

MEDIA LITERACY IN MONTENEGRO

Public opinion research

Prepared for:



Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe
Mission to Montenegro



AGENCY FOR
AUDIOVISUAL
MEDIA SERVICES

October 2026



ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Who took part, and how the research was conducted



1,013

citizens aged 16–75,
nationally representative



26 May – 17 Jun

data collection period,
2026



Mixed-mode

85% telephone (CATI),
15% online (CAWI)



Weighted

post-stratified by gender,
age, region, settlement

The sample universe is the general population of Montenegro aged 16–75 (469,730 people). Data are weighted by gender, age, region and settlement type so findings generalize to the full population.

Note: All percentages are rounded to whole numbers, so totals in some charts may sum to 99% or 101% – a normal rounding effect, not a data error.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Structure of the realized sample (weighted data)

Gender

Men	49%
Women	51%

Age

16-29	22%
30-44	28%
45-59	26%
60-75	24%

Region

Central	49%
South	26%
North	25%

Settlement

Urban	74%
Rural	26%

Education

Secondary	55%
Higher	29%
Primary or less	16%

Employment

Full-time employed	49%
Pensioners	20%
Unemployed	11%
Pupils/students	5%
Housework / Self-emp.	5% / 5%
Part-time	2%

Household monthly income: 33% earn more than €1,500, 17% €1,001-1,500, 13% €651-1,000, 12% up to €650; 26% did not disclose income.



ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Qualitative research: six focus group discussions

Six online focus group discussions were held with citizens of Montenegro between 10–12 June 2026. Each group had a minimum of five participants, ran for approximately two hours, and was guided by a trained moderator using a semi-structured discussion guide.



Women aged 30–55

Women only



Youth aged 16–25

Mixed gender, included at least two aged 16–18



Adults/parents aged 30–55

Mixed gender, all participants are parents



Elderly citizens aged 65–75

Mixed gender



Mixed group aged 26–44

Gender balanced, regional and urban/rural diversity



Mixed group aged 45–64

Gender balanced, regional and urban/rural diversity

Sessions were held at 17:00 and 19:30 to fit participants' schedules. Groups combined shared traits (for open discussion) with diversity across the sample – mirroring the 2023 design, though qualitative findings aren't meant for year-to-year comparison.



KEY FINDING

Citizens feel increasingly confident spotting a lie — but are falling for one more often.

Montenegro's overall Media Literacy Index barely moved between 2023 and 2026 — but that headline stability masks a widening gap between confidence and actual verification habits.

79%

feel confident recognizing propaganda and bias in the news

48%

often/always check alternative sources to verify what they read

down from 53% in 2023

40%

have shared a news story that turned out to be false or misleading

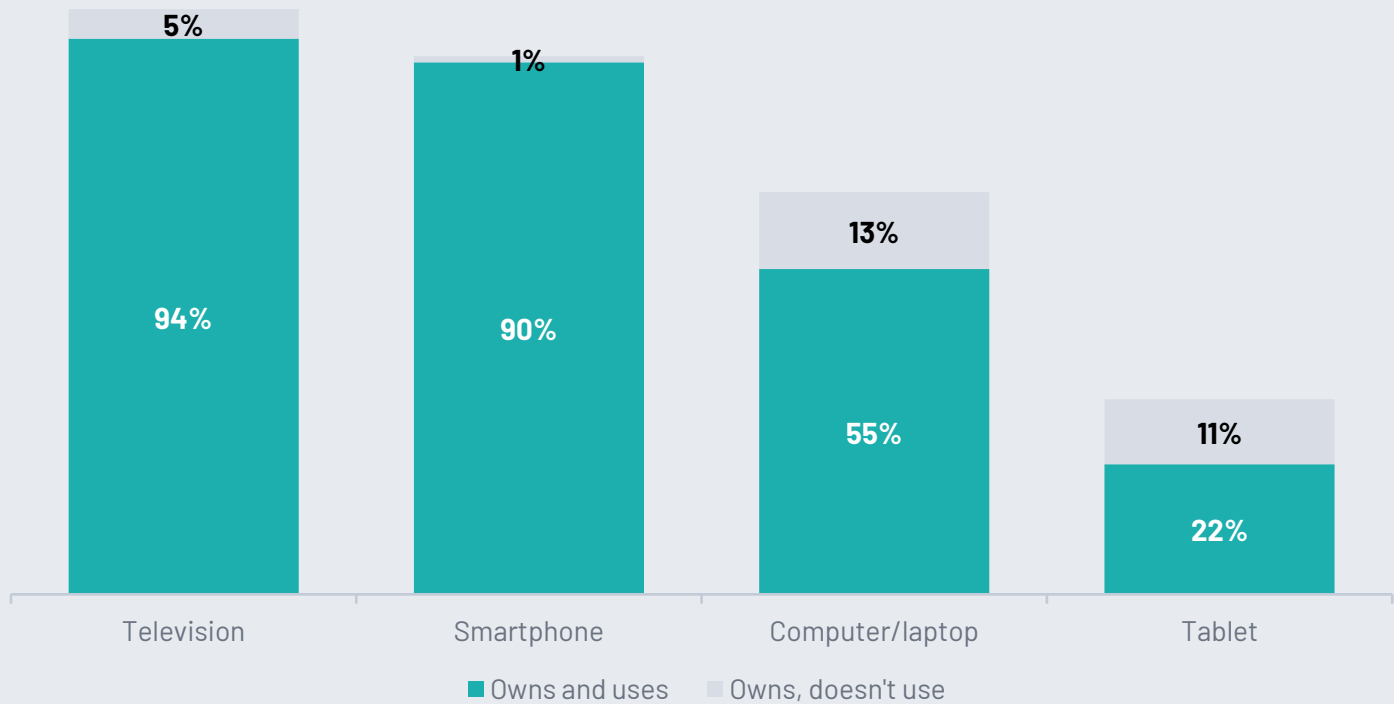
"How confident are you in your ability to recognize propaganda and bias? / How often do you seek alternative sources to verify? / Have you ever shared a news story that turned out to be false and misleading?"

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

ACCESS TO MEDIA AND INFORMATION

What devices citizens use, and how connected they are

Television and smartphones remain the main household devices



"Do you own the following?"
Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

Computers in decline

Computer/laptop use fell from 63% to 55% since 2023 — smartphones increasingly cover the same tasks.

81% vs 26%
computer use: university-educated vs. elementary education

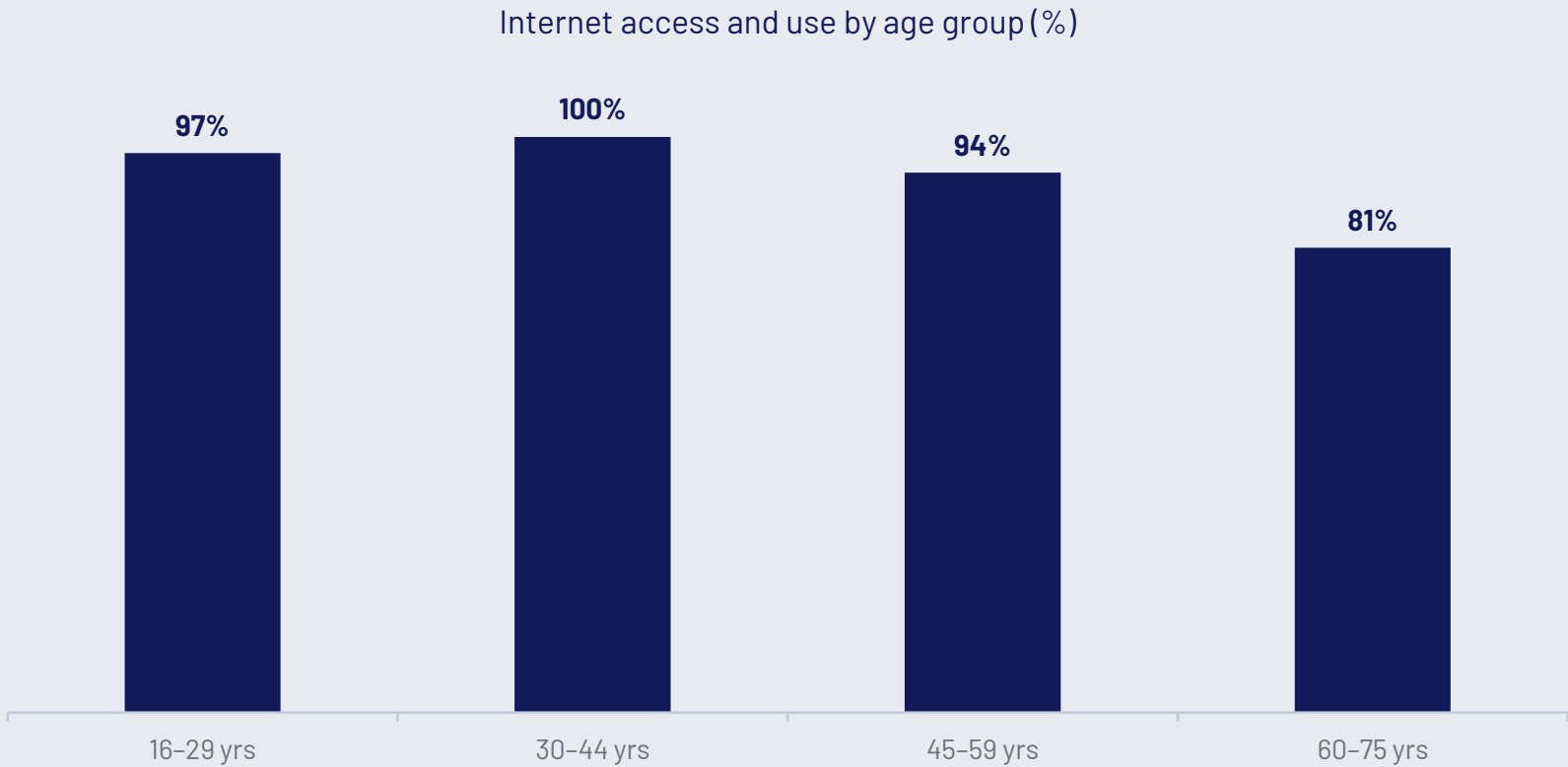
23%
of citizens aged 60–75 do not own a smartphone

Internet access is now near-universal, but an age gap remains

93%

of citizens have and actively use an internet connection

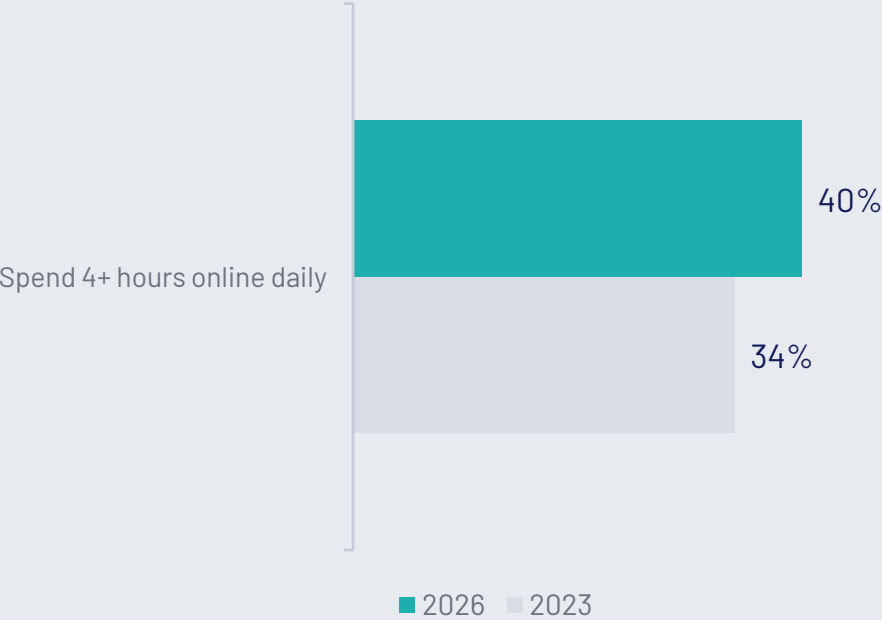
Just 5% of the population has no internet access at all – concentrated in rural areas (9%) and among those with elementary education (12%).



“Do you own - Access to the internet?”

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

Time spent online keeps growing



"How often during the day do you use the internet?"

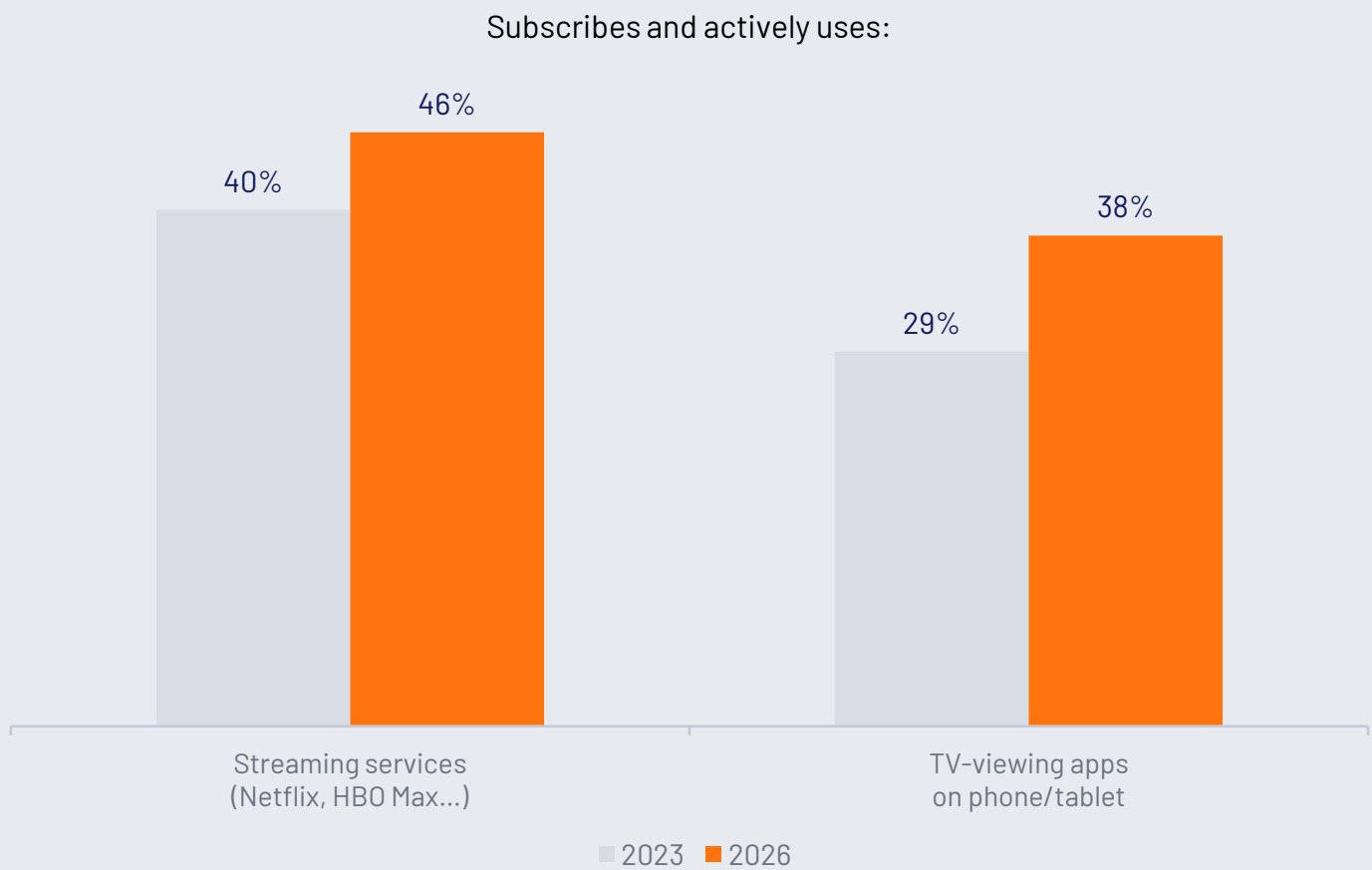
Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

Two in five citizens

now spend 4 or more hours online each day, up from 34% in 2023 – driven mainly by heavy users (6+ hours), who rose from 21% to 25%.

16-29 years	40% are online 6+ hours a day
30-44 years	33% are online 6+ hours a day
60-75 years	only 8% are "heavy users" (6+ hrs)

On-demand viewing keeps gaining on traditional TV scheduling



Age is the biggest divide

Citizens aged 16–44 use streaming services 3x more often (63% (16–29) and 61% (30–44)) than those over 60 (18%).

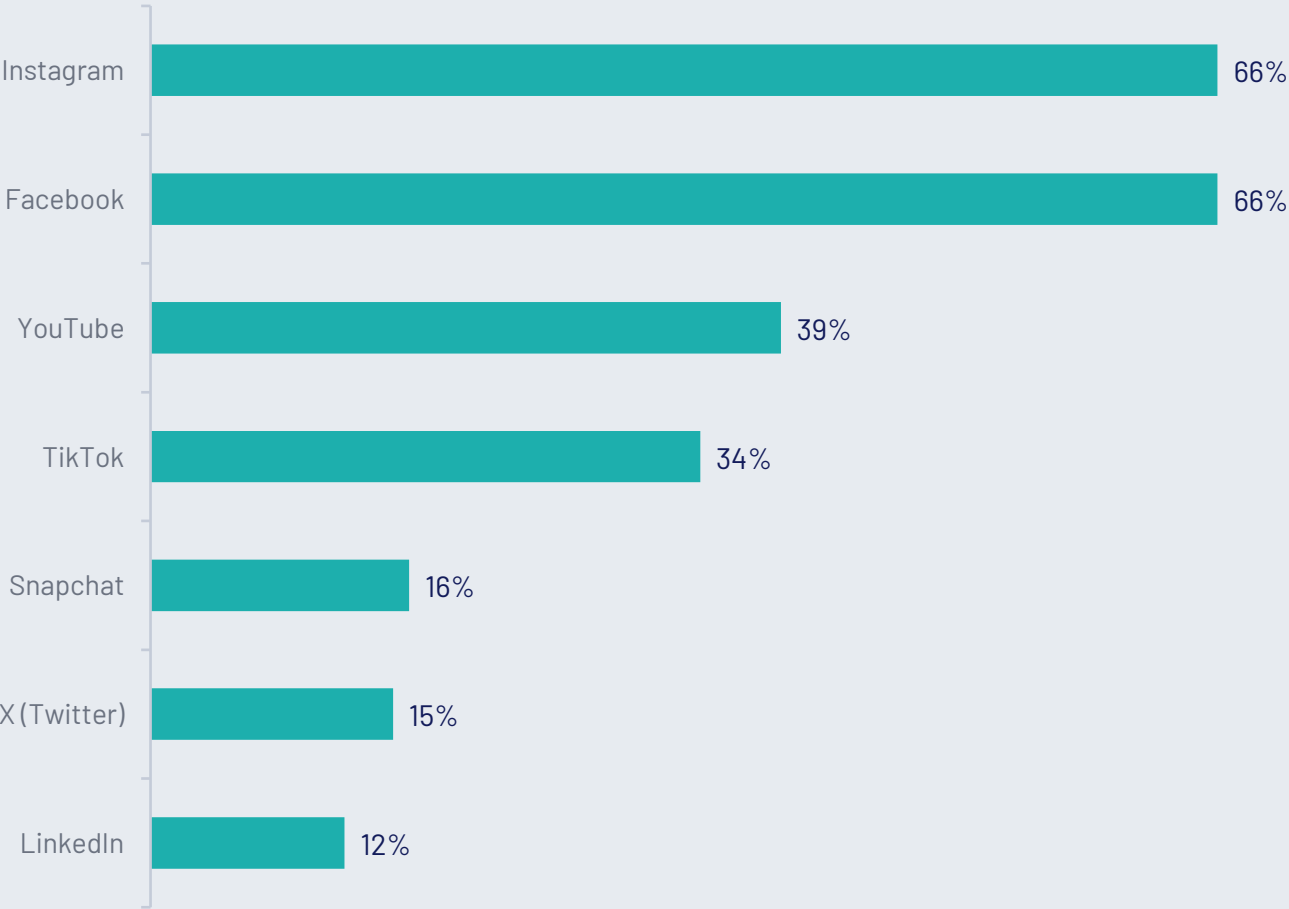
61% vs 25%

streaming use: university-educated vs. elementary education

“Do you own the following?”

Base: Total population / Those who own a smartphone or tablet (92%)

Instagram and Facebook lead, but TikTok is growing fastest



“Do you personally have an account on these social networks?”

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)



TikTok nearly doubled its user base

18% → 34%

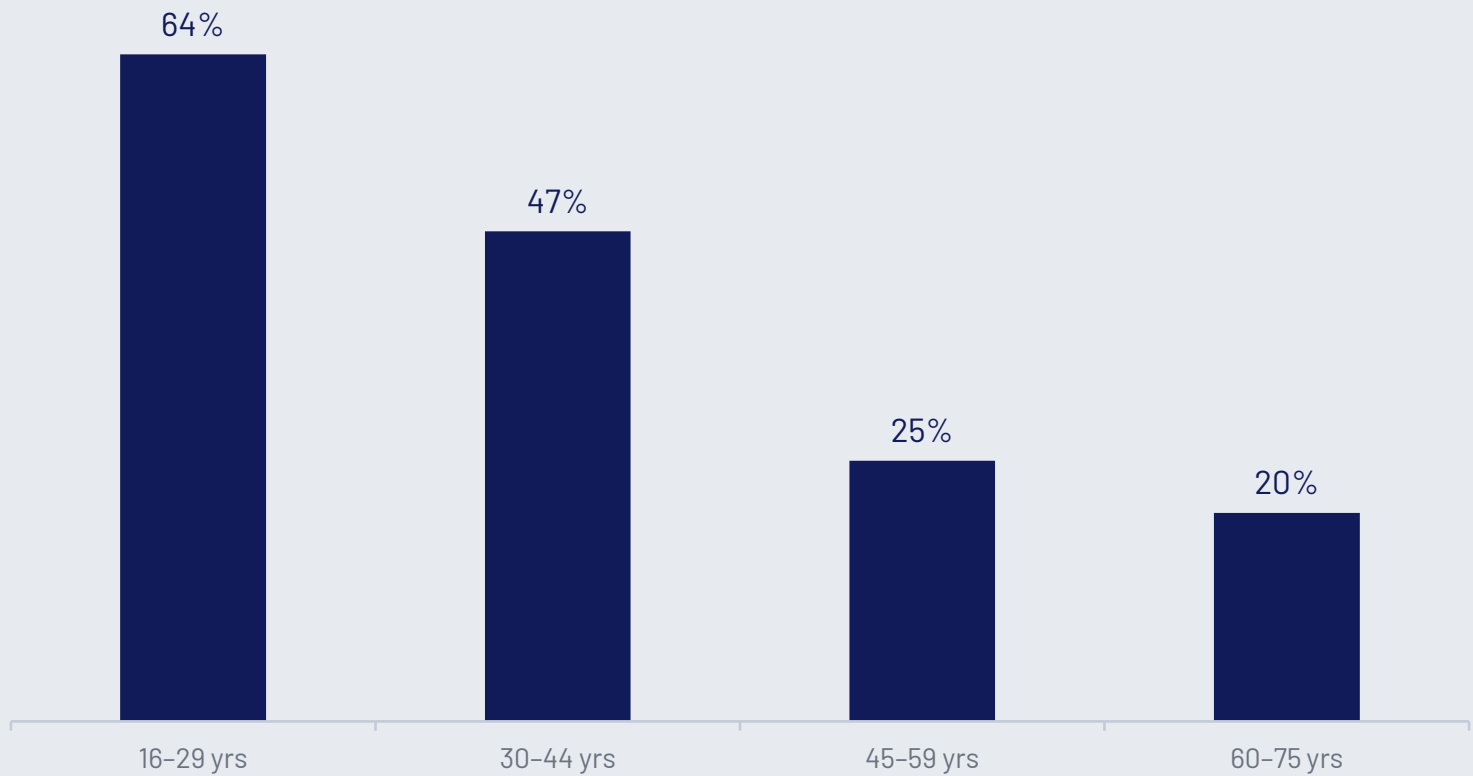
TikTok account holders, 2023 to 2026

No account on any network

20% of citizens (down from 24% in 2023)

Young people spend dramatically more time on social media

Spend 2+ hours using social media:



"On average, how often during the day do you use social media?"

Base: Those with a personal social media account (80% of target population)

42%

of social media users spend 2+ hours a day on them – up from 35% in 2023

Among those aged 16-29, that figure jumped from 53% to 64%.

HOW CITIZENS GET INFORMED

Where people turn to for news about the
world around them

HOW CITIZENS GET INFORMED

Most citizens follow the news regularly – men slightly more than women

75%

of citizens seek out news at least several times a week

“How often do you seek out news about current events in Montenegro or the world?”

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

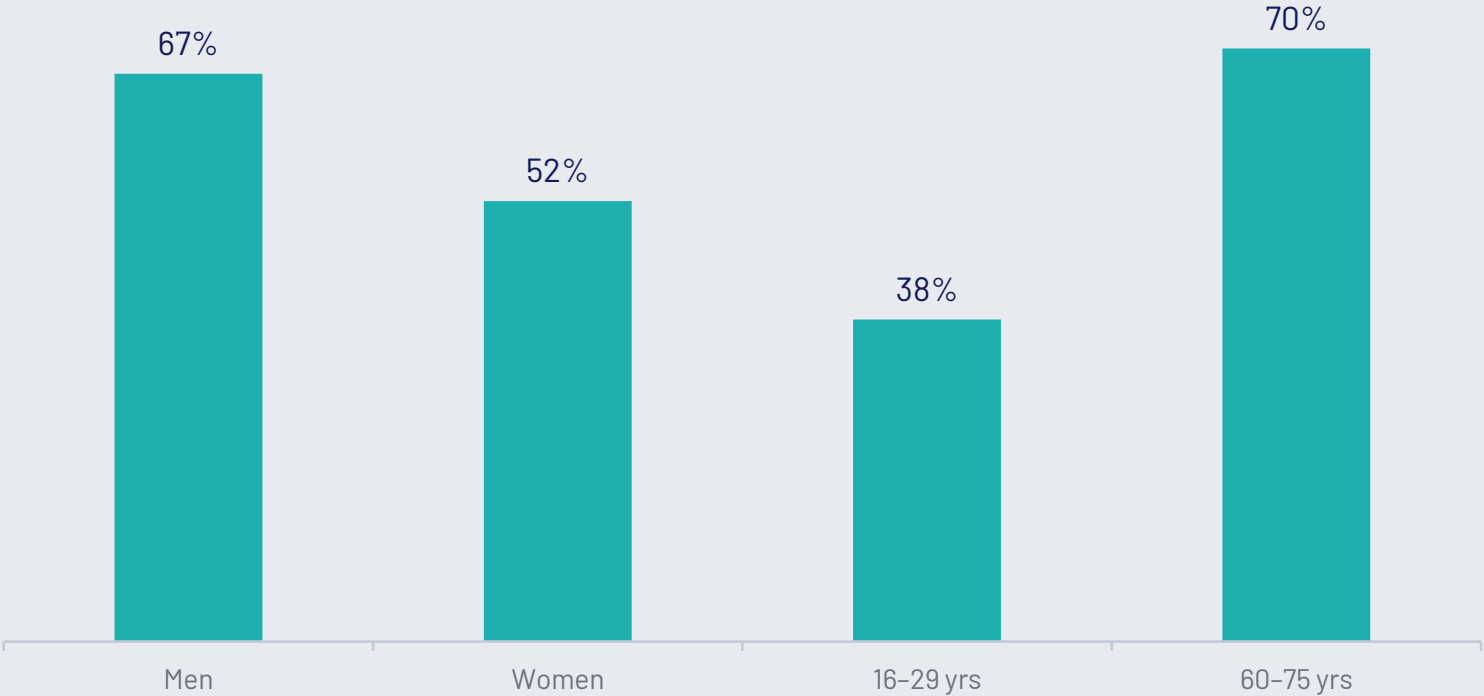
66%

of social media users search these platforms daily for information that matters to them (up from 58%)

“How often do you use social networks to find information that is important to you?”

Base: Those with a social media account (80%)

Follows the news daily (%)

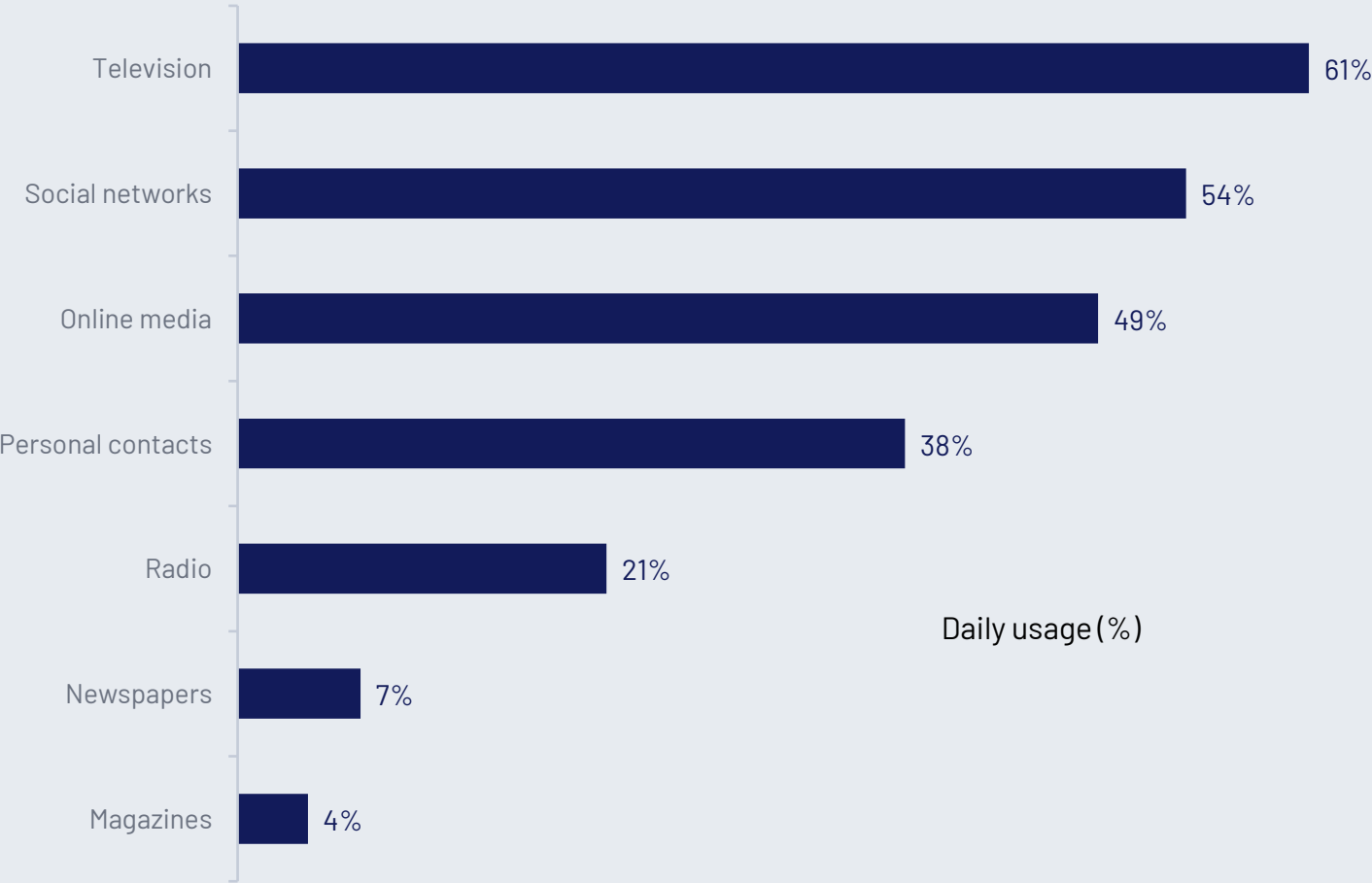


“How often do you seek out news about current events in Montenegro or the world?”

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

HOW CITIZENS GET INFORMED

TV still leads, but social media is close behind



"How often do you use the following sources to get news about current events in the country and the world?"

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

Print keeps declining since 2023

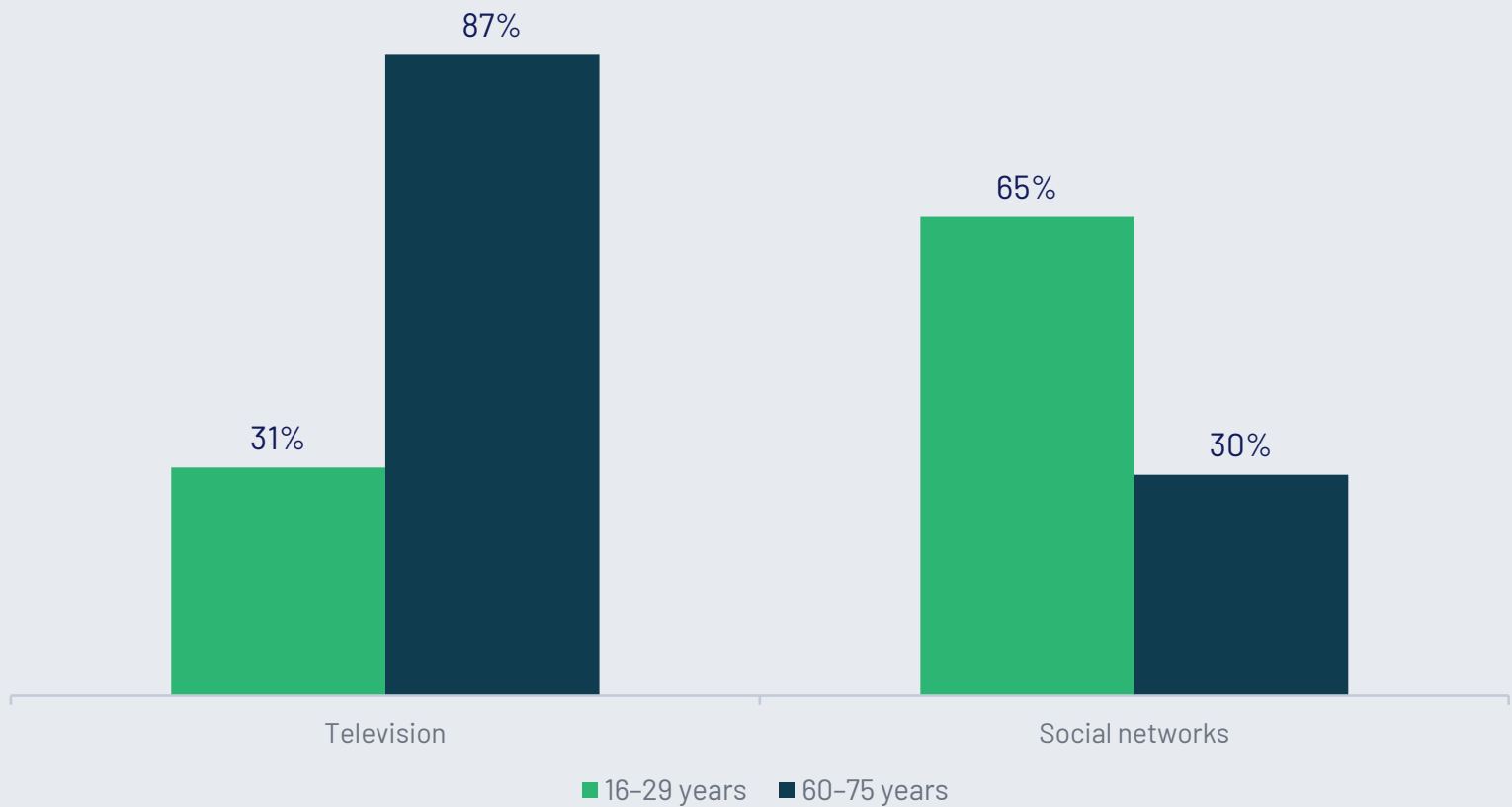
Daily newspapers: 10% → 7%
Magazines: 5% → 4%

Social media use grows

Fewer citizens say they never use it for news – down from 25% to 20%.



A generational divide: the young pick social media, older citizens stay with TV



Two different audiences

Young adults (16-29) watch TV daily half as often as the national average, while seniors (60-75) rely on social media as a news source far less often.

"How often do you use the following sources to get news, by age (% Daily)"

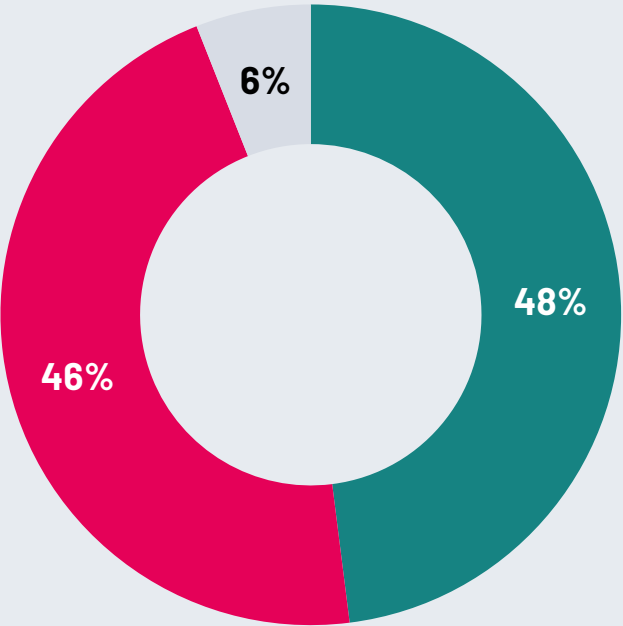
Base: Total target population (n=1,013)



TRUST IN MEDIA

Whom citizens believe when it comes to the news

Citizens are split – and trust has slipped since 2023



- Mainly + Completely trust the media
- Mainly + Completely distrust the media
- Don't know / no answer

Complete distrust is rising

Compared to 2023, the share who mostly trust the media fell significantly, from 48% to 44%, while complete distrust grew significantly, from 12% to 16%.

21% vs 11%

completely distrust media: men vs. women

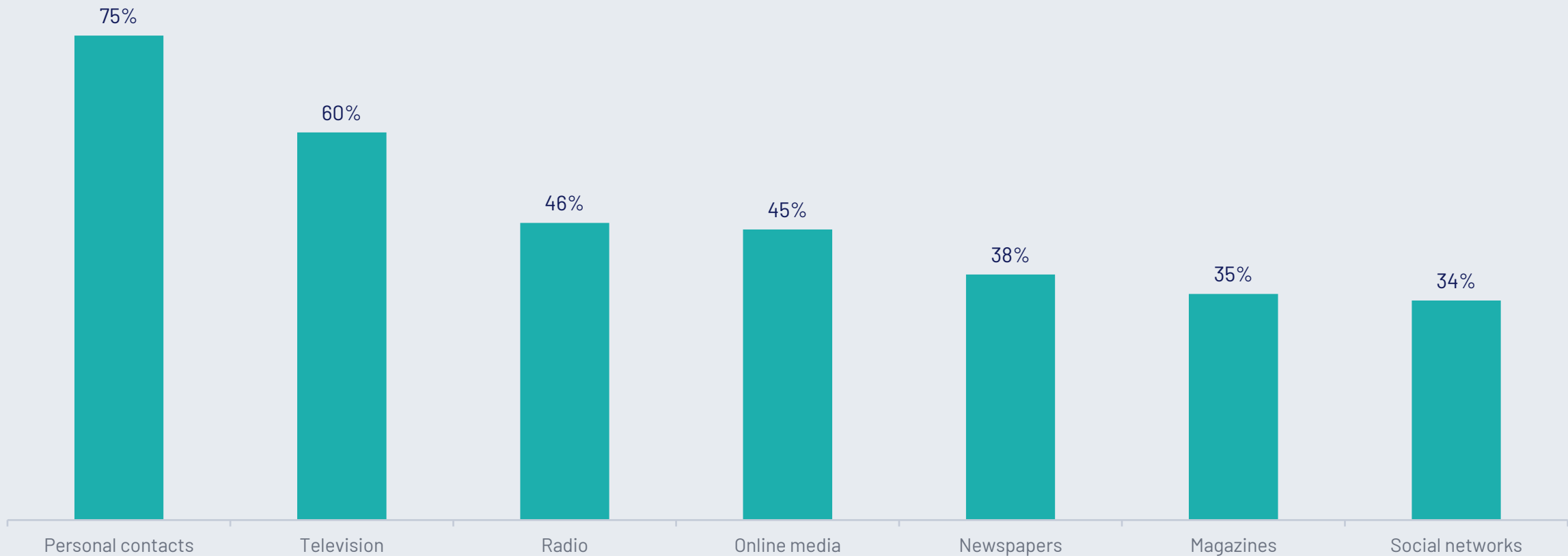
54% → 48%

trust the media, 2023 vs. 2026

“In general, how much trust do you have in the media – newspapers, TV, radio or online sources – when it comes to reporting news fully, accurately and fairly?”

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

Personal contacts are trusted most – social networks the least

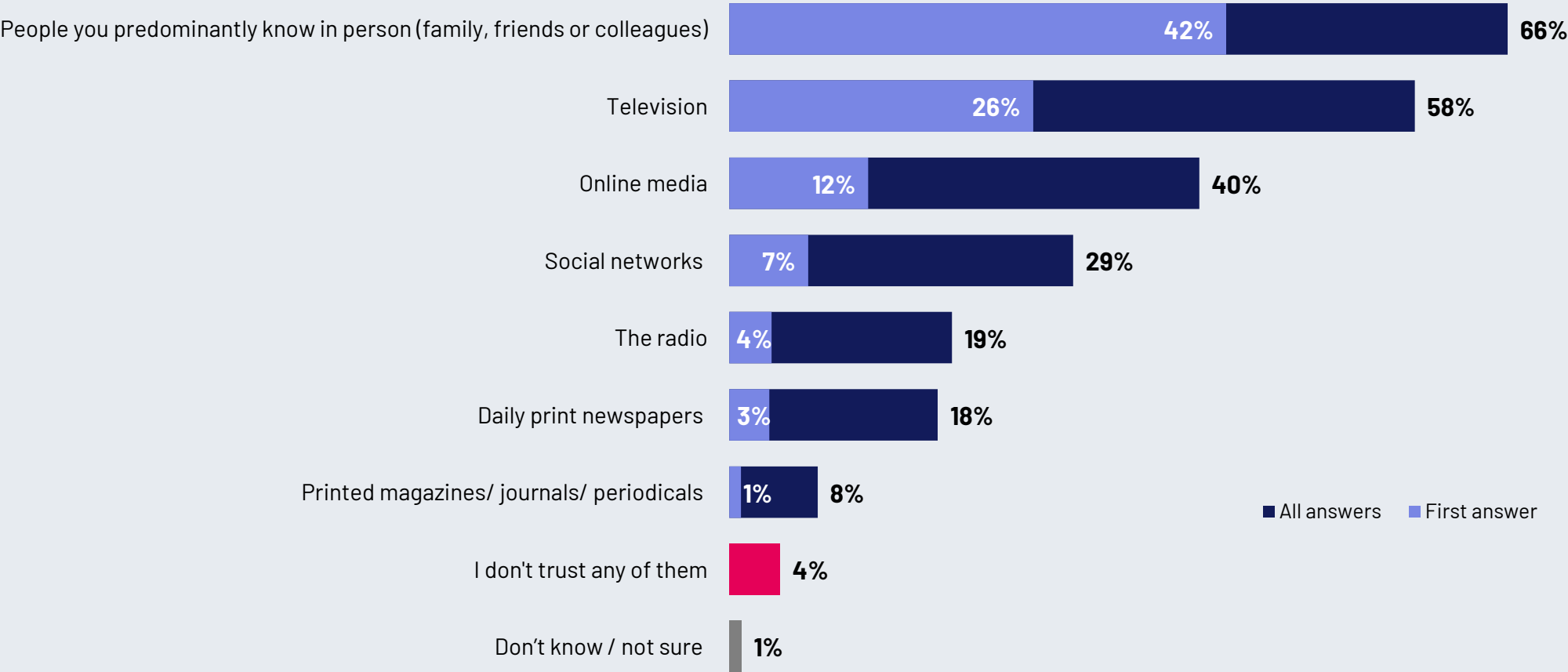


"To what extent do you trust each of these as a reliable source of news and information? (rated 1-4; share answering 3-4, "mostly/completely trust")"

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)



When ranking their top three, citizens put personal contacts first



"Now please choose the three sources you trust the most and rank them starting with the one you trust the most when it comes to news and information."

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)



UNDERSTANDING MEDIA AND ITS INFLUENCE

How citizens see the role and power of the media

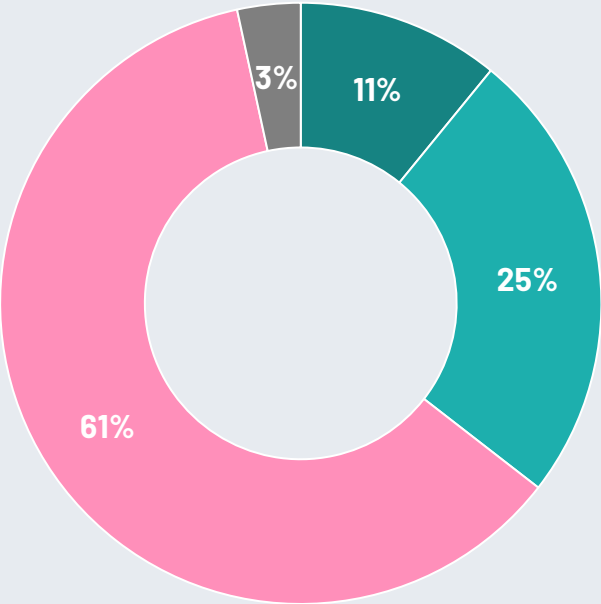


Most citizens still see media as a powerful force shaping opinion

61%

believe media has a significant influence on how people think

That share fell from 70% in 2023 – citizens now take a somewhat more moderate view of media's power.

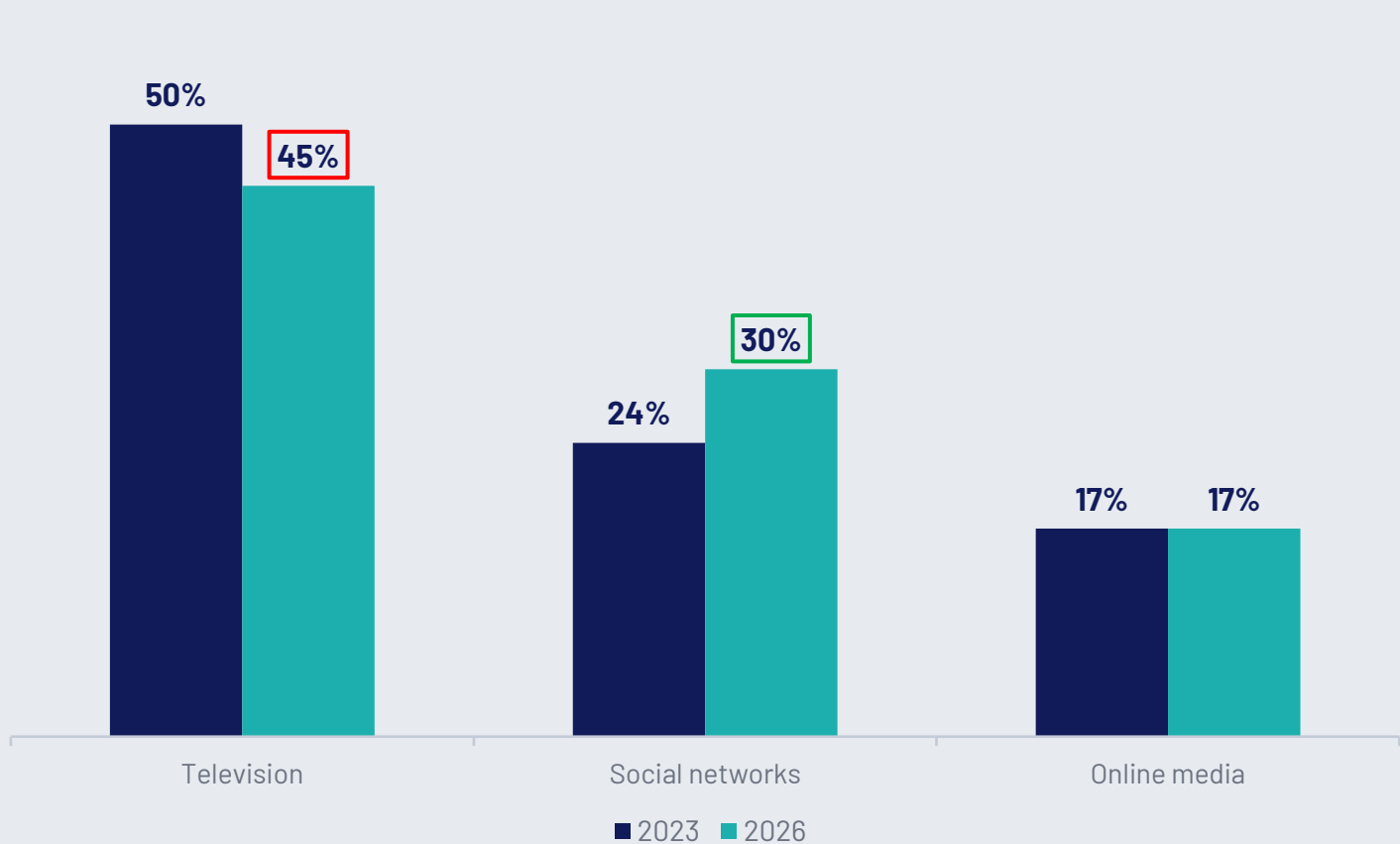


- Little/no influence
- Some influence
- Significant influence
- Don't know / Not sure

"Which position is closest to yours when it comes to media influence on public opinion in Montenegro?"

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

TV is still seen as most influential, but the gap with social media is narrowing



Young see social media, older see TV

16–29 yrs: 46% name social media as most influential, just 32% name TV.

30–44 yrs: 38% name TV as most influential, 28% name social media, 24% name online media – the only group where online media rivals TV and social as a major influencer

60–75 yrs: 62% name TV, only 21% name social media.

“When you think about the media, which one do you think has the most influence on citizens in Montenegro?”

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

- Statistically significantly lower than 2023
- Statistically significantly higher than 2023



UNDERSTANDING MEDIA

Citizens overwhelmingly see strong political polarization in media

81%

of citizens agree there is strong polarization between media controlled by different political structures – nearly half agree strongly.

This view has remained unchanged since 2023 – one of the very few findings on which almost the entire population agrees, regardless of age or education.

"To what extent do you agree: there is strong polarization between media controlled by different political structures in Montenegro?"

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

A common misconception: many think Google shows everyone the same results

59%

wrongly believe Google gives everyone identical search results

51%

correctly recognize that social networks are funded through advertising

59%

support a free, uncensored internet — 37% disagree

Why this matters

Not understanding personalized algorithms means citizens don't recognize how search, feeds and content recommendations shape what they see — leaving them more exposed to "filter bubbles" and targeted disinformation.

"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Google search results; social media financing; internet freedom)"

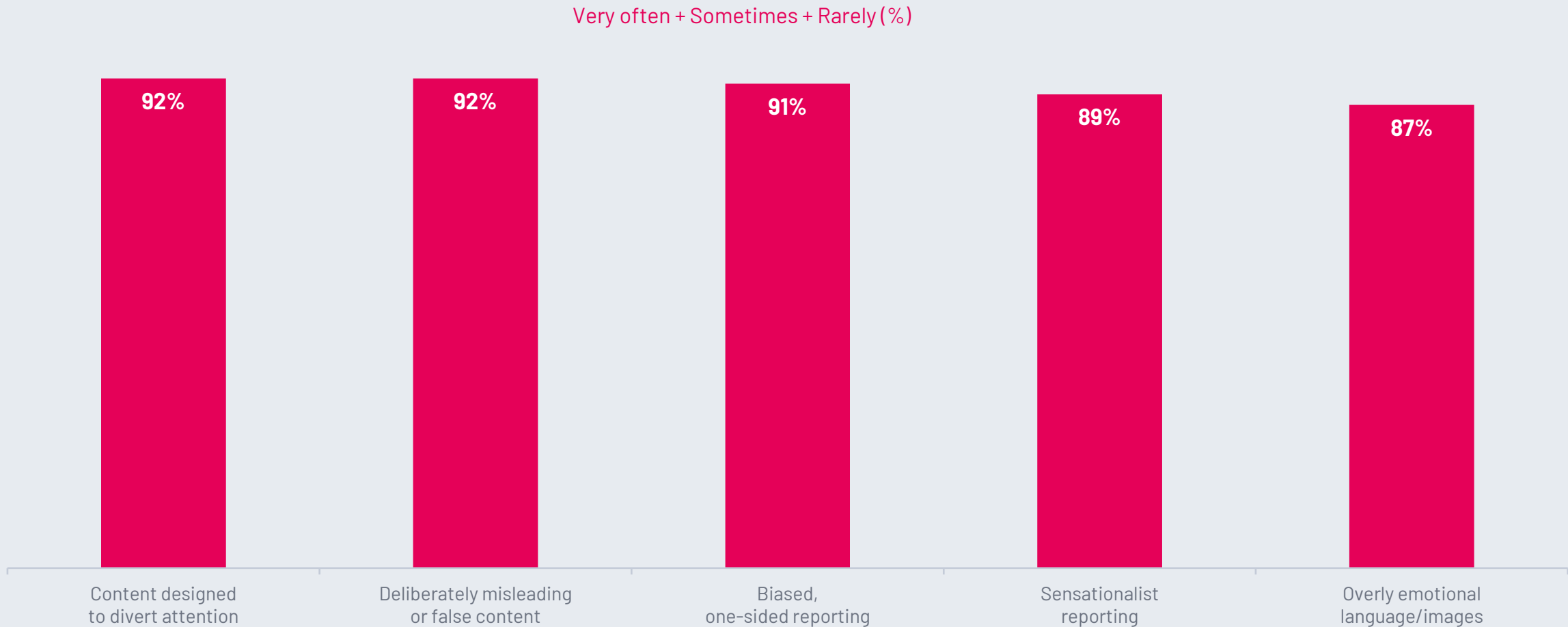
Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

RESILIENCE TO DISINFORMATION

How exposed citizens are to false content, and
how ready they are to spot it



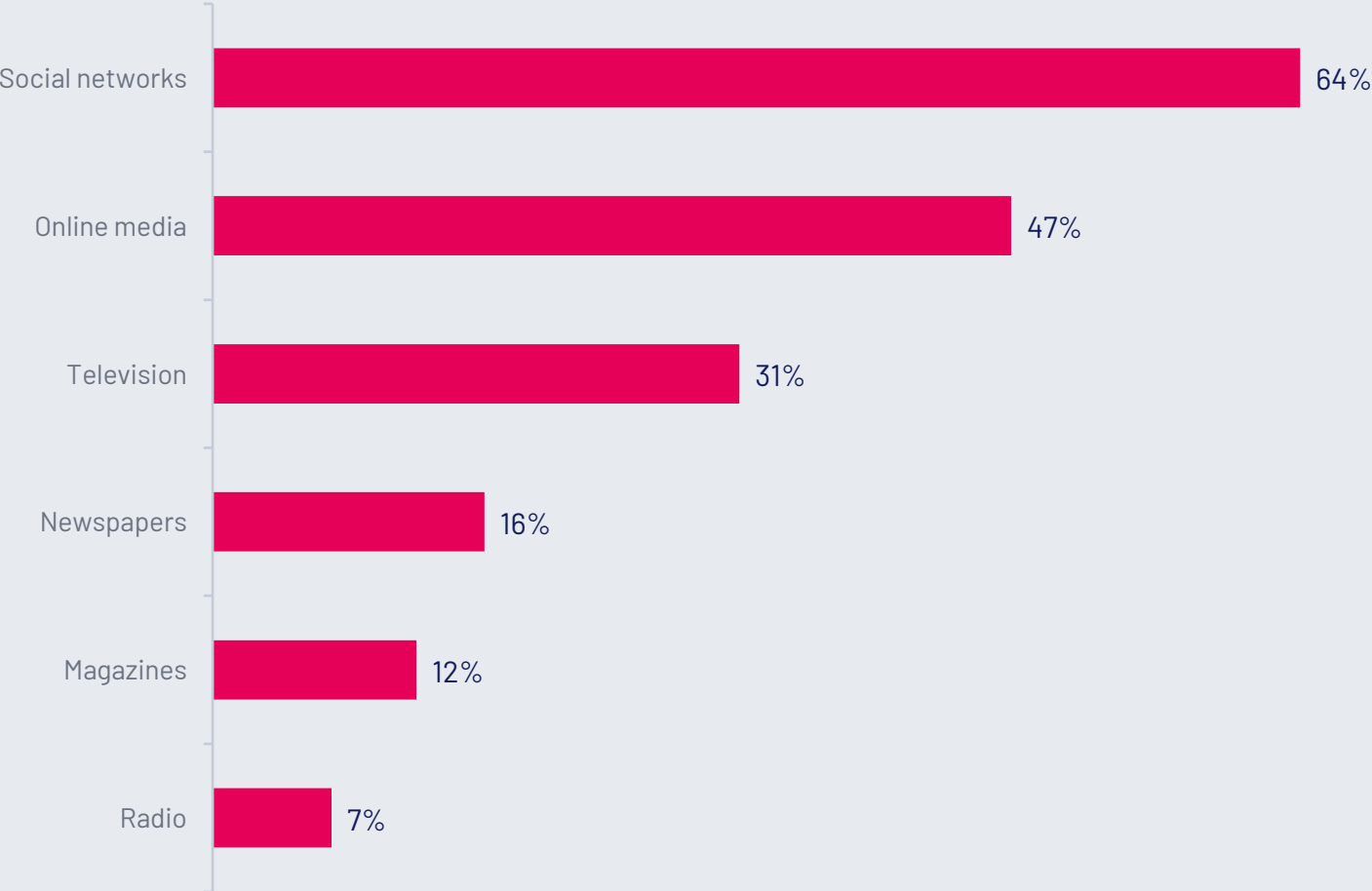
Almost everyone encounters misleading or biased content at least sometimes



"How often do you encounter news stories or articles that...?"

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

Social media is the main breeding ground for fake news



58% → 64%

share who say social media is where they usually see fake news, up since 2023.

Instagram, Facebook and TikTok are mentioned the most – focus groups described TikTok as a frequent source of dubious content among younger users.

“Where do you usually come across news you think is deliberately misleading or false? (multiple answers)”

Base: Those who at least rarely encounter such content (92% of target population)

More citizens later realize they believed something false



"It happens that people believe information later shown to be false – how often does this happen to you?"

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

63%

sometimes or very often believe information that later turns out to be false

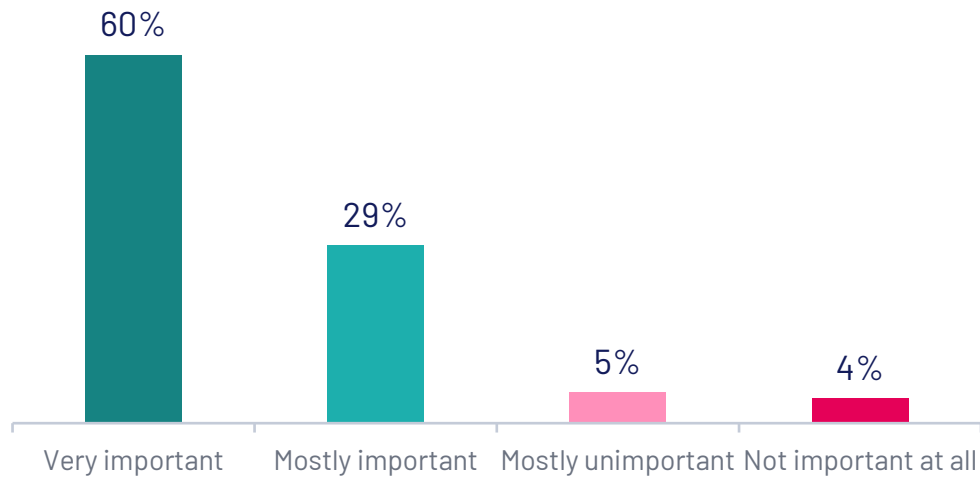
69% vs 57%

believe false information sometimes or often: **those who distrust media vs. those who trust it**



Citizens value diverse sources in principle – fewer actually seek them out

How important is access to a variety of news sources?

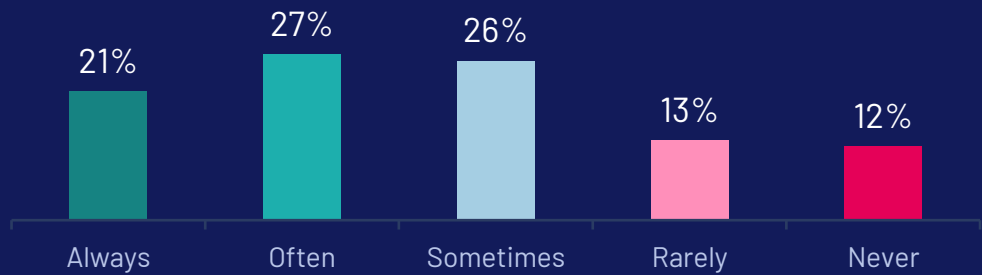


89% consider it important to have access to a variety of news sources

"How important do you think it is for citizens to have access to a variety of sources of news?"

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

But how often do they actually seek out other sources to verify?



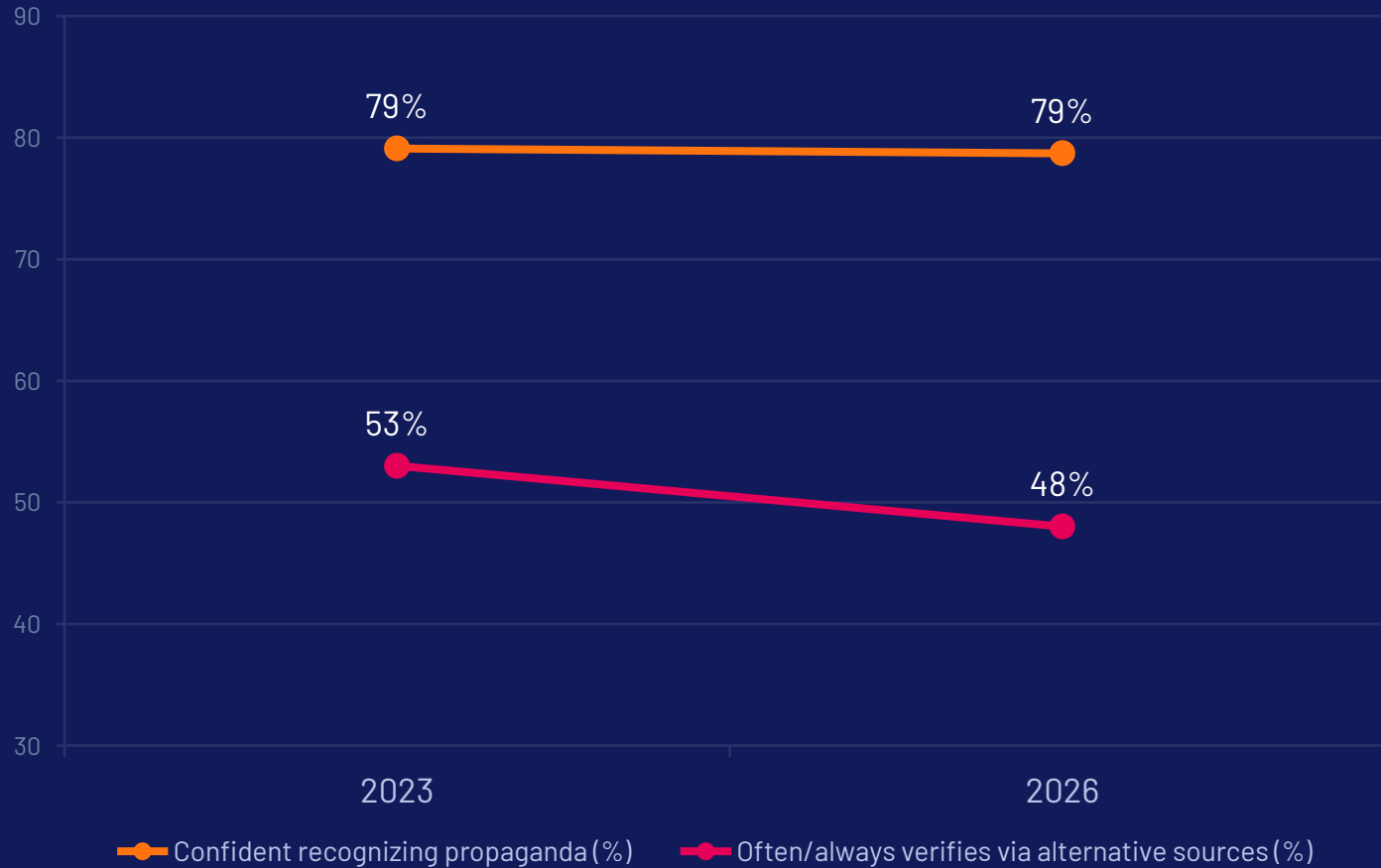
48% often or always verify via alternative sources – down from 53% in 2023

"How often do you seek out alternative sources of information to compare and verify what you have read/heard/seen in the media?"

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

THE CENTRAL PARADOX OF THIS RESEARCH

Confidence stays high – verification keeps slipping



"How confident are you recognizing propaganda and bias? / How often do you seek alternative sources to verify what you read?"

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

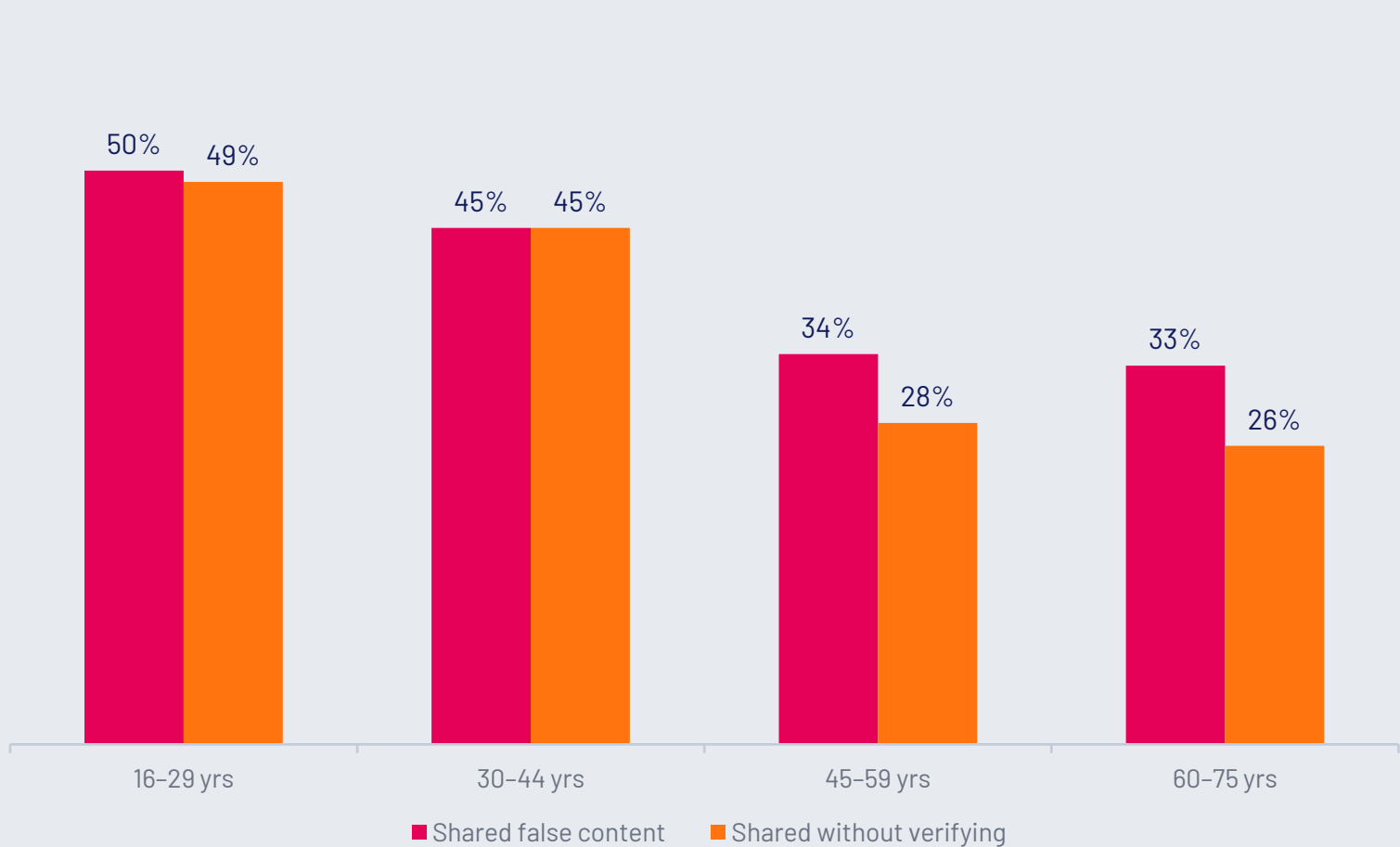
Why this matters

Confidence in spotting propaganda has stayed high and unchanged – but the habit of actually checking a second source has weakened. That gap between how safe people feel and how carefully they verify is where disinformation finds room to spread.

40%

of citizens have already shared content that later turned out to be false or misleading.

Sharing without checking is most common among younger citizens



40% have shared false content

37% shared without verifying

28% shared without reading it fully

Focus group participants noted that private channels like Viber and WhatsApp help unverified stories spread within family and friend circles, often shared before being checked.

"Have you ever shared a news story that turned out to be false / that you shared without verifying its accuracy?"

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

Citizens see fake news as a serious threat to democracy

51%

correctly define fake news as content intentionally designed to mislead and harm

65%

say fake news is widespread and a serious threat to democracy

32% vs 17%

see fake news as merely annoying, not serious: 16-29 yrs vs. 60-75 yrs

Education drives the biggest gap in understanding

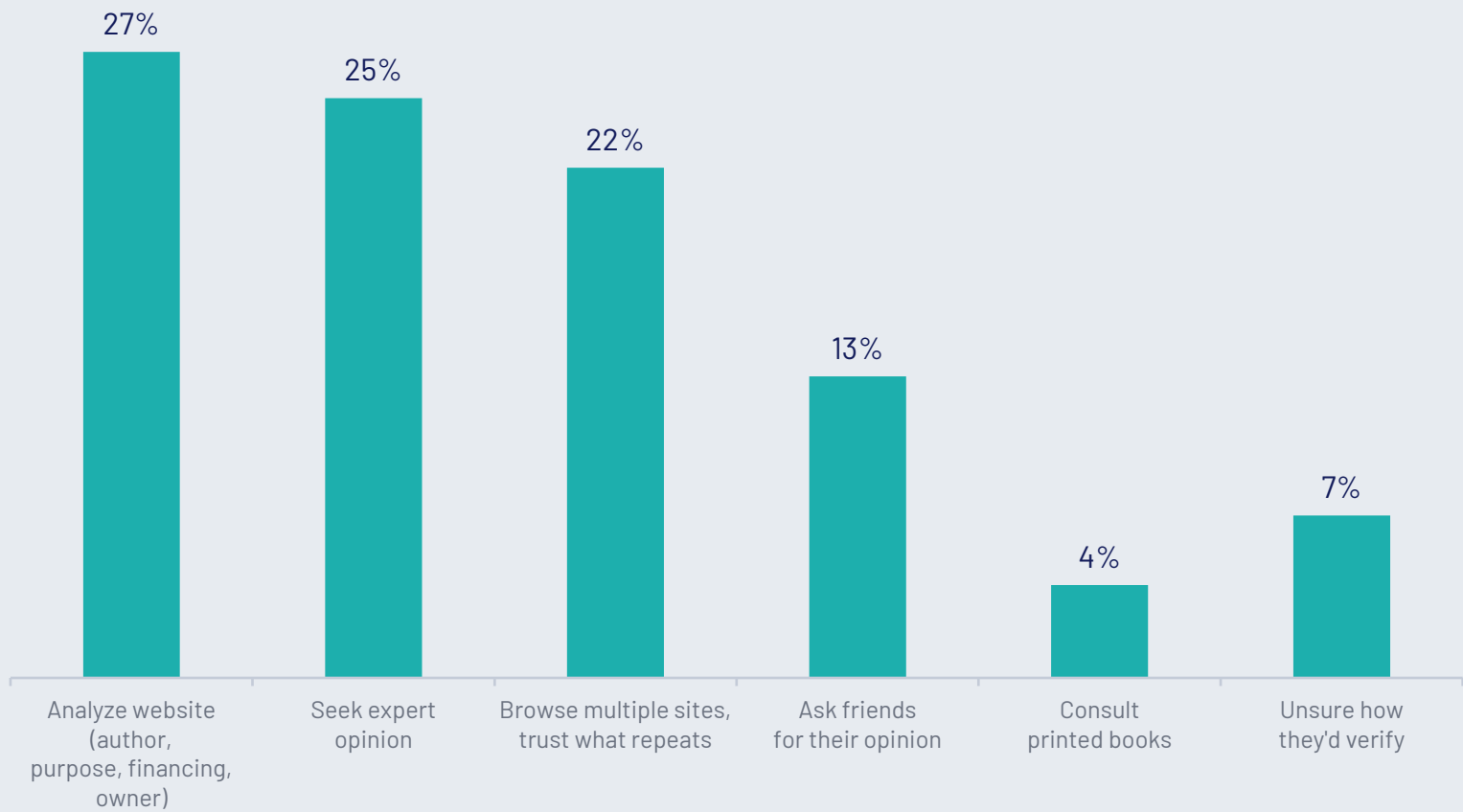
Only 32% of citizens with elementary education correctly define fake news, compared with 62% of those with higher education – a 30-point gap.

“What do you think is “fake news”? / How serious a problem is fake news in Montenegro currently?”

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)



How citizens actually check whether information is reliable



"Imagine that you are browsing the Internet and come across different information about something that interests you. Which of the following would you use to check which one is reliable/correct?"

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

Age and education shape the method

16–29 yrs

29% browse multiple sites and trust what repeats

30–44 yrs

34% analyze website characteristics

60–75 yrs

22% ask friends; only 20% analyze the website itself and 13% browse multiple sites

Higher education

36% analyze website authorship/financing

Elementary education

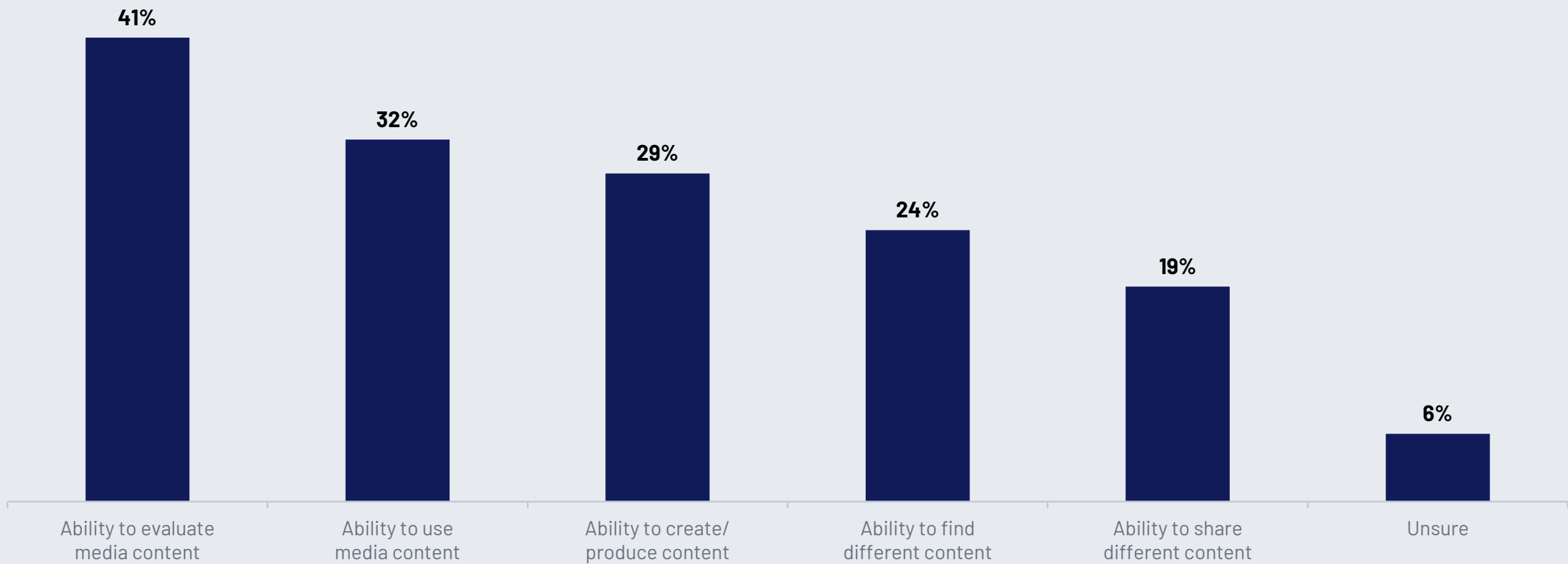
22% ask friends for their opinion



ATTITUDES TOWARDS MEDIA LITERACY

What citizens think about media education, and
who is interested

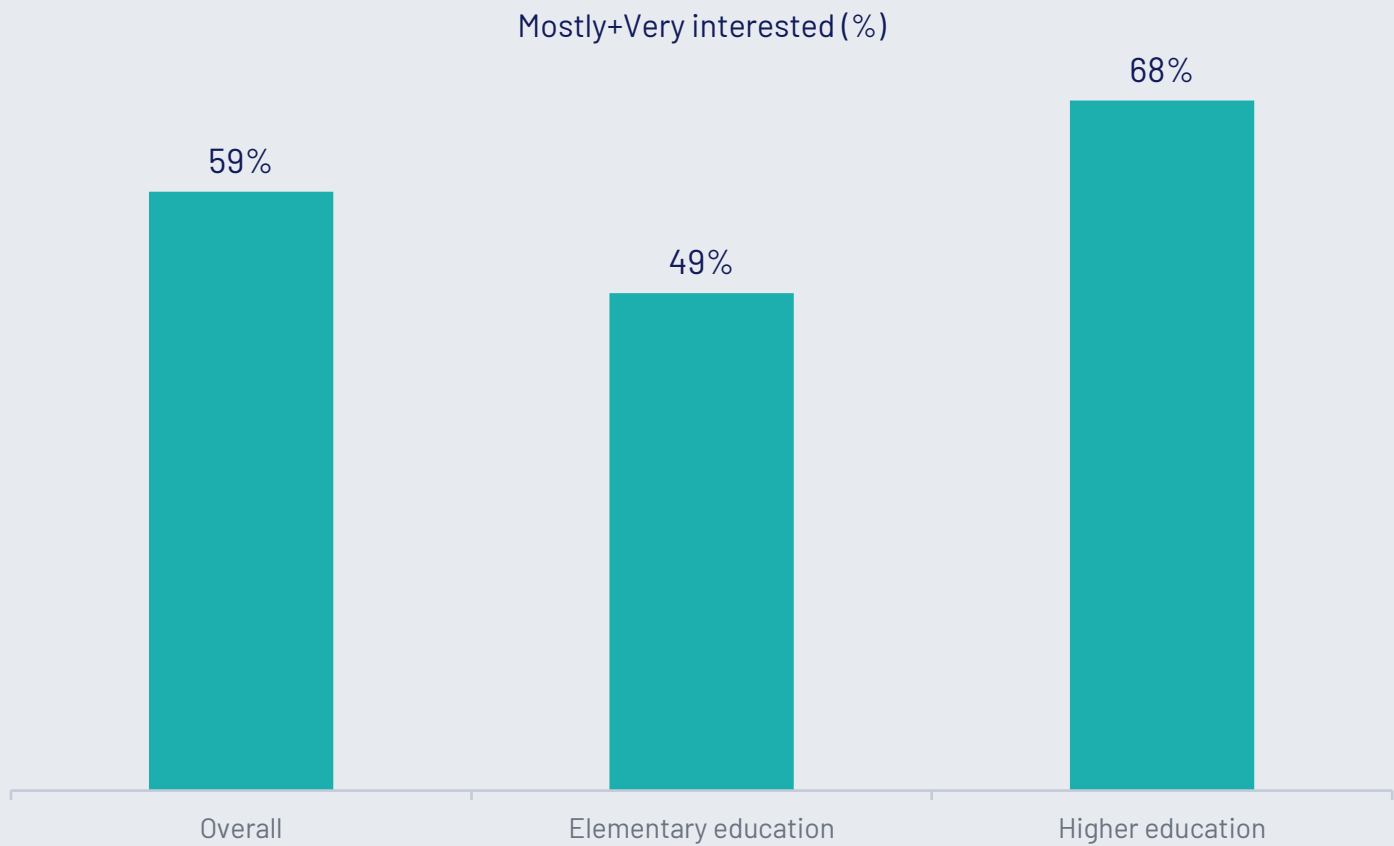
What citizens think media literacy actually means



"What is media literacy in your opinion? (multiple answers)"

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

3 in 5 citizens are interested in the topic – education makes the difference



"How interested are you personally in the topic of media literacy?"

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

Main reasons for lack of interest

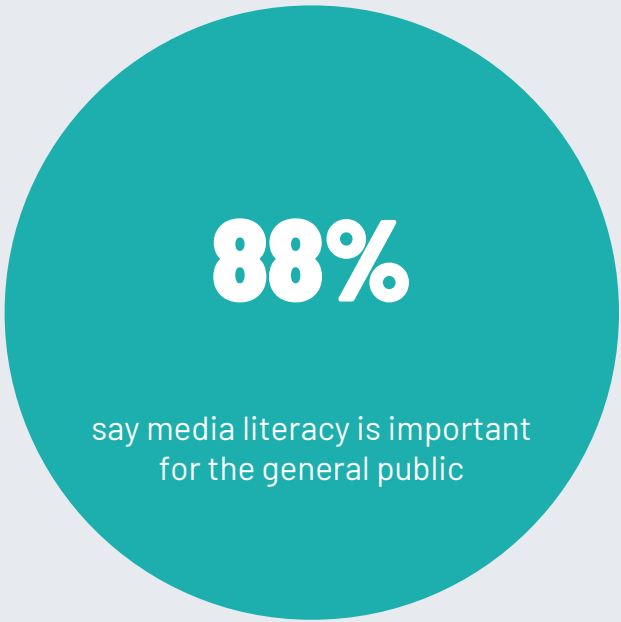
- Lack of time / other priorities 46%
- Doesn't see everyday relevance 32%
- Not interested in politics 22%
- Feels it wouldn't change anything 21%
- Too much information / news 20%

"Main reasons for not being interested in media literacy"

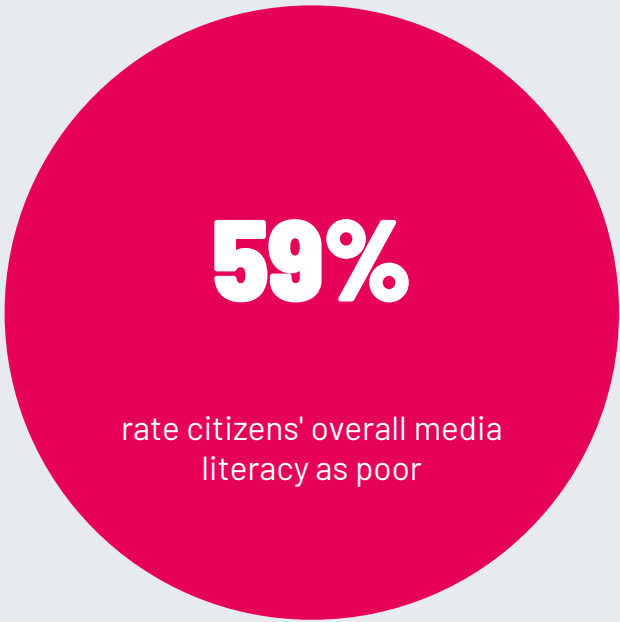
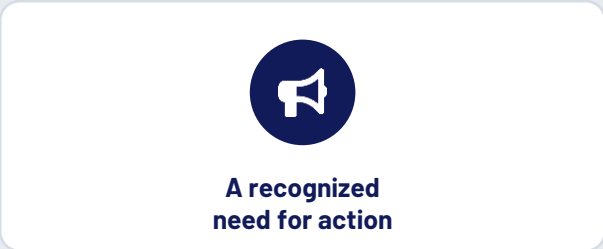
Base: Those not interested in media literacy (38% of target population)



Nearly everyone says it matters – few think citizens are actually good at it



Down from 92% in 2023

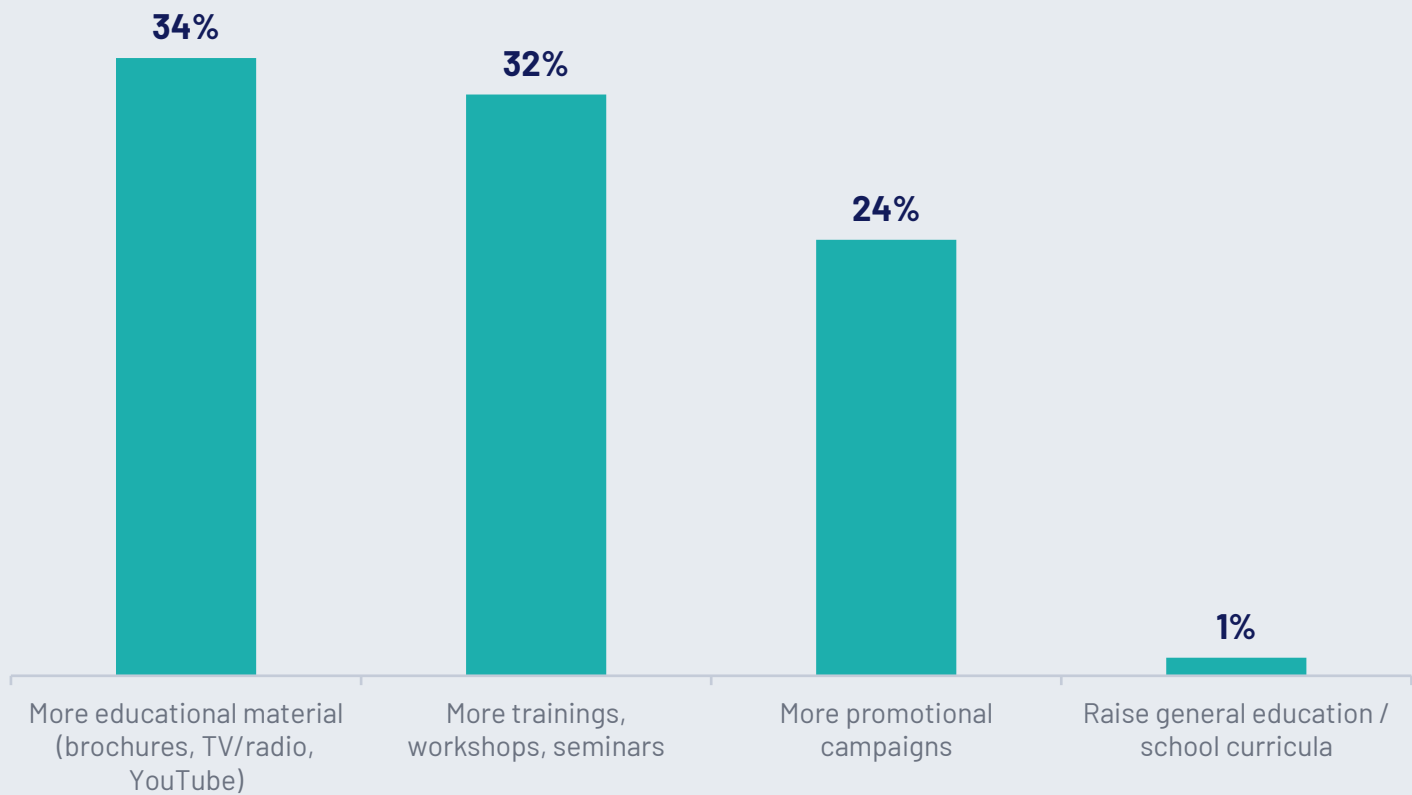


University-educated citizens are most critical: 75% rate it poor

"How important is media literacy for the general public? / How would you rate citizens' overall media literacy?"

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

What citizens say would actually help



83%

agree strengthening media literacy is the best way to fight fake news

85%

support teaching media literacy skills in schools

Educational material rose from 29% to 34% since 2023 – everything else stayed stable.

“What do you think is the most important thing to do to improve media literacy of citizens in Montenegro?”
Base: Those who rated the media literacy of citizens of Montenegro as very poor, mostly poor to mostly good (90% of the target population)



MEDIA LITERACY INDEX

A composite measure of citizens' knowledge, self-assessment and habits



How the index was built: 8 components, 0–25 points

Each citizen's score sums points earned across index components — knowledge questions score correct answers, self-assessment questions score confidence level, and sharing questions score dichotomous yes/no behavior.

Component	Points (min-max)	Mean 2023	Mean 2026
Seeking alternative sources / fact-checking	0–4	2.45	2.32
Verifying online information (approach used)	0–2	0.87	0.86
Sharing unverified / false news (3 items)	0–1 each	0.61 / 0.72 / 0.67	0.59 / 0.72 / 0.62
Self-assessed confidence (4 skills)	0–2 each	1.02 / 1.09 / 0.94 / 1.01	1.04 / 1.11 / 0.93 / 0.96
Understanding the internet (2 items)	0–1 each	0.32 / 0.50	0.30 / 0.51
Understanding fake news	0–1	0.49	0.51
Understanding media literacy	0–5	1.58	1.44
Total	0–25	12.21	12.16

The overall score holds steady – on a scale of 0 to 25

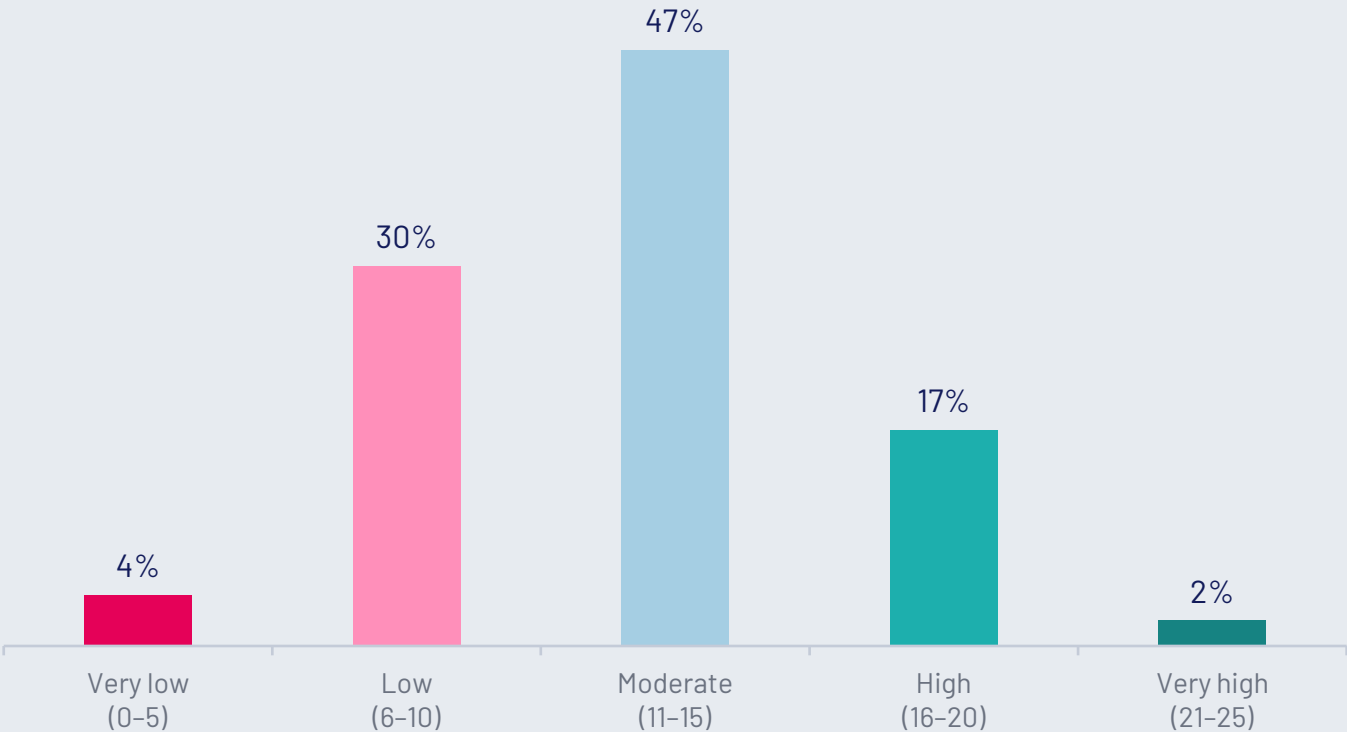
12.16

out of 25 points possible (2026)

2023: 12.21 → 2026: 12.16

Nearly unchanged overall – but the index's individual components are moving in opposite directions.

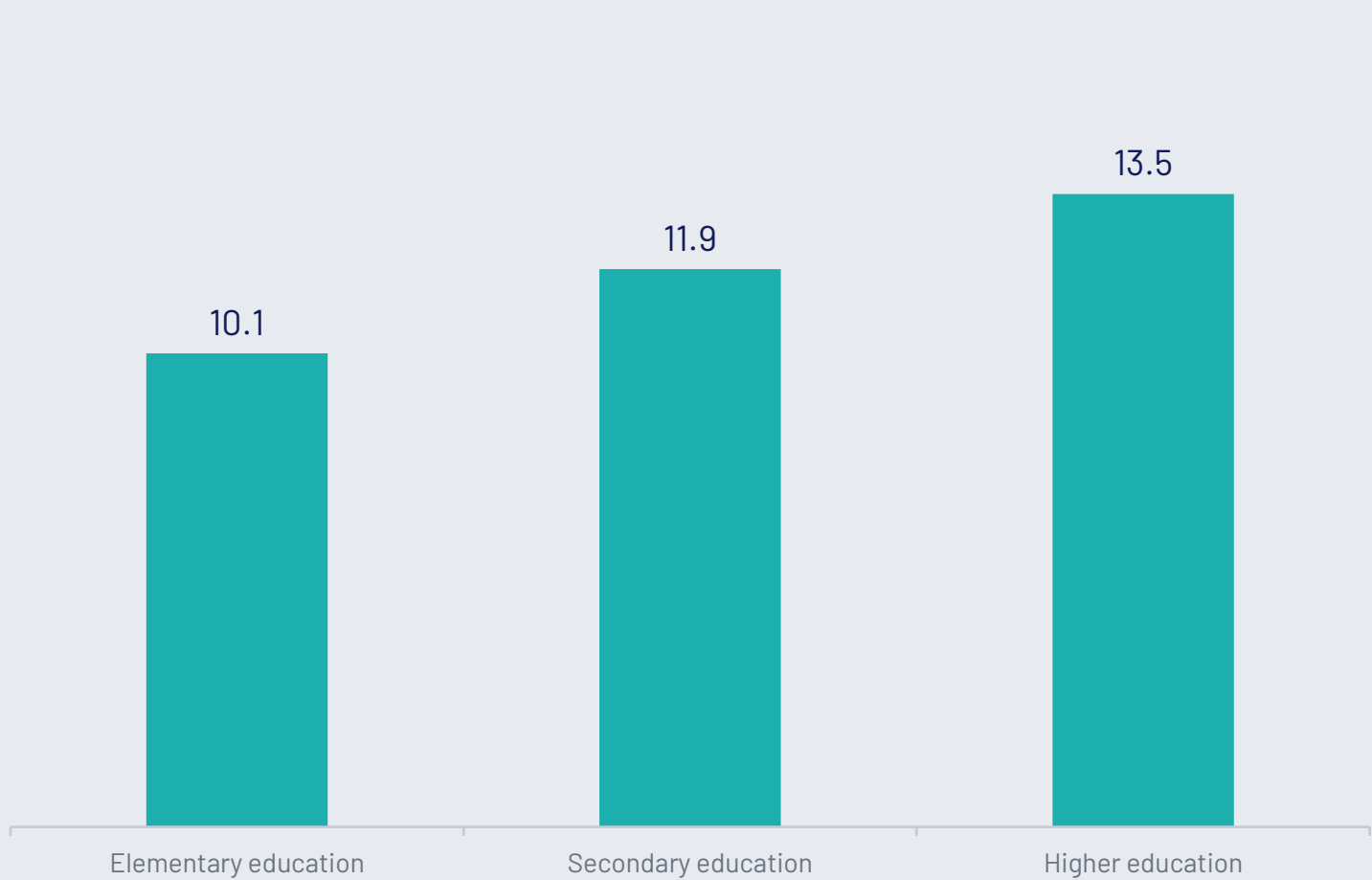
Distribution of citizens' scores



"Media Literacy Index – composite score built from verification habits, sharing behavior, self-assessed skills and understanding of media/fake news"

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

Education is the strongest single driver of media literacy



“Average Media Literacy Index score, by education level”

Base: Total target population (n=1,013)

3.4 points

gap between the highest and lowest educated groups –
the largest gap in the study

Age and social media use have a much weaker effect –
differences there are under one point.

What citizens told us in their own words

Platform habits are generational

Instagram is a morning headline check, YouTube plays in the background during chores, Viber/WhatsApp coordinate family life, Facebook stays important for 30+, and TikTok is youth-dominated but growing among adults.

Trust in TV is eroding, even among loyal viewers

National channels are widely seen as politically biased. Even older citizens who keep dedicated news-watching habits describe growing skepticism toward what they see.

Verification is a learned habit, not a given

Comparing multiple portals, checking bylines, and using Google "as a filter" are described as routine mainly by adults in their 30s–40s and parents — not universal practice.

Everyone can name spin — few always act on it

Participants describe "taking everything with a dose of reserve" and treat ALL-CAPS or "shocking" headlines as red flags, yet unverified sharing still happens via private chats.

Media literacy = critical judgment, not a technical skill

Participants defined it as spotting deception, telling sponsored from editorial content, checking authorship, and comparing sources — not as operating a device or app.

Motivation peaks among parents and daily users

Parents and adults in their 30s–40s show the strongest motivation — they use these skills daily and feel responsible for guiding children. Younger participants engage mainly when an issue directly affects them; some older citizens see the topic as less necessary, relying instead on familiar routines.

Based on six online focus group discussions held 10–12 June 2026 (see qualitative methodology). Findings are illustrative of participants' views, not statistically representative.

RECOMMENDATIONS

How to strengthen media literacy and resilience
to disinformation

RECOMMENDATIONS

Practical steps to strengthen media literacy (1/2)

1

Strengthen critical information verification skills

Citizens need support moving beyond surface-level checks — many rely on problematic shortcuts like assuming frequently-repeated content is truthful. Practical workshops and step-by-step guides should teach deeper source analysis: who's behind a publication, cross-referencing credible outlets, consulting experts.

2

Address the overconfidence gap

Confidence in evaluating media is rising while risky behaviors like sharing unverified content continue. Educational programs should confront this disconnect directly — interactive sessions where people test their skills against real misleading content can recalibrate self-assessment.

3

Develop age-appropriate educational approaches

No one-size-fits-all: young adults need concise, dynamic content built for social media; middle-aged adults need practical guidance on protecting children online and navigating politically-colored coverage; older citizens need approachable in-person sessions through familiar community structures.

4

Design actionable public awareness campaigns

Campaigns should open with concrete, relatable examples of misleading content before pivoting to solutions, clearly explain what support is available and how to access it, and produce platform-specific versions — shorter formats for social media, longer formats for traditional channels.

Practical steps to strengthen media literacy (2/2)

5

Integrate media literacy throughout formal education

Rather than a separate subject, media literacy should be a skill that runs through the existing curriculum — helping students question sources and recognize persuasion wherever they show up in class. Teacher training is essential.

6

Build awareness of algorithms and AI manipulation

Most citizens wrongly believe search results are identical for everyone. Citizens need straightforward explanations of how algorithms and personalization work, plus practical strategies for breaking out of filter bubbles — including emerging AI-generated content risks.

7

Support parents as media literacy educators

Parents want to guide their children but often lack concrete tools. Simple conversation starters, age-appropriate explanations of algorithms/advertising, and school-family partnerships with take-home materials can leverage this existing motivation.

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THANK YOU!