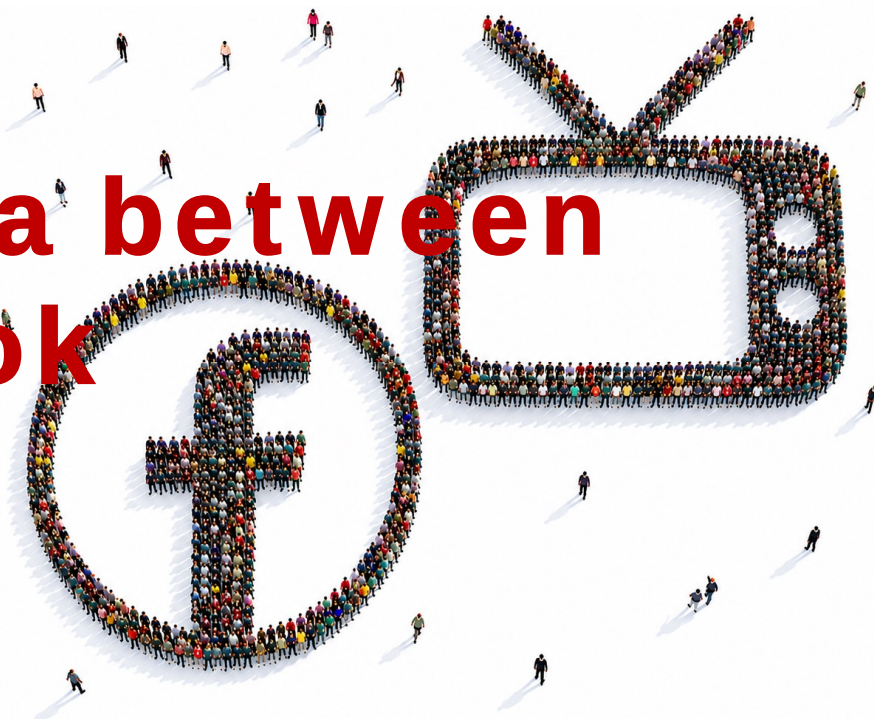


An EFOR-ARP opinion poll provides new data on media consumption and Romanians' trust in social media

Romania between Facebook and TV



Survey commissioned by EFOR as part of the Poll / Int barometer conducted by the *Political Rating Agency (ARP)* between 30 June and 3 July 2026.

1,174 interviews with a representative sample of the population aged 18 and over in Romania.

Online, opt-in panel, using two-phase weighting based on the variables of age, gender, education, residential area, region, internet usage and previous voting behaviour, in accordance with official data from the National Institute of Statistics (INS) and the National Electoral Authority (AEP).

Statistical margin of error: 2.8 %

For the past two years, almost every discussion about the elections in Romania has ended with the same explanation: TikTok. If a candidate appeared out of nowhere, it was TikTok. If an anti-establishment party saw spectacular growth, it was TikTok. If trust in institutions and the traditional media is eroding, once again the algorithms are the prime suspects.

The explanation is convenient but risks obscuring the truly interesting aspect of the phenomenon. The survey carried out for EFOR provides an in-depth analysis of how Romanians stay informed and whom they trust. The first conclusion is that the digital revolution has not produced the effect everyone is talking about: social media has not yet replaced the press, but **the distribution of information**

and **trust in the source of information** have diverged and are following different paths.

News may reach Romanians via Facebook, TikTok or YouTube, but when asked who they trust, **they still turn to TV, radio or news websites** (see question 1 below). Television remains the main source of trusted information, while radio and online media enjoy, on average, a level of credibility comparable to or even higher than that of social media. This contradiction is defining for the contemporary media landscape.

RESULTS IN BRIEF

We asked three questions in the survey and the answers are summarised below. The summary charts are on the next page and the breakdown of responses by socio-demographic categories can be found in the tables in the Appendix.

1. TRUST

- **Television remains** the most trusted **source of information**, including amongst those with higher education, despite the prevailing view that it has lost its relevance. It is possible that some of this television viewing is indirect, via TV content reposted and shared on social media.
- **The sovereignist audience** has the media consumption profile most strongly oriented towards social media and audiovisual formats, and least towards online print media.
- **The undecided and non-voters** are characterised by a distrust of all sources, rather than by a preference for a particular type of media. For them, not believing in

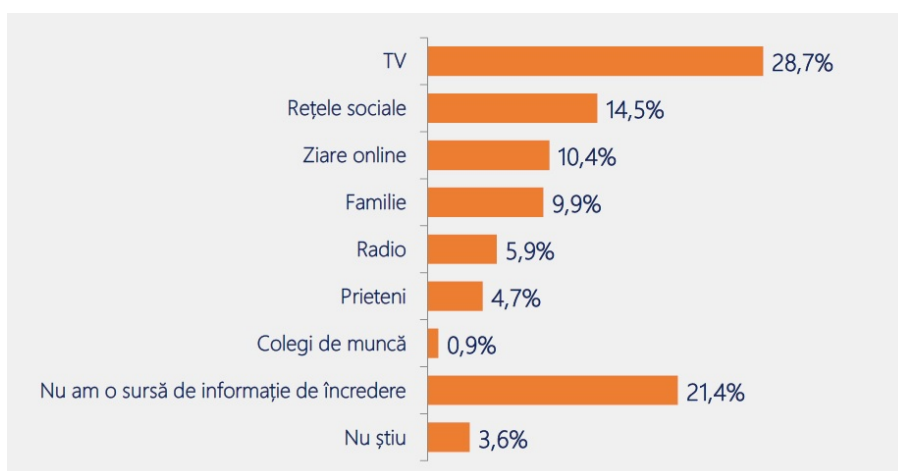
anything seems to be a form of wisdom or realism.

- **Supporters of traditional parties** place greater trust in television and online media; this trust increases with educational attainment. At the other end of the spectrum, AUR supporters place greater trust in social media and family, a pattern also seen among those with an educational attainment below secondary school level. At the same time, a significant proportion of AUR voters state that they have no source of information they trust.
- **Social media and family** are more important as sources of information for young people, particularly those under 39 and those living in rural areas.
- As such, **young people's media consumption profile is closer to that of the sovereignist audience** than to that of traditional media consumers.

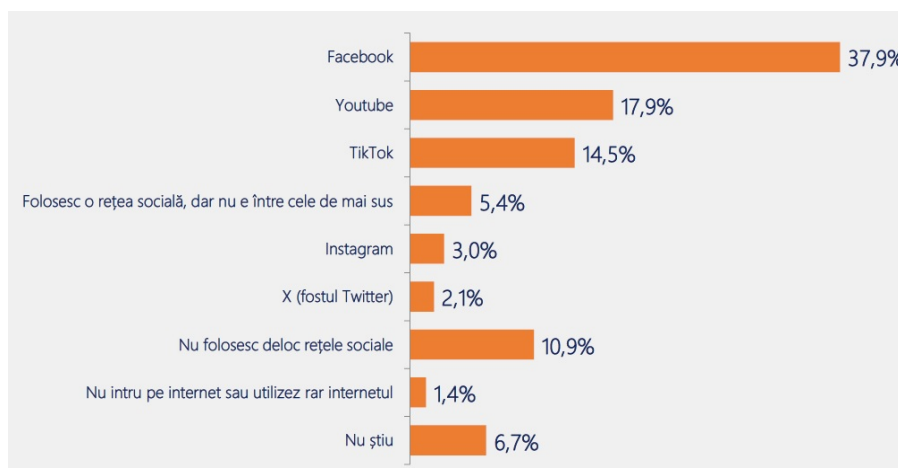
2. WHICH PLATFORMS DOMINATE THE MARKET

- **Facebook** remains more widely used than TikTok among the general public, despite the latter's increased visibility and political influence.
- **TikTok** is used most by AUR voters, people with a low level of education and those living in rural areas. From this perspective too, the profile of young people is similar to that of these categories with pro-sovereignty leanings.
- The similarity between young people's media profile and that of the sovereignist audience may

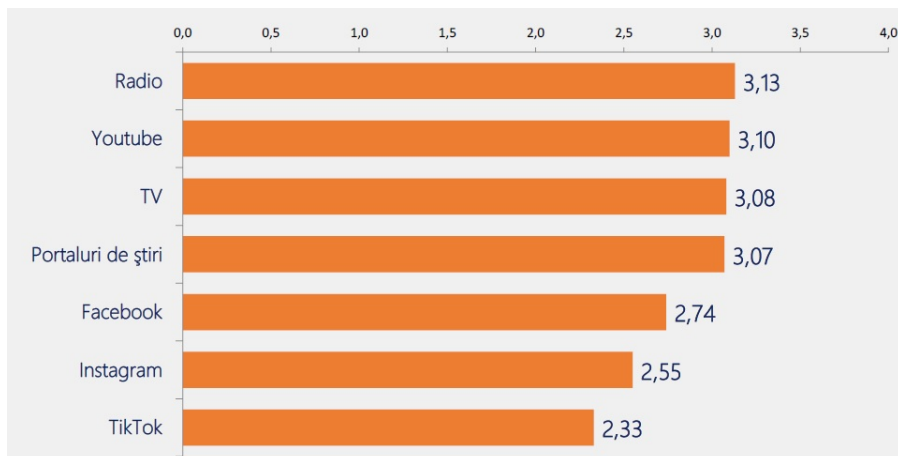
1. Where do you primarily get your day-to-day news from?



2. Which social media platform do you use most often to find out the latest news and updates?



3. On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you trust the information from the following sources? (1 = very little and 5 = very much) Those who do not know or do not answer are excluded



indicate a shared inclination **towards anti-establishment sentiment**, even if the motivations of the two groups differ.

3. TRUST IN SOURCES

- Although social media usage is high, trust remains primarily focused on **traditional sources**, particularly TV and radio. The fact that information is curated by an editorial team and associated with identifiable individuals (familiar voices and faces) matters.
- The sovereignist audience places proportionally greater trust in **TikTok and TV**, a profile similar to that of people with an education below secondary school level. In contrast, people with an education above secondary school level place greater trust in news portals and the radio.
- There is also a difference based on age: young people place greater importance on Instagram and YouTube, while the older audience has a stronger affinity for radio.
- Interestingly, regular **Facebook** users tend to place more trust in TV, radio and news portals than in their preferred platform. This suggests that Facebook is used more as an aggregator, a secondary channel or a space for entertainment and socialising – perhaps with a degree of discernment in selecting information – rather than as an independent source of news.
- The situation is the reverse for the **TikTok** audience: the platform's most consistent users tend to place the greatest trust in TikTok itself, treating it as a source of

information in its own right. Within this group, the trust gap compared to traditional media sources is at its widest.

- **YouTube** has an even stronger effect on user loyalty than TikTok: those who use it as their main news source give it a trust rating of 3.75, the highest figure in the table. Unlike TikTok users, they also have a high level of trust in radio and news websites. YouTube therefore appears to function as an audiovisual extension of the traditional media ecosystem, rather than as a substitute for it, isolated from other sources, as is the case with TikTok.
- **Instagram** in Romania is targeted at the 18–39 age group, and only 3 per cent cite it as their main source of news, but young people rate it at 3.15 for trust, higher than Facebook and TikTok (though lower than YouTube). In other words, **a platform's popularity and the credibility of the information gathered from it are not the same thing**. Furthermore, users are not trapped in a TikTok-style information bubble: they trust radio, TV and news websites, so they are more like YouTube's audience than TikTok's. Like YouTube, Instagram seems to complement a broader range of news sources rather than replace them.

FIVE CLICHÉS ABOUT HOW WE GET OUR NEWS

- **Cliché no. 1: ‘Nobody uses Facebook anymore’**

False. The first surprise from the EFOR-ARP survey is that Facebook continues to comfortably dominate news consumption, even though you hear day in, day out that the platform is on its last legs. In the minds of commentators, Facebook is the platform for parents and grandparents, while TikTok represents the future. The data, however, tells a different story: nearly 38 per cent of Romanians say that Facebook is the platform where they most often find news and updates, more than double the number who cite TikTok. YouTube comes second, ahead of the Chinese platform. As is so often the case, there is a considerable gap between what *the commentators* believe and what the general public actually does.

But the key difference between Facebook and TikTok is not necessarily the size of the audience, but rather the users’ relationship with the platform. Facebook functions like a newsstand in the market square (well, back when there were newspapers): people pass by, see the headlines, perhaps buy a newspaper, but then go to other sources to find out more about what caught their attention. In practice, this means that Facebook users rate TV, radio and news portals highly in terms of trust. TikTok, on the other hand, tends to be more of a final destination in the information-seeking process: its loyal users award the platform itself the highest credibility score of all the sources assessed. **As one might say, Facebook functions primarily as a distribution infrastructure and/or**

a relay to other sources; TikTok is beginning to become a self-sufficient media universe in its own right.

- **Cliché No. 2: ‘It all boils down to a generational divide’**

There is a temptation to explain the shift in media consumption using a convenient simplification: young people are on TikTok, older people watch television, and everyone else falls somewhere in between, in various combinations. Obviously, the age divide is real. People under 30 use TikTok more intensively, while Facebook dominates amongst those over 60. But the more interesting difference is not a biological one, but one related to the information ecosystem.

Young people’s media profile bears a striking resemblance to that of the ‘sovereignist’ electorate, not in terms of political preference, but in terms of how information circulates. Both groups consume proportionally more video content, make less use of the print media, and place greater importance on social media than on traditional media organisations.

This does not mean that TikTok automatically produces AUR voters, but rather that anti-establishment messages and the audience segments most receptive to them tend to inhabit the same information ecosystem.

When politics becomes a competition for attention online, the place where the audience encounters the message becomes the decisive factor in communication.

- **Cliché No. 3: ‘Social media breeds populism’**

A causal link is often assumed between the ‘shallow’ internet, polarisation and populism. The survey shows that people with higher education place greater trust in news websites and the radio, while respondents with less than secondary education use Facebook and TikTok more intensively and place greater trust in these platforms.

In other words, it seems that level of education influences **the format in which we are willing to receive information**. Text requires patience, comparison and verification, whereas short videos are light-hearted and encourage an immediate reaction. Politics over the last decade has understood this difference perfectly: emotion is cheaper to produce than reason, and algorithms distribute it much more quickly and efficiently. This explains the affinity between populism and certain platforms, which has been observed on more than one occasion.

The problem is that this sort of correlation does not necessarily imply causation; more research into the content of the messages is needed to draw a conclusion. From the data we have so far, we do not know for certain whether social media ‘produces populism’; all we can observe is that it provides an ideal environment for it to manifest itself.

- **Cliché No. 4: ‘It’s like nowhere else but here’**

Romania is not as unique as we like to think. *The Reuters Institute* finds the same trends in most developed democracies: social media platforms with predominantly video content are becoming the main gateway to news, but trust in the information found there remains lower than that accorded to established journalistic sources¹.

Romania is also following this trend, albeit with a more vulnerable media landscape. In Germany or the Netherlands, the shift in consumption towards streaming platforms is taking place against the backdrop of a traditional media ecosystem that remains robust. Here, the process is taking place in a media market that is economically fragile, politicised by clientelism, and against a backdrop of chronic institutional mistrust amongst the public. This difference matters because **algorithms cannot replace credible institutions**. In Romania, they often fill the void created by the weak institutional environment.

- **Cliché No. 5: “Disinformation works because people turn to the wrong sources”**

This is not necessarily the case. One of the survey’s most important findings suggests otherwise: approximately **one in five Romanians does not trust any news source**, and among the undecided and non-voters, the proportion is even higher. The discussion about disinformation always starts from the idea of a relationship of trust that is subsequently misused:

<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2026>

¹ *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2026*, Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford

people trust the wrong source, the wrong influencer, or the wrong account. For millions of people, however, the problem seems to be more serious than that: there is almost no relationship of trust left that can be misused, and this creates **an information vacuum**.

And as nature abhors a vacuum – in life, in the information sphere and in politics – the space is filled by whoever gets there first, speaks the loudest or tells the most spectacular story. This leads to a more general conclusion: the internet has not destroyed the press, as was predicted two decades ago. It continues to produce a large proportion of the information circulating in the public sphere. What it has lost, however, is **control over the path to the public**. Algorithms now stand between the newsroom and the citizen, increasingly determining what the consumer ends up seeing and in what order. Yet, as we know, in a democracy, control of the agenda is often even more important than the vote.

Perhaps this is the most important lesson to be learnt from the EFOR survey. We are not yet witnessing the death of the traditional press, as people have feared over the last decade and a half, but rather **a new, unintended division of labour within the information landscape**. Traditional media outlets continue to produce information, but digital platforms control its distribution and thus have a decisive influence on the public agenda.

FACEBOOK AND TIKTOK: NETWORKS WITH DIFFERENT LOGICS

Facebook and TikTok are platforms with audiences of different ages and, at the same time, channels for the circulation of information that are evolving in somewhat divergent ways.

Facebook was built from the outset around pre-existing social connections: friends, family, colleagues, professional groups, local communities, pages and organisations that the user has chosen to follow. The Facebook algorithm selects and organises content, but operates largely on the basis of this authentic social infrastructure. Hence Facebook's continuity as a space for *networked communities*: bubbles with some correspondence to real life, where users share, comment on and validate information amongst themselves.

TikTok operates on a different logic. To see a post, you do not necessarily have to follow the author or belong to their network. The algorithm tests it on successive groups of users and then massively expands the audience if the post generates engagement, in an upward spiral. Whereas on Facebook the network supports the post and spreads it further, on TikTok the post creates its own network for dissemination in a relatively short time.

This difference became politically significant during the 2024 election campaign in Romania (a phenomenon subsequently observed in the Republic of Moldova as well). Candidates with initially limited institutional support were able to very quickly gain the kind of visibility that traditional politics used to build up over years, through

local organisations, funding and access to television. Visibility has, in a sense, become detached from the resources of traditional politics.

Naturally, the algorithm does not treat every message equally. Political communication has quickly adapted to what works natively on the platform: short videos, simplistic explanations, strong emotions, direct appeal, influencer-style aesthetics, and repetition. Instead of the party, the focus is on the individual, as in a perpetual presidential campaign, and the individual no longer conveys a programme, but a story. There is no longer any need for journalistic mediation either, as the impression of a direct conversation with the leader is created.

So TikTok offers four advantages for this new form of political communication.

- a) **Personalisation:** politics centres on the figure who speaks directly to the citizen, obscuring the complex organisation behind the scenes. The personalisation of politics around the leader and the removal of intermediate institutional filters is, in fact, one of the hallmarks of populism.
- b) **Emphasis on emotion:** anger, fear, hope, indignation or admiration have a structural advantage over nuanced explanations when it comes to going viral. Ultimately, it is no longer information as such that is being conveyed, but pure emotional charge.
- c) **Continuous exposure:** users may encounter the same message or variations of it repeatedly without ever having searched for

political information. TikTok's recommendation and ranking algorithms produce this kind of effect.

- d) Finally, and very importantly, **there is a lack of transparency.** Researchers, electoral authorities and regulators have limited access to the data needed to trace the path of content and understand the mechanisms through which certain messages go viral, reaching huge audiences.

Hence the difference in focus between the two platforms: **Facebook is good at organising and mobilising communities; TikTok is excellent at rapidly generating visibility and emotion, as well as penetrating new bubbles.** Sometimes, TikTok can quickly build audiences from scratch.

The lesson to be learnt from the 2024 elections is therefore not that 'the elections were won on TikTok', but a more nuanced one: in an open ecosystem, where engagement itself becomes the main amplifier, **going viral can, for a time, take the place of organisation.** A political figure no longer necessarily has to build a political machine first and then gain visibility. Under certain conditions, they can gain visibility first and then build their political organisation around it. There are examples of parties in Romania, Moldova and the West that have emerged in exactly this way in recent years.

YOUTUBE, THE POLL'S UNEXPECTED SURPRISE

YouTube deserves more attention than it is usually given. It is the second most-used platform for news, ahead of TikTok. More interestingly, with an average trust rating of 3.10, it is practically on a par with television (3.08), radio (3.13) and news portals (3.07). In other words, of the major social media platforms, YouTube is the only one that is on a par with traditional media in terms of credibility; Facebook and TikTok lag behind (2.74 and 2.33).

User profiles explain this difference. YouTube is not primarily a platform for young people: its use for news peaks among the 40–59 age group, and there is no rural-urban divide. YouTube is thus less of a generational niche and more of a cross-sectional platform for audiovisual consumption.

A further clue lies in how each platform's audience rates the other sources. Among those who primarily use YouTube for news, trust in the platform rises to 3.75 – the highest value in the entire table – without this being accompanied by a comparable decline in the ratings of traditional sources. On TikTok, the picture is different, as I mentioned: its audience gives it a score of 3.49 and low scores to radio, television and news portals. We therefore have two distinct forms of video consumption: one that overlaps with existing media habits and another that appears to replace them to a large extent.

YouTube thus appears to function as an audiovisual extension of the traditional media ecosystem, while TikTok tends to become an alternative and almost autonomous information ecosystem for its users.

This is probably the key finding of the EFOR-ARP survey: **social media platforms fragment the information landscape in different ways, which has significant implications for how a message goes viral during an election campaign.**

Sorin Ioniță is a policy analyst and president of



7 Semiluna Street, Flat 1, Sector 2,
Bucharest

www.expertforum.ro

APPENDIX

Survey results by category

1. Where do you primarily get your day-to-day information from?

	USR	PSD	PNL	AUR	Nehotărât	Nonvotant
TV	37.9%	39.7%	40.3%	24.6%	27.9%	16.9%
Radio	4.2%	5.0%	7.9%	4.6%	4.7%	11.0%
Rețele sociale	9.5%	7.4%	14.4%	21.8%	14.0%	6.8%
Ziare online	29.5%	14.9%	24.5%	2.1%	4.3%	9.3%
Familie	1.1%	9.9%	3.6%	13.4%	9.6%	10.2%
Prieteni	2.1%	9.9%	2.2%	2.8%	5.3%	9.3%
Colegi de muncă	1.1%		1.4%	1.1%	1.3%	
Nu am o sursă de informație de încredere	14.7%	11.6%	5.8%	25.0%	30.2%	27.1%
Nu știu		1.7%		4.6%	2.7%	9.3%

	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
TV	16.4%	23.6%	29.8%	27.0%	40.9%
Radio	5.5%	4.3%	6.7%	7.4%	5.5%
Rețele sociale	18.0%	26.2%	14.5%	8.4%	7.6%
Ziare online	4.9%	7.7%	13.7%	20.0%	5.8%
Familie	11.5%	11.6%	9.0%	4.7%	12.0%
Prieteni	12.0%	4.7%	2.4%	5.6%	1.7%
Colegi de muncă	1.1%	0.4%	1.2%	1.4%	0.7%
Nu am o sursă de informație de încredere	19.1%	19.7%	21.2%	21.9%	23.7%
Nu știu	11.5%	1.7%	1.6%	3.7%	2.1%

	< liceu	liceu	> liceu	Rural	Urban
TV	21.8%	29.1%	33.7%	25.5%	31.2%
Radio	3.3%	5.7%	8.6%	5.0%	6.5%
Rețele sociale	15.2%	15.6%	11.5%	16.8%	12.8%
Ziare online	7.0%	8.9%	16.8%	8.4%	11.7%
Familie	18.5%	7.6%	7.9%	10.8%	9.3%
Prieteni	7.4%	5.2%	1.4%	6.4%	3.6%
Colegi de muncă	1.2%	0.9%	0.7%	1.0%	0.7%
Nu am o sursă de informație de încredere	18.1%	23.5%	19.0%	22.2%	20.8%
Nu știu	7.4%	3.5%	0.4%	3.8%	3.4%

Which social media platform do you use most often to find out the latest news and updates?

	USR	PSD	PNL	AUR	Nehotărât	Nonvotant
Facebook	36.8%	48.8%	30.7%	35.4%	37.6%	37.3%
TikTok	2.1%	10.6%	5.8%	25.6%	13.2%	14.4%
Instagram	6.3%	2.4%	4.4%	2.5%	4.3%	0.8%
Youtube	23.2%	32.5%	30.7%	11.2%	12.2%	11.0%
X (fostul Twitter)	1.1%	1.6%	4.4%	2.1%	3.0%	
Folosesc o rețea socială, dar nu e între cele de	5.3%	0.8%	12.4%	3.9%	6.3%	1.7%
Nu folosesc deloc rețele sociale	20.0%	3.3%	8.8%	10.5%	10.6%	23.7%
Nu intru pe internet sau utilizez rar internetul				0.7%	4.0%	1.7%
Nu știu	5.3%		2.9%	8.1%	8.9%	9.3%

	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Facebook	15.3%	36.8%	44.3%	35.0%	49.5%
TikTok	33.3%	16.0%	14.5%	7.0%	6.9%
Instagram	5.5%	6.9%	1.2%	2.8%	0.3%
Youtube	14.2%	16.5%	22.4%	24.8%	12.7%
X (fostul Twitter)	1.6%	2.6%	0.4%	0.9%	4.5%
Folosesc o rețea socială, dar nu e între cele de	6.6%	3.5%	2.4%	5.1%	8.9%
Nu folosesc deloc rețele sociale	5.5%	11.7%	11.4%	14.5%	10.7%
Nu intru pe internet sau utilizez rar internetul	3.3%	0.4%	0.8%	0.5%	2.4%
Nu știu	14.8%	5.6%	2.7%	9.3%	4.1%

	< liceu	liceu	> liceu	Rural	Urban
Facebook	42.3%	37.1%	36.1%	34.1%	40.7%
TikTok	19.9%	15.3%	7.9%	18.5%	11.6%
Instagram	0.4%	3.4%	4.6%	2.8%	3.1%
Youtube	11.6%	19.4%	19.6%	17.9%	18.1%
X (fostul Twitter)	2.5%	1.1%	4.3%	3.0%	1.5%
Folosesc o rețea socială, dar nu e între cele de	5.0%	4.4%	8.2%	5.0%	5.6%
Nu folosesc deloc rețele sociale	10.8%	10.9%	11.1%	11.0%	10.8%
Nu intru pe internet sau utilizez rar internetul	0.4%	1.7%	1.8%	1.6%	1.3%
Nu știu	7.1%	6.7%	6.4%	6.0%	7.3%

On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you trust the information from the following sources?

	Facebook	TikTok	Instagram	Youtube	TV	Radio	Portaluri
USR	2.63	1.44	2.32	3.32	3.4	3.44	3.57
PSD	2.97	2.44	2.58	3.43	3.51	3.52	3.2
PNL	2.89	2.13	2.75	3.55	3.52	3.53	3.59
AUR	2.99	2.93	2.82	3.12	3.03	3.03	2.86
Nehotărât	2.55	2.16	2.4	2.87	2.94	2.98	3.01
Nonvotant	2.3	2.17	2.2	2.54	2.63	2.72	2.62
Total	2.74	2.33	2.55	3.1	3.08	3.13	3.07

	Facebook	TikTok	Instagram	Youtube	TV	Radio	Portaluri
sub liceu	2.64	2.74	2.48	2.88	3.06	2.87	2.92
liceu	2.9	2.35	2.65	3.18	3.09	3.16	3.04
peste liceu	2.49	1.96	2.37	3.07	3.08	3.26	3.24
Total	2.74	2.33	2.55	3.1	3.08	3.13	3.07

	Facebook	TikTok	Instagram	Youtube	TV	Radio	Portaluri
18-29 ani	2.97	3.04	3.15	3.45	3.15	3.01	3.13
30-39 ani	2.91	2.5	2.71	3.21	3.08	3.2	3.02
40-49 ani	2.81	2.45	2.42	2.97	3.04	3.02	3.1
50-59 ani	2.46	1.78	2.2	3.02	3.07	3.26	3.09
60+ ani	2.63	2.04	2.37	2.95	3.09	3.13	3.02
Total	2.74	2.33	2.55	3.1	3.08	3.13	3.07

<i>Ce rețea socială folosiți vs Încredere în surse</i>	Facebook	TikTok	Instagram	Youtube	TV	Radio	Portaluri
Facebook	3.13	2.36	2.63	3.02	3.28	3.21	3.17
TikTok	3.07	3.49	3.11	3.32	2.9	2.88	2.77
Instagram	2.81	2.3	3.47	3.27	3.3	3.42	3.26
Youtube	2.61	2.07	2.51	3.75	2.91	3.27	3.16
X (fostul Twitter)	2.64	2.29	2.8	3.16	2.9	3.43	3.1
socială, dar nu e între cele de mai	2.07	1.93	2.07	2.74	3.02	2.89	2.79
deloc rețele	1.61	1.39	1.46	2.42	2.97	2.98	3.08
internet sau	1.61	1.9	2.39	2.6	3.41	3.44	3.17
Nu știu	2.13	1.74	2.18	2.33	2.82	2.9	2.83
Total	2.74	2.33	2.55	3.1	3.08	3.13	3.07