, Stodt, and Brand (2015), the ability to manage one's time online and control one's own online behavior may help prevent the development of a social network use disorder. Going one step further, when investigating problematic social network use among children and adolescents, online-specific self-regulative competences may be even more relevant. Focusing on the effects of social-network-use disorder or excessive Internet use on young people's mental health is crucial in this context.

Adolescent and young adult rates of mental illness are steadily rising (Thom, Nübel, Kraus, Handerer, and Jacobi, 2019). According to data from a health insurance company, there were 1.9 million cases of mental illness in Germany between 2005 and 2016—a 38% increase (Grobe, Steinmann, and Szecseny, 2018). Adolescents are particularly susceptible to mental health issues, particularly internet-related addictions like smartphone and computer addiction, which are positively associated with loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Robert Koch-Institut, 2018). Suicide, the second leading cause of death among adolescents and young adults, is strongly linked to depression. A significant mental health disorder increases the likelihood that a child or adolescent will have negative life experiences. Additionally, they are bound to experience the ill effects of social confinement and belittling (Dey, Marti, Jorm 2019). As a general rule, individuals with extreme and constant psychological maladjustments have an essentially diminished future contrasted with everyone. In this way, mental issues address an individual and cultural test and a colossal wellbeing financial (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Psychiatrie und Psychotherapie, Psychosomatik und Nervenheilkunde e. V. 2018) making an earnest requirement for exploration and activity.

The World Health Organization (WHO) characterizes emotional well-being as a condition of prosperity in which an individual can create or understand their true capacity, adapt to the typical burdens of life, work gainfully, and add to the local area. Adolescents may be more likely to develop mental illnesses because of certain factors. The World Health Organization (WHO), which conducted research on European adolescents aged 11 to 15, found that mental health declines with age; Nervousness, irritability, and sleep disorders are common among adolescents, with girls exhibiting lower mental health than boys. Young people with a migration background and lower socioeconomic status are more likely to develop mental health issues, according to research.

According to the risks identified during the quantitative and qualitative analysis,   the relevant national strategies and laws applied in Germany are the following:

- ***Cyberbullying***

Making use of the internet and connected devices are hallmarks of cyberbullying and online violence. However, in the field of criminal law, relevant conduct is frequently included in broader offenses that do not necessitate the use of such tools (such as insult, threat, or coercion). In these instances, computers primarily serve as instruments for traditional crimes. Due to the ongoing digitization of all aspects of society, this is a well-known development in relation to numerous traditional offenses.

At least in some instances, cyberbullying and online violence can also be linked to cybercrime in a narrower sense, which involves breaking into computer systems (like hacking a computer to get pictures that can be used for blackmail). However, even in these instances, the underlying cybercrime offenses appear to be primarily instrumental, facilitating the commission of other, frequently more serious offenses.

For the purpose of preventing cyberbullying and cyberviolence, numerous legal areas are relevant. Aside from criminal regulation, relating arrangements and rules can be tracked down in common regulation (for example remuneration, evacuation and directive), work regulation (for example cautioning notice) and managerial regulation including police regulation and guidelines for specialist co-ops (see beneath). Section 1 of the Gewaltschutzgesetz—the civil law prevention of acts of violence and stalking—allows the court to take the necessary measures to prevent further conduct.

- ***Criminal Law Provisions***

Sections 238 (Stalking), 240 (Using threats or force to cause a person to do, suffer, or omit an act), 241 (Threatening the commission of a felony), 176 (Child abuse), 185 (Insult), 186 (Defamation), 187 (Intentional defamation), 201 (Violation of the privacy of the spoken word) and 201a (Violation of intimate privacy by taking photographs)

Because it expressly includes conduct via telecommunications, Section 238 (Stalking) may be specifically mentioned (para. 1 no. 2) or by utilizing a person's personal information (para. 1 no. 3). The equivalent is valid for area 176 (Youngster misuse) which additionally explicitly covers direct through broadcast communications (para. 4 no. 3 and 4).

Regulations for Service Providers

Germany has imposed compliance requirements on social networks as a result of the recent adoption of the Act to Improve Enforcement of the Law in Social Networks. Specifically, informal communities are expected to eliminate content that is unlawful under specific arrangements of the German Lawbreaker Code inside a particular time period subsequent to having been informed about the substance. This commitment exists as to content satisfying for example segment 130 (induction to scorn), segment 241 (undermining the commission of a crime), area 185 (affront), segment 186 (maligning), segment 187 (deliberate slander), and segment 201a (infringement of private security by taking photos) of the Lawbreaker Code. In connection with this, the act also

gives social networks the option to pay up to 50 million Euros in fines if they fail to meet their compliance obligations in a systemic way. As a result, the act helps to control cyberbullying and cyberviolence and fosters a healthier social network environment. The law will take effect on October 1, 2017.

The demonstration additionally alters segment 14 para. From a data protection standpoint, sections 3 to 5 of the German Telemedia Act (Telemediengesetz) grant host providers, such as social networks, permission to disclose personal data to individuals for the purpose of enforcing civil law claims related to the content mentioned above. Personal data includes data relevant for establishing the contractual relationship between user and service provider and usage data. However, the German Civil Code, in particular, provides the legal foundation for these individual disclosure requests.

- ***Fake News***

A law counteracting hate speech and fake news on the Internet, 'Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz', has been in force in Germany since 1 January 2018. Under rules adopted in 2018, social media and portals are required to remove content found to be offensive or illegal within 24 hours, on the basis of a decision by the competent public administrative body, supervised by the federal government. This law does not guarantee a quick or effective procedure for appealing against a decision of that kind, nor does it set out clear criteria for deciding whether blocked content is inappropriate (Złotowski, 2018).

- ***Online Gambling***

In July 2021, the new German Interstate Treaty on Gambling (ISTG) or Glücksspielstaatsvertrag (GlüStV 2021) come into effect, which legalizes and regulates online gambling in Germany across all 16 states. Its main purpose is to regulate the opaque online market for gambling in a uniform manner and to curb illegal offerings. Even before the new State Treaty on Gambling, it was possible to use online betting and gambling services in Germany, for example on the basis of EU-wide gambling licenses issued in Malta, among other countries. For consumers, it was often no longer clear what was legal and what was illegal, and also gave rise to unregulated black-market operations. The State Treaty on Gaming 2021 creates clearer conditions and encourages players to move away from the black market (Hofmann, Spitz, Herpich, Straimer, 2022).

- ***Revenge Porn & other form of image based sexual abuse***

Even though it is a very important issue among youth, in Germany there is no explicit anti-revenge-porn law or regulation.

- ***Identity theft***

Identity theft can constitute various criminal offences, depending on how the offender obtains access to the identity data. This can either be done by phishing methods, which could constitute a criminal offence under Sec. 202b of the GCC (German Criminal Code), or by use of such identity data for fraudulent purposes, which could constitute a criminal offence under Sec. 263 of the GCC. Depending on the individual facts of the case, the use of such identity of another may further constitute a criminal offence under Sec. 267 or 269 of the GCC, with both offences being punishable (Niethammer, Rieks, Saerbeck, Norbu, 2022).

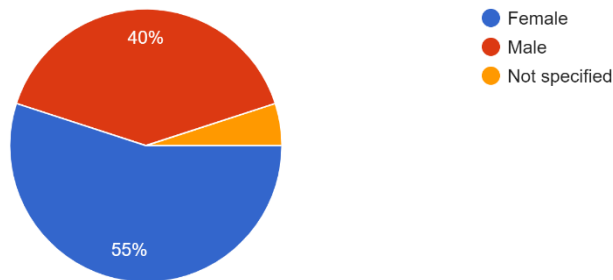## 5.1 Quantitative Data

1. What is your age?

40 responses
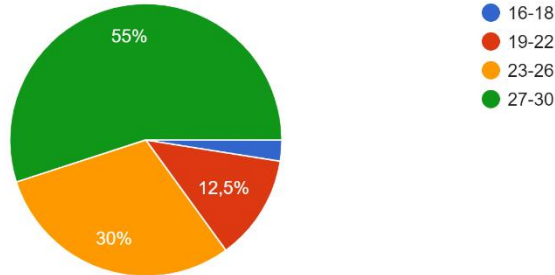
55% of the responses were in the age group of 27-30, 30% were from the age group of 23-26, 12,5% from the age group of 19-22 and only 2,5% from the age group of 16-18 years old.
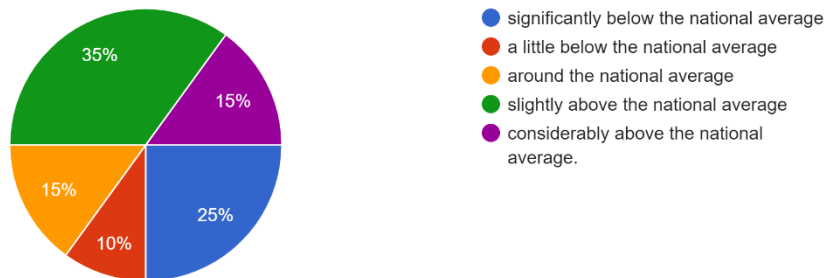
2. Can you please mention you gender?

40 responses

55% were female participants, 40% were male and 5% did not specified.

**3. During the first trimester/ semester of this year, your household total income was:**

40 responses

Regarding the household income of the first trimester / semester of this year, 35% stated that it was slightly above the national average, 25% reported that it was significantly below the national average. An income that is considerable above the national average and around the national average was reported by 15% each and 10% stated that it was a little below the national average.
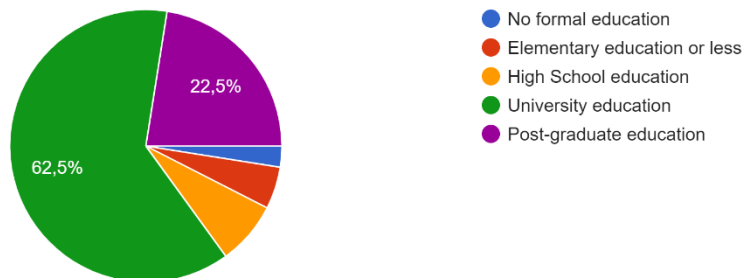
4. Your area of residence is:

40 responses
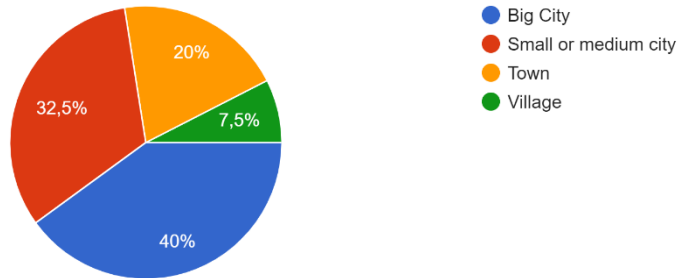
Almost half (40%) of the people who responded to the survey live in big cities, 32,5% live in small or medium cities, 20% in towns and 7,5% in villages.

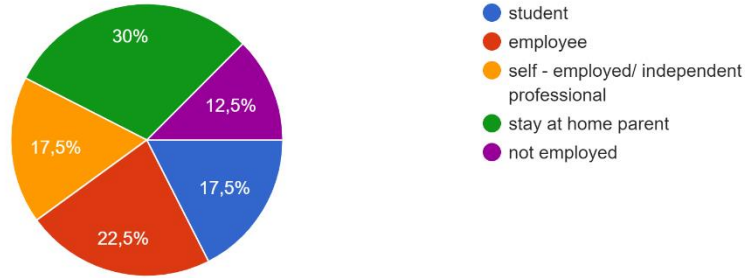5. Which is your highest educational program completed?

40 responses

The level of education has been reported as follows: 62,5% have University Education, 22,5% have post-graduate education, 7,5% have high school education, 5% have elementary education or less and 2,5% have received non-formal education.

6. Please mention your occupational status:

40 responses

- ● student
- ● employee
- ● self - employed/ independent professional
- ● stay at home parent
- ● not employed

The occupational status of respondents varies from 30% stay at home parent, 22,5% employee, 17,5% self-employed/independent professional, 17,5% student and 12,5% not employed.
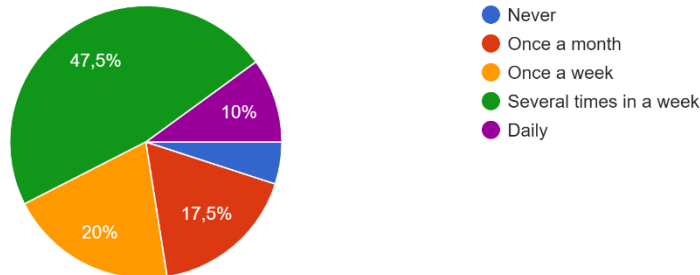
7. What is your ethnicity?

40 responses

- ● German
- ● Roma
- ● Polish
- ● Other
- ● Prefer not to say
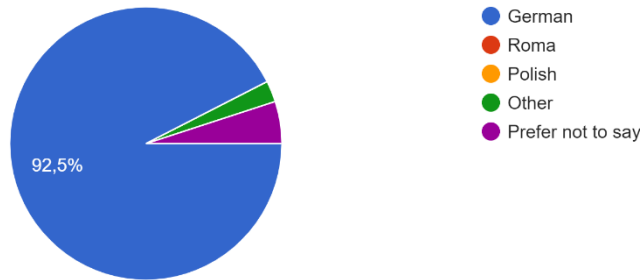
Regarding the ethnicity, the majority of the respondents (92,5%) were German, 5% preferred not to say and 2,5% chose other.

8. How often do you access Internet?
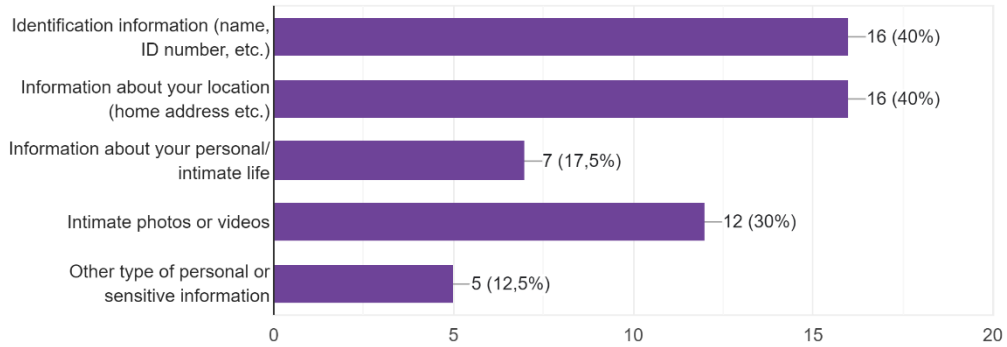
40 responses

- ● Never
- ● Once a month
- ● Once a week
- ● Several times in a week
- ● Daily

Almost half of the respondents (47,5%) access internet several times in a week, 20% once a week, 17,5% once a month, 10% daily and 5% never.

9. Did you ever provide the following information to a person from the internet which you have never met in person and with whom you do not have an institutional affiliation
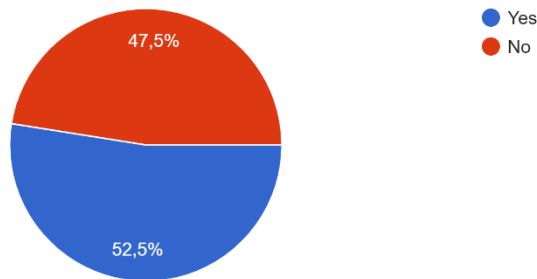
40 responses

When asked if they have ever shared personal information with somebody from the internet whom they have never met in person and with whom they do not have an institutional affiliation, 16 people (40%) responded that they have shared their identification information, 16 people (40%) have shared information about their location, 7 people (17,5%) have shared information about their personal/intimate life, 12 people (30%) have shared intimate photos or videos and 5 (12%) have shared other type of personal or sensitive information.

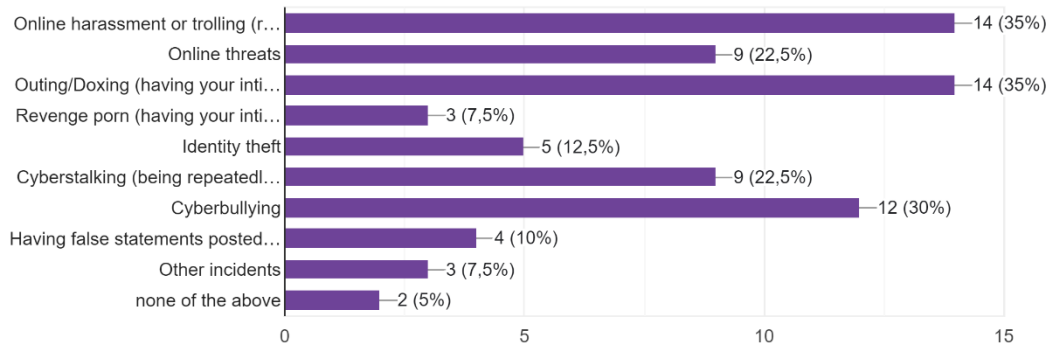10. Did you ever provide intimate information, photos or videos to a friend or partner online?

40 responses

As indicated in the graphic above, 47,5% reported that did not provide intimate photos to friends or partners online and 52,5% reported that they did.

11. Have you ever been a victim of the following incidents when accessing the internet?

40 responses

14 people (35%) have experienced online harassment or trolling, 9 people (22,5%) have experienced online threats, 14 people (35%) have experienced outing/doxing, 7 people (7,5%) have experienced revenge porn, 5 people (12,5%) have experienced identity theft, 9 people (22,5%) have experienced cyberstalking, 12 people (30%) have experienced cyberbullying, 4 people (10%) have experienced false statement posts, 3 people have experienced other incidents and 2 people (5%) have not experienced any of the listed.

12. What do you generally do online?

40 responses
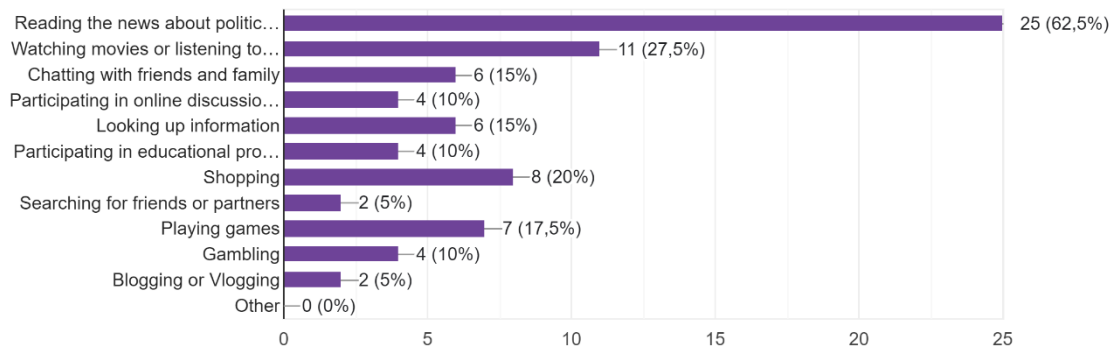
Youth online activity includes: 62,5% reading the news about politics and current events, 27,5% watching movies or listening to music, 15% chatting with friends and family, 10% participating in online discussions on forums, blogs, groups etc., 15% looking up information, 10% participating in educational programs or working from home, 20% shopping, 5% searching for friends or partners, 17,5% playing games, 10% gambling and 5% blogging or vlogging.

13. Did you engage in online gambling over the past two years:

40 responses

- Yes, more than once a week
- Yes, about once a week
- Yes, about once a month
- Yes, several times or less
- No
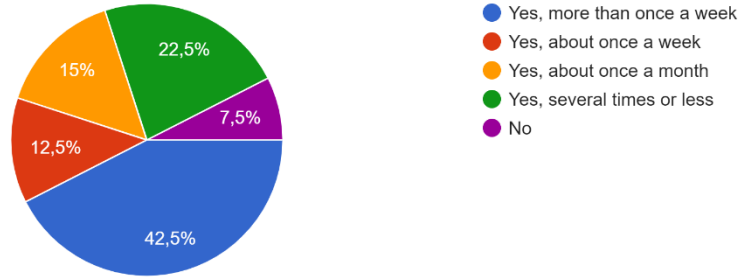
42,5% of respondents have engaged in online gambling more than once a week, 22,5% several times or less, 15% about once a month, 12,5% about once a week and 7,5% do not.

14. What type of social network platforms do you use on a regular basis?

40 responses

Platform	Value
Facebook	29 (72,5%)
Twitter	4 (10%)
Instagram	18 (45%)
TikTok	8 (20%)
Other	1 (2,5%)
None	0 (0%)
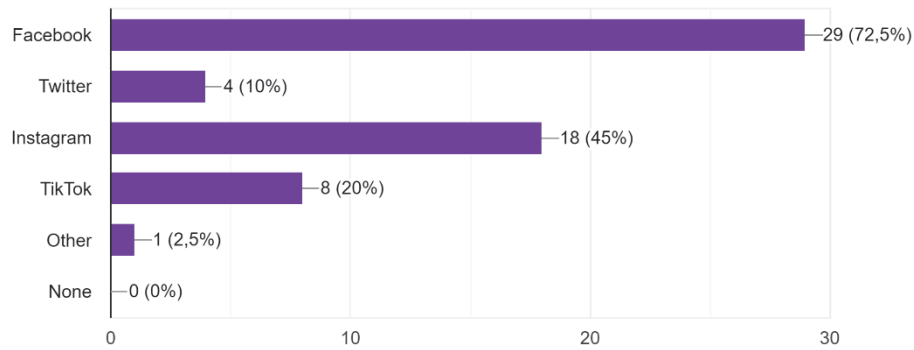
29 respondents use Facebook, 4 use Twitter, 18 use Instagram, 8 use Tik tok and 1 used other social networks.

15. How often do you read the news about politics and current events?

40 απαντήσεις

- Daily
- Once every few days
- Once a week
- Once a month
- Never

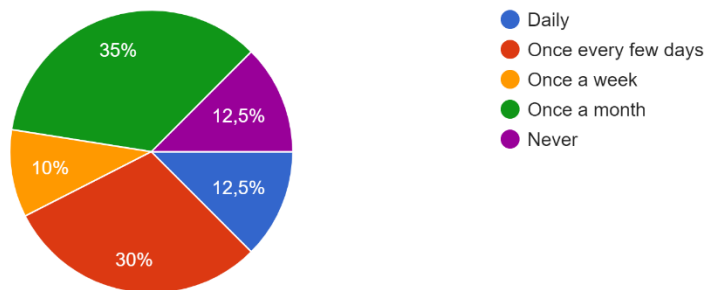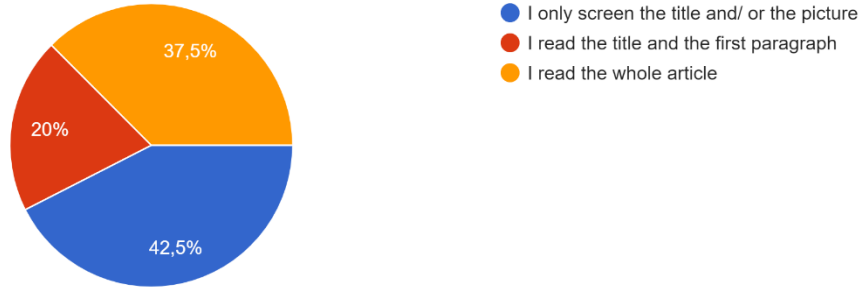When asked how frequently they read the news regarding politics and current events, 12% said daily, 30% once every few days, and 10% once a week. 30% of those surveyed said they read political and current events news once a month, while 12.5% said they never do.

16. When reading a piece of news, how thorough do you usually read?

40 responses

In response to the question "When reading a piece of news, how thorough do you usually read?" 42.5% of participants indicate they only screen the title and/or picture, 37.5% read the entire article, and 20% read the title and first paragraph.

17. In terms of political orientation, do you consider yourself:

40 responses
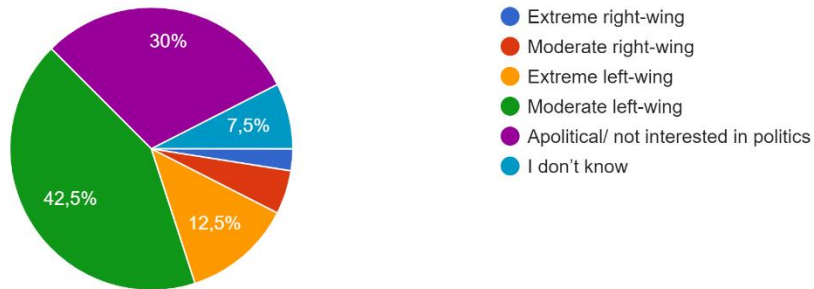
In terms of political orientation, 42,5% of the participants consider themselves moderate left-wing, 30% apolitical and not interested in politics, 12,5% extreme left-wing, 5% moderate right wing and 2,5% extreme right-wing

18. Do you comment on news platforms? If so, how often?

40 responses
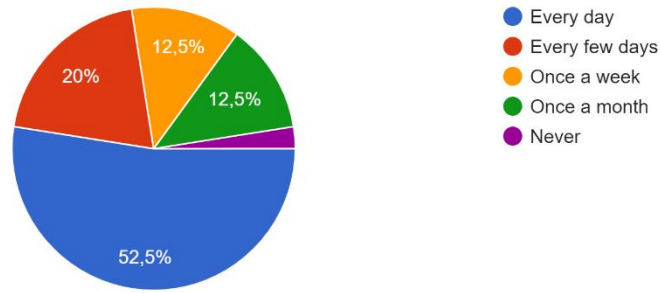
When asked "Do you comment on news platforms? If so, how often?" 52.5% of participants responded every day, 20% responded every few days, 12.5% responded once a week, and 12.5% responded once a month. Only 2.5% of those polled said they had never done so.

19. What are your top three sources of information on politics and current events?

40 responses
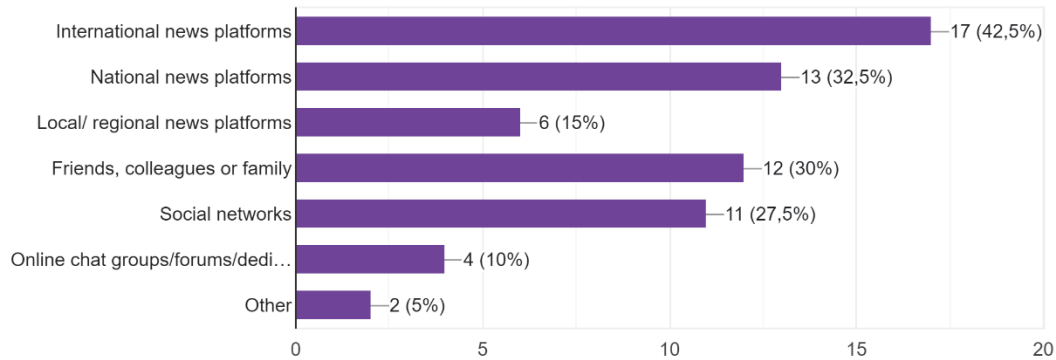
When asked to choose their top three sources of information on politics and current events, 42,5% (17) of participants chose International News Platforms, 32,5% (13) chose National News Platforms, 30% (12) selected Friends, colleagues, or family, while 27,5% (11) chose Social Networks, 15% (6) Local/regional news platforms, 10% (4) Online Chat Groups/ Forums and 5% (2) indicated "Other" as their answer.

20. How often do you interact with other users online through public social media:

40 responses

- Every day
- Once or twice a week
- Less than once a week
- Less than once a month
- Never

To the question "How often do you interact with other users online through public social media" 25% responded every day, 35% replied once or twice a week, 7,5% replied less than once a week, 27,5% indicated less than once a month and 5% replied never.
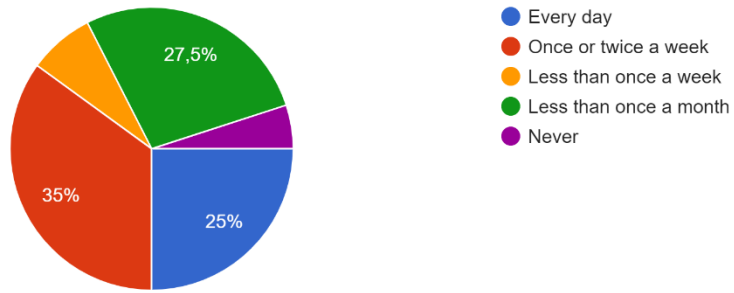
21. How often do you interact with other users online through private chats:

40 responses

- Every day
- Once or twice a week
- Less than once a week
- Less than once a month
- Never
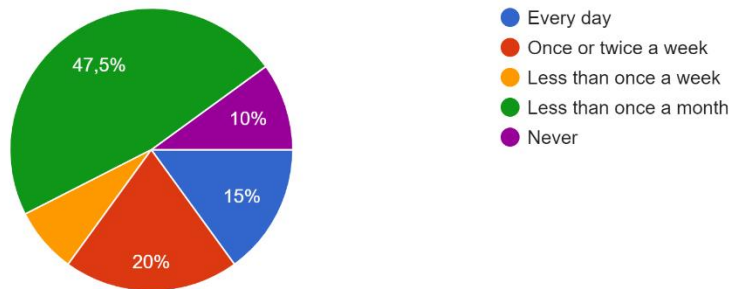
15% of the participants interact with other users using online private chats daily. 20% of the participants replied that they interact with other users through private chats once or twice a week, 7,5% less than once a week, 47,5% less than once a month and 10% never interact with users through private chats.

22. The COVID-19 pandemic makes you:

40 responses

- Very anxious
- Somewhat anxious
- Not anxious at all

According to the pie chart above, 40% of the participants feel very anxious about the Covid-19 pandemic, 42,5% feel somewhat anxious while 17,5% do not feel anxious at all.

23. The war in Ukraine makes you:

40 responses

Legend:
- Very anxious
- Somewhat anxious
- Not anxious at all
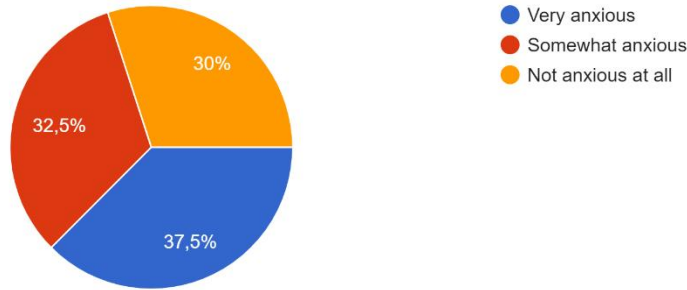
37,5% of the participants feel very anxious about the war in Ukraine, 32,5% feel somewhat anxious and 30% do not feel anxious at all.

24. Please rate the accuracy of the following statement: Covid-19 was deliberately created by a state government in a laboratory in order to control world population
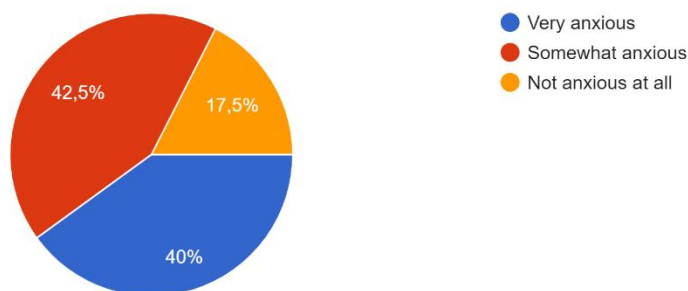
40 responses

Legend:
- Highly accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Neutral
- Unlikely to be accurate
- Not accurate at all
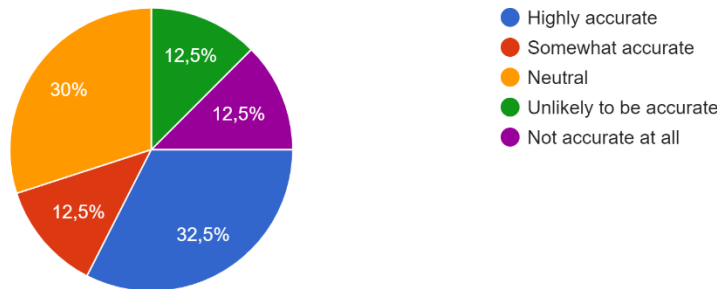
32,5% of the participants rated the statement "Covid-19 was deliberately created by a state government in a laboratory in order to control the world population" as highly accurate, 12,5% of the participants rated the statement as somewhat accurate, 30% were neutral while only 12,5% rated it as unlikely to be accurate and not accurate at all.

25. Please rate the accuracy of the following statement: Covid-19 vaccines can cause infertility.

40 responses

- Highly accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Neutral
- Unlikely to be accurate
- Not accurate at all
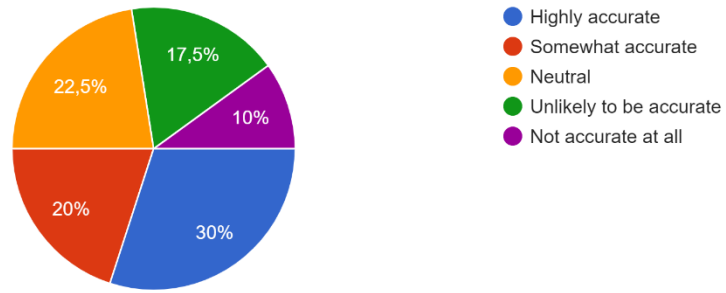
30% of the survey's participants deem the statement "Covid-19 vaccines can cause infertility" as highly accurate, 20% as somewhat accurate, 22,5% were neutral, 17,5% rated it as unlikely to be accurate, and 10% as not accurate at all.

26. Please rate the accuracy of the following statement: The crimes in Bucha and Irpin, Ukraine were staged by the Ukranian government in order to order to receive Western aid.

40 responses

- Highly accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Neutral
- Unlikely to be accurate
- Not accurate at all
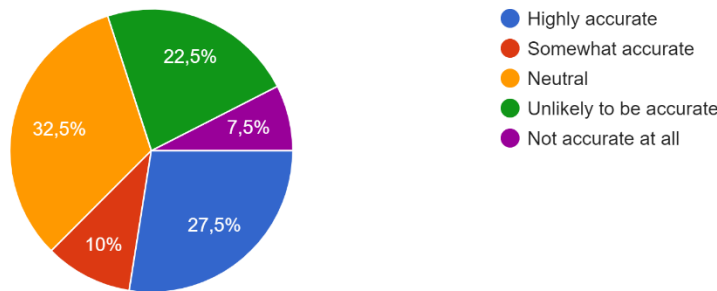
The graph above shows that 27,5% of the participants believe the statement "The crimes in Bucha and Irpin in Ukraine were staged by the Ukrainian government in order to receive western aid" to be highly accurate, 10% of the participants deem the statement to be somewhat accurate while 32,5% were neutral. 22,5% of the participants rated the statement as unlikely to be accurate and 7,5% as not accurate at all.

27. Please rate the accuracy of the following statement: Most Muslim immigrants from the Middle East are likely to be involved in criminal/ terrorist acts.

40 responses

- Highly accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Neutral
- Unlikely to be accurate
- Not accurate at all

The pie chart above indicates that 25% of the participants rated the statement "Most Muslim immigrants from the Middle East are likely to be involved in criminal/terrorist acts" as highly accurate. 22,5% deemed the above statement as somewhat accurate and 32,5% were neutral. 12,5% of the participants believe the statement unlikely to be accurate while 7,5% not accurate at all.

28. Please rate the accuracy of the following statement: Global warming is not real, but it is used as a pretext by Global elites to control global resources
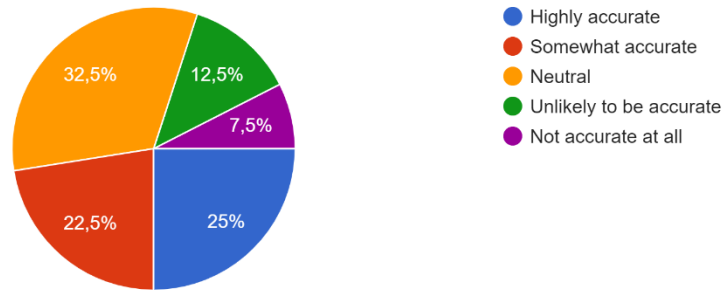
40 responses

- Highly accurate
- Somewhat accurate
- Neutral
- Unlikely to be accurate
- Not accurate at all
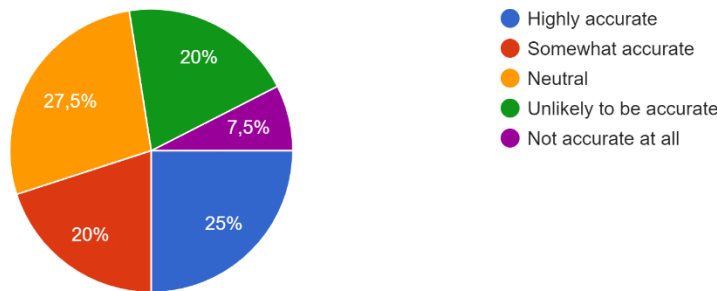
Following the prompt to rate the statement "Global warming is not real, but it is used as a pretext by global elites to control global resources" 25% of the participants responded that it is highly accurate, 20% somewhat accurate, and 27,5% neutral. 20% of the participants found the statement unlikely to be accurate while 7,5% not accurate at all.

Participants were asked to read the following statement and choose which statement is true from the list: "While most of the Beryslav district in the southern Kherson region remains under Russian control, several villages have been liberated — including Novovorontsovka on the Dnipro river — according to Dmytro Slyvchenko, head of the district council. The village had 6,500 people before the war, but the population has gone down to only 400, he said. "People have already started to come back to these liberated villages, to their homes, and started renovating their damaged houses, even though there is still shelling from the occupiers from time to time," Slyvchenko added."

30% of the participants believed that Dmytro Slyvchenko is speaking on behalf of the Russian army, 22,5% of the participants think that Novovorontsovka is a village in the Beryslav district, 7,5% of the participants think that the statement "The shelling comes from the Ukrainian army" is the correct one while 22,5% of the participants think that Novovorontsovka is still under Russian control. 17,5% of the participants found the statement "Most of the Beryslav district is still under Russian Control" to be true. Therefore, based on their answers, we concluded that 40% had medium reading skills and 60% had low critical reading skills.

Crtical Reading Skills

0, 0%

16, 40%

24, 60%

■ High (2 -3) ■ Medium (0-1) ■ Low (0>)
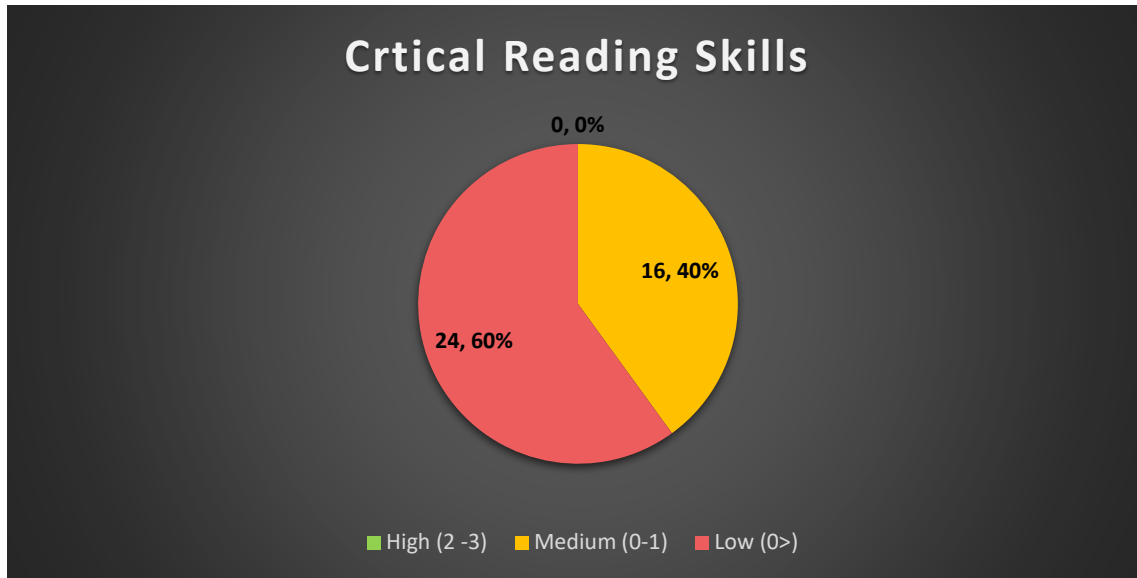
5.2. Qualitative Data

Based on the 4 interviews conducted, we are going to present the key points of each one of them, and reach the main conclusions.

On the topics of experience with youth, the first interviewee informed us that he has worked with young people of different ages in language teaching, where the most of them were in the age range of 16-25 years old. Also, he/she informed us that during the lessons, they use diverse learning activities to make sure that the learners were engaged and felt comfortable cooperating with their classmates. The second participant claimed that he/she is currently working in a private VET Provider (EQF level 3-5), where they are dealing with adult students. In particular, he/she answered that the activities that they are performing, vary among training and teaching, mobility, research, etc., having as a main aim to assess their students' needs, tracking their employability and providing career counselling to them. The third participant in the interview process, responded that he/she works with young people, aged from 18 to 30, professionally as a non-formal educator in VET programmes, with extensive experience in both f2f and in distance learning. The fourth interviewee, said that he has been involved in a voluntary basis with migrant youngsters, aged from 16 to 18 years old, as a teacher of national language and as a social worker in organizations that provide hospitality to unaccompanied migrant young people.

At the second question, regarding the online behavior of young people (16-30 years old) in Germany, the first participant claimed that younger students generally feel comfortable using digital tools in education. In particular, he/she added that young people of Generation Z deem can easily implement tasks and specific actions under an online educational tool since online channels are their main avenue for communicating with their friends. The second interviewee expressed the opinion that young people in Germany, are very active online. According to his/her opinion, their behavior could vary according to the behavioral category, as they may have a different behavior as an online buyer, a social media user, a student/employee that uses internet

for work, etc. In addition, the participant added that youngsters from 16-20 years old may be more active online more than anyone, since social media are on the top of their preferences, especially for the generation Z. They are using it in order to communicate with their friends, watch movies online, listen to music, study their lessons, etc. Their online behavior might be careless, since sometimes they do not feel the risks associated with their online presence. In addition, the interviewee highlighted the fact that the aforementioned situation is not something that is missing from the millennials, however in a lower level, as the online presence of adults is not focused so much in social media, as in online buying, use of e-services, and of course working, since distance working is now more usual than ever before. They tend to be more informed upon existing online risks, having many times conducted research upon to pages, tools, apps and media they use. The fourth participant answered that young people, both in Germany and across Europe, and particularly those aged 16 to 20, have been born and raised in a digitally dominated environment. Young people of this age know how to use the internet from a very young age, and they are creating social network profiles at a much younger age than in the past. This situation has a number of positive and negative aspects, as youngsters live a large part of their lives online, but young people over 20, and especially over 25, were not born into the digital age, but have learned it as they grew up. Although the 16 to 30 age group is now very familiar with the internet, which is a big part of their lives, there are some differences. In particular, people the age group of 16 to 20 are more vulnerable to online bullying, sexual harassment, personal data breaches, or even online viruses, as their online behavior might be careless. Although this behavior is also found in the over-20s, it is to a lesser extent, as this generation tends to be more cautious and warier of the internet.

With regard to the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic upon youth online behavior, the fist participant replied that even if young people feel comfortable in online interactions, they dealt with various difficulties. Firstly, young people were forced to participate in online lessons, which was not common in the pre-Covid period. Young people consider online lessons as an easy process of learning, but they started becoming nervous and anxious about the obligatory aspect of being in front of a computer (or any other device) to attend the lesson. Thus, their initial positive response to online lessons became a negative issue related to feeling trapped in the home. The second interviewee expressed the opinion that the online presence of youth has been radically increased within COVID-19. Social media became a daily routine, in order to stay connected with friends and family, and of course to spend some time in „scrolling". Several applications have become more popular than ever during the COVID pandemic (such as TikTok, Pinterest, etc.) and thus, youngsters became dedicated users. In many cases, this caused an addiction to social media. There are many incidents of young people experiencing „social media insomnia". Apart from online communication, online learning and online working have also become the new normal.

Thus, according to the participant, young people in universities (or even in high school have been used to distance learning, e-learning platforms and webinars. In parallel, the employees who started working from home due to COVID, also got used to it and many of them stayed in this working model, even after COVID. As a result of this, many people lost the sense of belonging and collaboration or even got depressed. Additionally, online shopping has also increased, due to the closure of shops. People were spending a lot of time in „e-window shopping" and they never stopped. Even after COVID, this habit has been adopted, and online shopping has in many cases replaced the physical one. In this case, many illegal webpages have popped up, setting the customers in a great danger of paying for products that do not exist. However, according to the participant, some people eventually got more informed upon online shopping and its risks, and learned how to ensure that their personal information (such as credit card number, etc.) will not be leaked. The third interviewee claimed that young people (as well as other age groups) seem to be more interested in trainings available online.

Following their preference for online training, they also present a more active role during the training. Their interaction with many and different online platforms, has also increased the requirements they have in terms of the features of the learning platform, the training material and how it is adapted to online courses, the experience and skills of the trainers. The fourth participant, agreeing with the other three, further stated that the lack of physical contact has brought many online dangers such as personal information breaches. First of all, since many times intimate relationships were expressed via texting or video-calling, there were many reported incidents (mainly by young people) of sensitive information leaking, or even „revenge porn". Young people were also communicating with people they do not really know outside of the online world, jeopardizing their own safety.

On the factors that determine young people to share their personal information online with unknown people, the first interviewee stated that young people are becoming more and more aware of the importance of not publishing so much personal information on their social media accounts. Young people, and especially adolescents, are often prone to seek the acceptance of others. Because of this, they might decide to share personal information in order to become more popular and show off their achievements and their personal moments so as to be accepted by their peers. The second participant to the interview, expressed the opinion that the main reason for sharing this kind of information is the lack of awareness about the real dangers. Especially young people tend to trust others more easily than older people (maybe due to the lack of previous experiences) so their innocent trust is the main driving force of their behavior. The fourth interviewee answered that during training young people feel comfortable to share personal information with others. When the training lacks features such as cameras and microphones, their willingness is reduced in significant levels. In general, the social distance (not only due to COVID) of modern life, fosters online communication, and inevitably young people feel the need to share personal information with others in order to achieve personal contact. Though, according to the participant's point of view, young people are eager to share information about their location, but they are more careful in sharing data such as ID number or other information that can be used in scams. He concludes that young people are not a little bit technophobic, but risk-conscious. The fourth participant, expressed the opinion that a significant factor is insecurity, social pressure and the need to be part of a group. Young people, see the online environment as completely safe and free of risks, or at least they have the feeling that "it will never happen to me". Their need to socialize leads them to be less careful with their personal information. Although they have extensive digital literacy, this also works in the opposite direction, as they tend to be less cautious, believing that they will be able to easily identify the risk.

On the question regarding whether and why young people send intimate media content (pictures, videos) to their intimate partners online or by phone, the first interviewee answered that they often send pictures and videos of themselves to their intimate partners because they consider sexting to be a factor in maintaining their relationship or a way of increasing their confidence level. The second participant said that ignorance, lack of previous experience, and the honest trust of young people in their partners are the main driving force of their behavior. The third interviewee said that he knows from co-workers (psychologists and social workers in high schools) who work with under-aged youth (16-18), that sharing media content even with personal and sensitive content is very common among young people. The same behavior is also met in other age groups (above 18). This kind of behavior has contributed a lot negative outcomes, hindering the psychosocial well-being of the youth, such as the cyber-forms of bulling, SGBV (Sexual and Gender Based Violence) etc. The fourth interviewee, expressed the opinion that especially at a young age, people lack the maturity to understand that a partner may have manipulative attitudes towards them, and use this content in a way that violates their personality. Having grown up in a digital environment, they consider it normal to share their photos online with someone they trust.

On the sixth question, regarding the frequency that young people fall victims to online incidents such as online harassment or trolling, online threats, outing/doxing (having their intimate/ sensitive information shared without their consent), revenge porn, identity theft, cyberstalking, cyberbullying, having false statements posted online in their name or others the first participant answered that more and more young people are getting victims of online incidents, such as revenge porn. Most of them have the assumption that the online world is a safe environment, without risks. However, trolling, online threats and doxing can have severe effects upon a persons' psychological health. Low self-esteem, disturbed sleep, and high level of anxiety are some of the most common cases. The second interviewee claims that young people very often fall victims to online incidents, as the most usual of the abovementioned cases is online trolling, cyberbullying and cyberstalking. Of course, all the other examples are also real case scenarios that happen every day. According to the third participant, it is a quite common and a phenomenon that already worries the professionals in the field of youth work in public educational institutes and NGOs. The fourth interviewee answered that young people are quite often harassed online, as they consider the internet a safe environment and do not perceive harassment at an early stage. Moreover, the fact that they are unlikely to express their concerns about this issue to an adult makes them vulnerable to continued and escalated harassment.

On the topics of online gambling, the first participant replied that young people perceive this activity as entertainment while they are home since they can do it 24/7 without getting out of their rooms. Also, they think they can combine entertainment with an increase in their pocket money while not working. They start to get addicted when they start investing little money and getting back more. Thus, online gambling starts becoming an addiction and they are unable to get out of this situation since they are getting addicted in fast and easy ways of increasing their income without an essential effort. The second participant claimed that she doesn't believe that online gambling is a usual phenomenon among the youngsters. She expressed the opinion that adult people (mainly above 40 years old) are more vulnerable to this habit, since gambling (on site in casinos, etc.) was very famous during the previous decades, so online gambling is a trend mainly for people that were already used to it. She also added that especially, since online gaming (in PC, PS, Nitendo, Xbox, etc.) has evolved, it is also possible to become addicted to this, as gambling has lost a specific target group: the ones that are playing for the play (for fun) and not for the money. The third participant answered that the entry point in gambling in Germany is related in sports. Young people are enthusiastic about group sports, such as football and basketball. Gambling is a means to prove their skills and knowledge in order to find out which team wins. Combined with easy profit, young people are easily engaged in gambling. As mentioned above, in July 2021, the new German Interstate Treaty on Gambling (ISTG) or Glücksspielstaatsvertrag (GlüStV 2021) come into effect, which legalizes and regulates online gambling in Germany across all 16 states. Its main purpose is to regulate the opaque online market for gambling in a uniform manner and to curb illegal offerings. Even before the new State Treaty on Gambling, it was possible to use online betting and gambling services in Germany, for example on the basis of EU-wide gambling licenses issued in Malta, among other countries. For consumers, it was often no longer clear what was legal and what was illegal, and also gave rise to unregulated black-market operations. The State Treaty on Gaming 2021 creates clearer conditions and encourages players to move away from the black market (Hofmann, Spitz, Herpich, Straimer, 2022). Although, many parents lend them with their cards, thinking that they will buy something online. She added that for young people over 18, it is much easier to get engaged, especially during their studying years. The fourth participant replied that gambling is not such a common phenomenon among young people, however he thinks that they are much more prone to gambling addiction than an adult, however the fact that they have no income of their own and that there is a plethora of online games that they play with each other, gambling is not a major threat at these ages.

On the question regarding the level of media use and media literacy of the young people, the first interviewee expressed the view that most young people are informed about the current news from social media accounts without further assessment of the sources of information and the authors/ people behind the posts. So, most of them are not adequately updated about the state of affairs in different fields and they are not spending time in order to identify if the information is trustworthy or credible. The second participant of the interview answered that young people are reading news continuously. This happens due to the plethora of news sources nowadays. Apart from magazines, newspapers etc, that have already stopped being so famous, e-news have popped up. Articles and e-magazines were always a mean of information sharing, but now, social media have also taken over this role. Only by scrolling to Facebook, one is able to read a plethora of news of all around the world. Despite how often young people read the news, it does not mean that they read them thoroughly. The third participant claimed that everyone's ability to focus and pay attention to long texts is reduced nowadays. This is a characteristic shared mostly by young people. Also, she added that young people spent a lot of time to read the news. The majority of them come in contact with articles and news through the social media platforms (Instagram and TikTok). While many read only the titles, and with all the existing click-baits, I think that many attitudes and beliefs are shaped via fake news and false information. Young people should increase their competences in cross-checking information online (and not only). This also affects their behavior in trainings. The fourth participant, expressed the opinion that young people are informed about the news from social media, but they are not interested in looking further. As a result, the spread of fake news as well as superficial learning has increased. Above that, often young people online (for example in Facebook) are commenting below a post about news, without even reading the article that the post contains. Sometimes, these articles are just scams and the title is very different than the content. Thus, it sometimes happens that a person who has not read the article at all, still comments on it.

Regarding the level of critical thinking of the young people, the first participant claimed that this ability is usually dependent on young people's personalities, and the stimuli that they have received while they were growing up. However, the majority of young people between 16 to 18 years old do not always have an objective point of view, but as they start to get older, they tend to have a more concrete point of view and they can more efficiently contend in favor of their thoughts. The second interviewee expressed the opinion that young people in general have an intermediate level of critical thinking, since this is a soft skill that still needs to be developed, especially for the new generations. The third participant claimed that in general, the level of critical thinking is very good. She added that young people have all the skills and brains to think critically, but they do not embrace the role of a critical thinker. It has to do with the way formal education has shaped the way they behave. The fourth participant, claimed that the ability of critical thinking in young people is still in a developing stage. People of this age receive a plethora of information and through the development of their personality, they learn how to filter the information they receive.

On the reasons why, young people fall victims to online misinformation/ fake news, the first participant answered that they use social media as the primary source of information. However, young people are usually not educated on how to deal with misinformation and how to identify the credibility of the authors, websites and social media accounts. The second interviewee claimed that as we are living in the era of limitless information and speed, so many times young people want to be informed upon something very quickly, without spending time in really understanding the content. The third participant explained that the main reason is related to the way in which they consume information combined with the abundance of available information. The fourth interviewee, in line with the first participant expressed the opinion that social media is the primary

source of information for the young people, and as a result they believe everything they see on social media, without further research.

All interviewees, recommended specified trainings as the main tool for addressing these problems. More specifically:

Risk: Fake news / Misinformation
A course for the identification of misinformation. The learners of this course will practically go through a series of articles and websites to pinpoint the main differences in the articles, posts and news including fake news and conduct desk research in order to define how the fake news of a specific topic was spread around the world.

Risks: Cyberbullying, online trolling, online threats
Training on how your online profile might have beneficial or negative effects in your life according to your posts and the information that you share, training on how to protect your personal information online and define the online threats.

Risks: Sexual harassment , revenge porn
Training all young people from an early age on the importance of maintaining the personal moments as part of their personal life. The training will have as a basis the identification of the feelings and thoughts of people being the victims and the victimizers based on real cases so as to comprehend the reasons behind the revenge porn and how this affect the psychological health of all.

Risks: Cyber attacks / Hacking
Training of young people on how to keep their accounts safe either in social media or bank accounts through the activation of the data breach notification response plan. It is highly important to practically assess cases of hackers' attacks, the common hacking practices (based on the up-to-date information) and the settings for the cyber security process in order to ensure that they properly save their accounts.

Finally, one of the interviewees mentioned another EU project that focuses on motivating techniques and digital skills. The project is called EndigiVET and more info can be found below:

https://www.facebook.com/EndigiVETproject?paipv=0&eav=AfbGPtUqyUfdtbSq7JV0w0AiZnjjqt2y5MyQzBt17rE7tOCDr71IbcvkPAThIF4GUvg&_rdr

The main risks associated with young people in Germany are cyberbullying, fake news (misinformation and disinformation), cyber-attack, revenge porn and other forms of image based sexual abuse and identity theft. The common ground of the above-mentioned risks, is the lack of preventing mechanisms as well as the limited level of critical thinking of young people.

It appears that young people (16-18 years old) are more vulnerable to online exposure although adults are also prone to experience and online risk. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to be an important factor that affected the presence of young people on the Internet. Communicating with their peers, following content on social media (Instagram, Youtube and Tik Tok, mostly) as well watching movies/ series and streaming are some of the main online activities of young people. Although, there have been observed numerous issues of self-esteem and self-confidence as an important element that can lead to several online risks (harassment, online threats, revenge porn, cyberstalking etc.).

Recommendations

To this end, the following recommendations have been identified:

Young people should receive training and have access to other online resources (games, e-learning platforms, etc.) that provide clear, simple-to-understand information about the risks, preventive behaviors, primary patterns of manifestation, as well as social and legal repercussions.

Training programs

Future trainings in this field ought to include qualified experts, influencers, and speakers with relevant experience. They should include techniques for non-formal education and participatory teaching, and the information should be presented in a way that makes young people feel directly concerned and included.

Therefore, training programs should ensure the following:

1. Specific training on Critical thinking, Media Literacy and Communication.
2. Active participation of young people in info days and events about cyberbullying and cybersecurity.
3. Encouragement of the correct use of social media including privacy settings, blocking of undesirable content and unknown profiles.
4. Suggestions for more physical activities that lead to periodic breaks from the screens and face-to-face communication with peers.
5. Promote the incorporation of sex education classes and discussion on sexual harassment within the educational institutions.
6. Informative campaigns in University/ School level on fake news/ misinformation/ disinformation.
7. Trainings on Internet Safety with main focus on privacy, phishing, spam mailing, unknown profiles and pop-up messages.
8. Involvement of local and regional authorities on the campaigns and info days and serious action on crucial topics and cases of the above-mentioned risks.
9. Encouragement of young people to report cases of online risks to their environment (peers, teachers, parents, etc.)
10. Put in practice strategies and policies that protect the victim of each case, securing his/her personal data.

Online games/ platforms

Young people should also be given real-world examples of how these risks manifest through online learning tools like games and e-learning platforms. They should be optimized for smartphones in terms of their technical setup, unless they are also intended for other stakeholders who primarily use other devices to access the internet.

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Action-based approach in addressing and mitigating risks of young people in online social networks