

Perception of Media and Information Literacy among Representatives of Mid–Age and Older Generations: the Case of Latvia

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Abstract: Academic interests on the impact of media on individuals' lives often highlight differences in knowledge across generations. The spread of disinformation and its potential impact on societies has added a new dimension to this process - the need to continuously improve media and information literacy (MIL). Thus, the older generations face greater challenges, as they need to acquire new skills more rapidly and on a larger scale. This article analyses interrelations between encouragement measures (implemented by media policy makers) and media literacy perception of middle-aged and older population in Latvia (aged 55 to 75). The research employs data of two national representative surveys (May 2019, 1017 respondents; August 2019, 1005 respondents) that include data on respondents' perception of MIL and test their media literacy skills. The theoretical background of this paper is supported by literature that discusses age and generations in context of media and technology use (Aroldo, 2014), and the Ideological model of literacy (Street, 1984; 1994). Data shows that a higher proportion of middle-aged and older respondents, compared to other age groups, are not interested in MIL issues and evaluate their MIL competences as rather low, but in the everyday practice their ability to recognize and evaluate information is equivalent to that of other age groups.

Keywords: age, generation, media and information literacy, media politics, Latvia

*La perception de l'éducation aux médias et à l'information parmi les représentants
des générations d'âge moyen et avancé : le cas de la Lettonie*

Résumé : L'intérêt scientifique pour l'impact des médias sur la vie des individus met souvent en évidence les différences de connaissances entre les générations. La propagation des désinformations et leur impact potentiel sur les sociétés ont ajouté une nouvelle dimension à ce processus – la nécessité d'améliorer en permanence l'éducation aux médias et à l'information (*media and information literacy* – MIL). Ainsi, les générations plus âgées sont confrontées à de plus grands défis car

elles doivent acquérir de nouvelles compétences plus rapidement et à plus grande échelle. Cet article analyse les interrelations entre les mesures d'encouragement (mises en œuvre par les décideurs de la politique médiatique) et la perception de l'éducation aux médias de la population d'âge moyen et avancé en Lettonie (âgées de 55 à 75). La recherche utilise les données de deux enquêtes représentatives à l'échelle nationale (mai 2019, 1017 personnes interrogées ; août 2019, 1005 personnes interrogées) qui incluent des données sur la perception des répondants de la MIL et testent leurs compétences en éducation aux médias. Le contexte théorique de cet article est étayé par des recherches qui traitent de l'âge et des générations dans le contexte de l'usage des médias et de la technologie (Aroldo, 2014) et du modèle idéologique de l'alphabétisation (Street, 1984, 1994). Les données montrent qu'une proportion plus élevée des répondants d'âge moyen et avancé, par rapport aux autres groupes d'âge, ne sont pas intéressés par les questions de la MIL et évaluent leurs compétences en MIL comme plutôt faibles. Dans la pratique quotidienne leur capacité à reconnaître et à évaluer les informations équivaut à celle des autres groupes d'âge.

Mots-clés : âge, génération, éducation aux médias et à l'information, politique des médias, Lettonie

Introduction

Negative attitudes and stereotypes about older adults can be observed around the world (Raymer et al., 2017). They are considered less valuable by employers due to lower digital skills, which are essential in the modern work environment. Data on media use show that pre-retirement and older generations are less likely to use digital technologies. Media usage habits and lower digital skills are reasons why older generations are often seen as insufficiently able to adapt to the realities of today's information space, and thus having poorer media literacy (MIL). In the current period, some age gaps are narrowing: all generations use the Internet, mobile phones, and social networking platforms user numbers are growing rapidly, thanks to an increase in middle-aged and older users (Standard Eurobarometer 90, 2018; Barbosa Neves, 2018). However, other age gaps are increasing, as older adults in commercially targeted media systems are no longer considered to be an attractive consumer group for advertisers (Bolin & Skogerbo, 2013).

Does belonging to a certain generation determine the ability to understand the processes of today's communication environment? What are the relationships between age, media use experience and perception of media literacy? How does the use of digital information affect media literacy skills? These questions are the basis of this study, which aims to analyse interrelations between belonging to a particular age group, media use and MIL. This research focuses on two age groups: people of pre-retirement age (55-63) and retirees (64-75). Older adults that belongs to these

groups are subjects of negative stereotypes related to insufficient modern communication technology skills (Raymer et al., 2017).

To interpret the understanding of MIL from the perspective of the state and individuals within the social and political context, the ideological model of literacy is employed in this research. This model, first of all, contests literacy as a neutral and technical skill, describing the formation of literate person as a result of the social, cultural, political, economic impacts of its time (Street, 1994; 2003; 2005; 2006, Livingstone, 2014). Secondly, the aim of developing the model was to change the inclusion of the concept of literacy mainly in the cognitive psychological sense of learning, by adding more situational, critical and social aspects to literacy understanding (Gee, 2015). Within the framework of the ideological model of literacy, literacy is viewed in the context of social relations, cultural traditions and ideological conditions established in the society (Street, 1994; 1997).

The importance of media literacy in older adults is related to the demographic trends in Latvia. The population structure in the country is characterised by population decline due to emigration and negative birth rate, and population ageing. In 2020, 1.9 million people live in Latvia (Central Statistical Bureau, 2020a). At the beginning of 2019, out of 1.9 million people, 15.9% were children under 14, 61.3% were in the working age (15-62), while 22.8% were above the working age. The population groups at the centre of this study (aged 55 – 75), represent a significant part of the population of 25% (489.4 thousand inhabitants).

Multi-generational studies, which analyse the differences between post-Soviet and Western societies and include important social political events over a specific period of time, sort older adults chosen for this study in two main groups. The people aged 55 to 63 has grown up in the Soviet period, also known as the last generation of Soviets (Šūpulis & Zellis, 2019/2020), having spent most of their working life during the formation and development of an independent state of Latvia. A second group of residents aged 64 to 75 belongs to the post-war generation, the majority of whose lives have been spent in the Soviet Union, but from the 1990s its representatives have lived under the conditions of the recovery and formation of Latvia's national independence.

From the point of view of media use, the representatives of these age groups have been described as having started using digital media later and are still less likely to use the Internet and digital services than other age groups (Latvian Facts, 2017, Latvian Facts, 2018; Standard Eurobarometer 90, 2018). The representatives of two generations have experienced a number of technology-driven phases of media development, integrating the transition from analogue to digital media in personal experience. Members of both groups know the activity of censored media in an authoritarian political system and can compare it with freedom of press and functioning of the media in a democratic society.

The concept of MIL (Livingstone, 2004; 2013a; 2014; Leaning, 2017; Vraga, & Tully, 2016; Cappello, 2017) is based on multi-disciplinary approach, it

commonly is defined as the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create messages of variety forms (CML, n.d.; Livingstone, 2014) and may be designated as different literacies (Fleming, 2014). Importance of MIL competences in international documents are seen in relation of rights-based approach that foster the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms (UNESCO, 2013a; UNESCO, 2013b). Media literacy is particularly concerned with freedom of expression, press freedom and media pluralism.

This article analyses MIL perception in the context of media policy, including a definition, which explains that MIL is: *“knowledge and skills needed to work with information sources – to find and analyse information, understand functions of the providers of information, critical evaluation of information, differing between critical and biased information, comparing the news from different sources in order to make one’s own opinion. Media literacy includes also the skills of practical use of media.”* (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016).

MIL in Latvia is characterized as underdeveloped (Freibergs, 2015), MIL activities outside the formal education system mostly have been implemented using ICT company-initiated projects (Rožukalne, Skulte, & Stakle, 2020). In Latvia, at the political level, MIL formally is identified since 2016, when ‘audience media literacy’ was included among the five basic principles of the first media policy. MIL target audiences include education-related groups: children, young people, teachers, university students, librarians. The older adults are not mentioned in the media policy documents, but seniors could be reached by MIL activities addressed to the general public.

The main research questions of this study are as follows:

- 1) how does belonging to a particular age group influence the perception of media literacy, the understanding of media education and the interest in MIL?
- 2) how does the knowledge of MIL determine media usage experience of a particular audience (55 - 63, 64 - 75)?
- 3) how does belonging to a particular age group and media usage habits affect the skills of the MIL tested in the study?

1. Literature Review. Age, Generations and Media Use

In media use analysis dominated by structural studies, the audience age has always been important factor: as Bolin & Skogerbo (2013, p. 4) write, media usage is “age-separated”. A generation, regardless of age, is characterised by a special sense of community and belonging. Thus, age is the movement of an individual through time, but generations are the movement of an individual “with time” (Bolin, 2014, p.114).The category of generations, actively used in sociology since the middle of 20th century, has come to media audiences research relatively recently (Siibak et.al, 2014): in the 90s, highlighting the interest of researchers in audience restructuring

processes arising from the use of communication technologies and accentuate the importance of the cultural concept in defining generations.

Intergenerational media studies use the generational theory of Karl Mannheim (1952/1996) (Siibak et al., 2014), defining generations in the context of social and historical change. The key to Mannheim's generational theory is the recognition of “fresh contact” in “formative years of youth” with objects, events and phenomena, and the impact of this experience on later experiences (Bolin, 2014). The Mannheim's generational theory is close to the Bourdieu *habitus* concept, which describes a stable system in which the individual's desires are internalised through family parenting and education. It plays an important role in the surrounding community, which determines the individual's willingness to act, namely, *habitus* after Bourdieu is a “community in a body” (Bourdieu, 1990; Bolin, 2014).

According to Mannheim, generations bring together people born at the same time, but the concept of generation includes an agreement on shared experience-based sense of belonging (Bolin, 2014), because generations are characterised by social importance and cultural identity (Aroldi & Colombo, 2013). Media connect people, they help one generation realise that they have something in common and that it is different from the experience of parents or younger people. Intergenerational and media relations in the past and in the present are analysed by the model created by Aroldi & Colombo (2013), which explains role of media in generation identity building process during the course of life. Such a view of the media role and interfacing relationship uses the “multi-dimensional” concept inherent in sociology, in which biographical characteristics can coexist with specific historical experience, technological development and other factors.

In the Western countries and the Soviet Union, the same generations are formed in different social political and media conditions (Bolin, 2014). Members of the groups of population highlighted in this study represent the two Soviet generations. The younger group (55 - 63) is full of career, with children and grandchildren growing up for a large part of its representatives. The representatives of the second group (64 - 75) are characterised by a very important phase of life – closing working life, retiring, gradually ageing. During this period, part of this group is still working. Income has decreased significantly for most in this group, because in Latvia, the majority of pensioners receive small pensions (Central Statistical Bureau, 2020b).

The first age group or middle-generation representatives from 55 to 63 years, represents those born in the mid-1960 s. Its personality “formation years” (Mannheim, 1952/1996) has passed during the period of Soviet stagnation and Cold War. The greatest event of this group's youth is participation in restoring national independence in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This group is referred to as the “generation of thaw” (Šūpulis & Zellis, 2019/2020, p.70), whose representatives experienced both the agony of the Soviet regime and the restoration of independence at an informed age.

The older group, from 64 to 75, was born in the mid-1940s or later. Latvia is part of the occupied territory of the Soviet Union at this time. This group of people belong to the “first Soviet or post-war generation” (Šūpulis & Zellis, 2019/2020, p.70.). The representatives of this generation have grown up under Soviet conditions, they have no personal memories of the time of Latvia's first independence (1918-1940). Most of the working life of this group of people was passed during the Soviet period, but its representatives were participants in the process of regaining Latvia's independence, and formation of an independent state following the restoration of national independence in 1991.

Representatives of both age groups belong to those who had to adapt to the development of the Internet and digital media. Both groups have grown into a media environment controlled by Soviet censorship. In the 1990s, their representatives witnessed the role of the media in regaining independence (Briksē, Skudra, & Tjarve, 2002) and experienced the development of a commercial media system following the recovery of independence.

Several studies of media use in Latvia confirm that the consumption of information resources and media is closely linked to the age of respondents (Latvian Facts, 2018; 2019). However, each of the groups selected by the study has different media usage habits today. People of age 55+ media usage habits are more similar to those of younger age groups than those in the 65 + age group. Respondents aged 55 + combine traditional and digital media usage, so more often than the age group 65 + reading news on the Internet, using social networking sites, video streaming services (NEPLP/Latvian Facts, 2019).

2. Method and Data

The data of the study consists of two representative surveys of Latvia's residents, concerning perception of media literacy, skills and knowledge of media literacy, risk assessment, and other issues related to MIL. The study uses data from two surveys, as each contributes different data required for the aims of this study. The first survey determines the perception of media literacy, while the second survey tests the respondents' practical media literacy competences and skills to evaluate information.

Both national representative surveys were conducted using multistage stratified random sampling method. Selected sample is representative to the general population of Latvia. Sample size is at least 1000 permanent residents of Latvia 18 to 75 years old.

The first survey data (1017 respondents) was collected in May 2019 (hereinafter referred to as “first survey”) by face-to-face interviews at the places of residence of the respondent. The second survey (1005 respondents) was conducted using the Web panel survey (CAWI) in August 2019 (hereinafter also called “second survey”).

The first study (May 2019) used a structured questionnaire consisting of 16 closed-ended questions. The survey included 11 multiple choice questions (e.g. questions on media politics, consequences of insufficient MIL education), and 5 Likert scale questions (e.g. questions on interest on MIL, MIL skills evaluation, media use). The second survey (Aug, 2019) consists of 12 questions, the structure of which is as follows: one open-ended question (for responses on a false news piece), five multiple choice questions (for structuring responses on false information and behaviour in the internet), three single choice questions (for testing MIL skills), and three Likert scale questions on media and information use habits. A standardized data processing system and software SPSS was used for data analysis of both surveys. Data were cross tabulated within each survey to compare the media literacy perception and test MIL skills of the two groups of older adults (55-64 and 65-74) and other groups of respondents.

3. Results

The total number of respondents aged 55 to 75 in both studies is 686 people. The first survey's group of respondents aged 55-75 is 335 people (from 55 to 63 years old – 162 respondents, from 64 to 75 years old – 173 respondents). Second survey respondents group aged from 55 to 75 make 351 respondents total (from 55 to 63 years old – 183 respondents, from 64 to 75 years old – 168 respondents).

The structure of the age groups of respondents selected in the study is broadly similar to that of gender and ethnicity (Table no 1). The second survey respondents generally have higher levels of education in both age groups (over 60% of respondents have higher education). The 70% of respondents of the first study aged 55 to 63 are working, 30% are not employed; among respondents of the second age group (64 -75) 16% are employed, 84% are retired. According to data of the second study, 79% of respondents aged 55-63 are employed, 21% are retired; 32% of respondents aged 64-75 are employed, 68% pensioners.

Table 1. Characteristics of surveys’ respondents’ structure. N=1017 (May 2019); N= 1005 (August 2019)

		First survey (May 2019)		Second survey (August 2019)	
		55 - 63	64 - 75	55 - 63	64 - 75
Gender	Male	45%	42%	50%	45%
	Female	55%	58%	50%	55%
Education	Primary	9%	12%	-	1%
	Secondary	63%	65%	40%	33%
	Higher	28%	23%	60%	66%

Ethnicity	Latvian	57%	54%	49%	49%
	Russian	33%	39%	31%	34%
	Other	10%	7%	20%	17%
Employment	Public	22%	2%	35%	17%
	Private	48%	14%	44%	15%
	I don't work	30%	84%	21%	68%

In the analysis of study data, the data for the two groups of respondents selected in each study, which together form a group from 55 years to 75 years, are analysed together if the responses obtained do not differ. The data are analysed separately for each group (55-63; 64-75) if there are statistically significant differences between the data of each group of respondents.

3.1. Individual Assessment of MIL Education

When assessing the interest of respondents in terms of appreciation and perception of the significance of MIL, the differences are observed not between the representatives of the selected age groups, but between face-to-face survey and Internet user survey. Therefore, this section first provides data on the media usage of the participants in each study. Secondly, the interest in MIL issues of both polls is reflected. Thirdly, the assessment of various aspects of MIL education is presented. Since questions on how respondents use their knowledge and skills daily and perceive MIL were the same in both questionnaires, data from both surveys are compared.

The data shows significant differences in the use of media between the two surveys participants. This is demonstrated in the use of social media (Table no 2) and Internet news portals. Among participants in the first study (May 2019), middle-age and older respondents' use of social media is much smaller and less frequent. The use of social media for the two selected age group members also varies significantly: 32% of aged from 55-63 and 53% of age group from 64-75 do not use social networking platforms at all. The second survey respondents who belong to the older group (64-75), use social media to a similar extent as other participants.

Table 2. Media use: social media. N=1017 (May 2019); N= 1005 (August 2019) (%)

	Every day or almost every day	At least once a week	At least once a month	Less often	Do not use at all	No answer	Total
All respondents; N= 1117	50%	19%	4%	4%	21%	20%	100%

1st survey (May 2019)	Age group 55 – 63; N=162	33%	20%	5%	4%	33%	5%	100%
	Age group 64 – 75; N=173	17%	16%	4%	5%	54%	4%	100%
All respondents; N=1005		67%	14%	4%	5%	7%	3%	100%
2nd survey (Aug 2019)	Age group 55 – 63; N = 183	52%	17%	8%	8%	12%	3%	100%
	Age group 64 – 75; N= 168	52%	21%	4%	9%	8%	6%	100%

The data from both surveys on the use of Internet news portals structurally coincides with data on social media use data, i.e., compared to total data, a significantly smaller proportion of senior group (64 – 75) representatives of the first survey use Internet news.

There are also different TV viewing data from both surveys. A much larger proportion of participants in the first study regularly watch television (70%, mid-age group (55-63) TV viewing habits are closer to general population data (77%), 89% of senior respondents (64-75) regularly watch television. Among respondents in the second study, there are differences between the middle age and the older respondent group. For respondents aged 55-63, the use of TV (57%) does not differ from the total data (55%), 75% of the senior group's representatives watch TV daily.

Printed press reading data in both surveys is similar. Total data show that 40% of those surveyed in both studies read the press daily or at least once a week. Older adults read press slightly more regularly than average respondents in both studies: over 50% aged 55-64 and 60% aged 64-75.

3.1.1. Interest in MIL Issues

42% of participants in the first survey are interested in MIL, while more than half (52%) of respondents are not interested on MIL issues (Table no 3). Among the senior respondents in the first survey, interest is even lower: only a third (34%) of respondents aged 55-75 admit that they are interested in in MIL.

In the second survey, the answers to this question vary significantly: the number of respondents (48%) interested in MIL issues exceeds those who are not interested

(42%) in MIL. There are also significantly different responses from older respondents: 42% aged 55-63 and 57% of respondents aged 64-75 are interested in MIL.

Belonging to a given age group has little to do with interest in MIL. In the first study, respondents in the older groups are generally less interested in MIL than other participants in the study. A similar number of participants in the second survey (53%) and respondents aged 55-63 (48%) and respondents aged 64-75 are interested in MIL (57%).

Table 3. To what extent are you concerned with, interested in MIL issues? N=1017 (May 2019); N= 1005 (August 2019)

	1st survey (May 2019)			2nd survey (Aug 2019)		
	All respondents; N= 1117	Age group 55 – 63; N=162	Age group 64 – 75; N=173	All respondents; N=1005	Age group 55 – 63; N = 183	Age group 64 – 75; N= 168
I am interested	42%	34%	34%	53%	48%	57%
I am not interested	52%	59%	60%	35%	42%	37%
No answer	6%	70%	6%	12%	10%	6%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

A number of issues about MIL knowledge and skills were covered only in the first study (May 2019). The identification of negative consequences associated with insufficient knowledge and skills is not affected by age group (Annex no 1). Most commonly, respondents note potential material or information-related losses: the possibility of being robbed (42%) or defrauded in a digital environment (37%), the inability to find the necessary information (24%), encountering threats to the safety of their own or property (22%).

The middle age group (55-63) is generally more confident in assessing the skills to find, select and use information, so these consequences are assessed as less likely. Less frequently than the other respondents, this group highlights problems that might arise if a person does not have the necessary information, that insufficient information could lead to incorrect decisions, that a person might be considered foolish because of the use of out-of-date information, or lack of adequate skills would prevent friends and family members from being contacted.

3.1.2. MIL Knowledge and Skills

Assessing different situations related to MIL education (Annex no 2, no 3, survey in May 2019), the representatives of the two age groups (55-75) generally slightly lower than total generally say they could assess them. The older respondents (64-75), compared to the overall data, is equally convinced of the skills to assess misleading information and high-quality media. In general, lower self-evaluation among senior group representatives (55-75) refers to digital environment-specific phenomena. Older respondents (64-75) are relatively less likely to recognise manipulated information or copyright-protected content.

Comparing respondents in both studies (Table no 4) it can be observed that scores of MIL knowledge and skills among participants aged 55-75 (21% and 19%, respectively) are significantly lower than all respondents' data (34%). In the second study, the two older adults' groups rate their MIL knowledge and skills similarly or higher (38% and 35%, respectively), compared with the first survey respondents.

Table 4. Self – evaluation of MIL knowledge and skills. N=1017 (May 2019); N=1005 (August 2019)

	1st survey (May 2019)			2nd survey (Aug 2019)		
	All respondents; N= 1117	Age group 55 – 63; N=162	Age group 64 – 75; N=173	All respondents; N=1005	Age group 55 – 63; N = 183	Age group 64 – 75; N= 168
Good	34%	21%	19%	46%	38%	35%
Weak	56%	71%	70%	38%	42%	47%
No answer	10%	8%	11%	16%	20%	18%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Comparing the two age groups, it can be concluded that the media use of middle-ages respondents (55-63), MIL knowledge and skills are not, in general, different from those of other groups of society. Respondents of the older group (64-75), who use the Internet less, rely more on existing media usage habits in the use of information, less interested in MIL, underestimates their knowledge and skills. However, representatives of this group, especially Internet users, are as critical as other respondents in assessing the media and information, recognising the criteria for characterising media activities.

3.2. MIL Education and Society

When asked to assess the threats caused by insufficient MIL knowledge and skills to society as a whole, a list of 14 choices was offered to respondents, including threats in the socio-political, economic, cultural fields. Responses from respondents of different ages are similar, highlighting security threats and threats to the economic well-being of society, as well as a possible decline in education and cultural levels. The list of the five most commonly mentioned threats is similar (Table no 5): child safety risks, lower population welfare, threat to the safety of citizens, degradation of society, lower educational opportunities. The responses of respondents in the middle age group (55-63) did not differ from the overall results. The older group of respondents (64-75) assessed the threat of worse health care in Latvia – 27% (all respondents – 20%, 19% – aged from 55 to 63).

Table 5. In your opinion, what are the 5 biggest threats to Latvia, society as a whole, if the population has insufficient media use skills and knowledge? N=1017, May 2019 (%)

	All respondents %	55 - 63 years old	64 - 75 years old
Threat to child safety	40%	38%	36%
Decline in wellbeing	28%	22%	29%
Threat to citizen safety	27%	25%	28%
Society degradation	26%	25%	18%
Decline in high-quality education opportunities	26%	19%	27%

In response to the question what Latvia needs to do first to mitigate risks, the respondents (survey in May 2019) highlighted the need to monitor or limit the availability of information provided by public communication agents. 41% (34% aged 55-63; 37% aged 64-75) believe that there should be more control over the use of social media, 34% (30% aged 55-63; 33% aged 64-75) believe that social media regulation is tightened; 33% (30% aged 55-63; 33% aged 64-75) think it is necessary to ensure transparency in the functioning of the Internet; 32% (28% aged 55-63; 26% aged 64-75) - to tackle the dissemination of misleading information, 29% (27% aged 55-63; 24% aged 64-75) are convinced that it is important to take measures to improve, promote media literacy.

When assessing what 3 measures should first be taken at national level to improve MIL of the population, all respondents highlight the need to include MIL in formal education. 50% (48% aged 55-63; 46% aged 64-75) respondents believe that primary school curricula should include mandatory media content and their impact,

46% (44% aged 55-63; 44% aged 64-75) think that secondary school programmes should include mandatory media and social learning content, 32% (25% aged 55-63; 26% aged 64-75) believe that more educational content on problematic situations should be published in the media.

As regards the main population groups which should be educated on MIL, all respondents highlight the need to educate teachers (58%), pupils – 52%, students – 39%, journalists – 30%, seniors – 26%. In addition, answers to the question of five key skills and knowledge needed to address threats to oneself and society were similar in all age groups, namely, the use of digital equipment (56%) and social media platforms (38%), the knowledge to seek help if there are problems (threats on the Internet, persecution), 44 (%), knowledge of laws (on their rights, copyright, advertising, etc.), (37%), skills to impose access restrictions on children – 35%.

In order to ascertain the effectiveness of the measures provided for in Latvian media policy to improve MIL awareness, a question was asked about what MIL education activity respondents had noticed. A fifth of all respondent group representatives were similarly interested in the same events and processes: the growing interest of people in how modern media works (20%), programs and articles that explain misleading information (19%). Each seventh respondent noticed the growth of quality media information that helps to navigate issues of public importance and experts' information on IT use. Yet more than 40% of respondents in general and more than half (54%) of older respondents hadn't noticed any of MIL activities.

The assessment of the effects of insufficient MIL education, MIL activities and priorities, is not affected by the age group represented. Respondents mostly associate MIL education with the skills provided by digital literacy. The participants in the study expect basic MIL knowledge to be acquired at formal education and include representatives of all generations in the target groups of MIL.

4.3. Test Results on MIL Knowledge and Skills

Three examples of media publications were offered to the survey respondents and they were asked to give their assessment to MIL knowledge and skills. The first example is false news, reporting that a man was not admitted enter a bus. The title “Absurd! The man is not allowed into the bus because he is sweaty” was published by the clickbait portal tautaruna.nra.lv [peoplespeak.nra.lv]. The news is only made up of a man's experience story of conflict with a bus driver.

In response to the question “Imagine that you saw such an article in reality. What would you do after reading this article?” (Table no 6), 43% of respondents would do nothing, each third would read comments on it, each seventh would discuss it with friends or acquaintances, each tenth would seek rules on riding public transport. The age group represented by the respondent does not matter, except for some of the answers that were chosen more frequently by senior respondents (64-75): reading

comments more frequently (40%), discussing this with friends and acquaintances (23%), seeking information on the terms 18%, rarer - doing nothing (37%).

Table 6. Imagine that you saw such an article in reality (someone had shared it on social networks). What would you do after reading this article? N=1005. August 2019 (%)

	All respondents	Age group 55 - 63	Age group 64 - 75
Read comments (on social media or the site)	33%	29%	39%
Check which friends have commented or shared	10%	7%	6%
Comment	8%	12%	12%
Share on social media	6%	7%	8%
Read other articles on the site	8%	8%	11%
Discuss with acquaintances, friends	15%	18%	24%
Contact authorities with complaint or protest	2%	1%	2%
Look for more information on the incident	7%	8%	13%
Look for rules on public transportation (restrictions, rights etc).	10%	16%	18%
Other	4%	2%	3%
Do nothing	44%	44%	37%
I don't know	6%	8%	7%
Total	153%	140%	180%

Regarding the main focus in the article, respondents highlighted significant signs of media literacy: how likely the situation is (49%), the publication website (40%), information on the time and place of the event (26%), headline (26%), subject topicality (17%), publication date (16%), author (12%). The overall assessment of the misleading news piece is not affected by the age group. Representatives of the older group (64-75) are paying more attention to the time and place of the event (29%), and the extent to which this article could gain attention on social media (13%, total data 6%). In the context of the content of the article read, when asked "How and where would you first look for information about what rules passengers have to comply with in public transport?" the majority of respondents of all ages chose two answers: the information would be searched by Google.com or another search engine (43%) and the websites of bus companies (33%).

The second example in the test asks to evaluate the famous picture of photographer Nilufer Demir (Annex no 4), in which he caught the drowned 3-year-old Alan Kurdi, son of Syrian refugees (Time, 2015). To answer this question, respondents would have had to follow up on the current events and remember the photograph published on many media worldwide. The age group did not affect the answers to this question. Of the answers offered, more than half of all respondents (58%) recognized that the photograph showed a drowned refugee child, 16% couldn't answer, 10% thought it was an accident near the Baltic Sea, 8% - a doll for firefighting and rescue training.

Another example was a famous photograph by Yevgeny Khaldey (Rare Historical Photos, n.d.) (see Annex no 5) depicting the arrival of Soviet Union soldiers in Berlin and soldier raising flag over the Reichstag at the end of World War II. Respondents were offered to distinguish the original between two almost similar photos. To answer this question correctly requires knowledge of the history of visual icons in 20 century history, since the photograph is well-known for describing Soviet time propaganda, censorship and Soviet soldiers of World War II as marauders. Its original has been altered by retouching and removing the one from two watches from soldiers' wrists. Respondents were shown two versions of the photograph: faded, with the two watches on the both soldier's wrists and bright, vivid, without the watch on right wrist. Respondents' thoughts on the original photograph differed, but the answers did not depend on a specific age group: 46% of respondents thought the original was the photograph that looked old, 36% - the retouched photograph, 18% - couldn't answer.

Data show that media usage or belonging to a particular age group does not determine the skills to recognize text and visual information, but knowledge of events and processes of public interest, understanding the criteria for determining the quality of information, and the habit of following important information in the media are more relevant.

Conclusions

Representatives of different generations undoubtedly use different content in the media and use it for different reasons (Ministry of Culture, 2018; Latvian Facts, 2018, 2019), yet usage and skills to recognise and evaluate content are not directly related, at least according to the data of this study.

Although older adults are slightly less interested than younger respondents in MIL, lowly evaluate their MIL and less frequently notice MIL activities, belonging to a particular age group does not affect other aspects related to the perception of MIL. The perception of MIL is more determined by three other factors: use of the Internet and digital information resources, the level of education, and income of respondents in all age groups. The conclusions therefore combine responses to the first and second research questions.

Answers to Research questions:

RQ1: How does belonging to a particular age group affect the perception of media literacy, the understanding of media education and the interest in MIL?

RQ2: how is the perception of MIL determined by the media usage experience of two older adults' groups (aged 55 - 63, 64 - 75)?

Like all respondents, senior adults state that insufficient MIL-skills threaten child and public safety, highlights material losses, supports stronger regulation of global platforms in order to protect individuals and society, suggests to include in MIL all levels of education, to teach mostly digital tools and resource usage skills; teachers, pupils, students, journalists and seniors are mentioned among major target groups in MIL. The opinion of respondents of the first study regarding seniors as an important target audience of MIL in education contradicts the priorities of Latvian media policy, in which MIL is mostly interpreted as the competencies needed to protect children and young people from unwanted impacts of the use of digital media, and the rest of society – from disinformation from third countries.

The analysis of data on older adults shows that media usage affects the perception of MIL's competences related to the use of digital technologies but does not affect MIL content-related competencies – assessment of the impact of technology and media, MIL education priorities and MIL solutions.

When assessing a variety of knowledge and skills, respondents of the first survey highlight the 'practical' use of technologies. Less than a third of all respondents in the first survey believe critical thinking is important, less than a tenth note knowledge of the ethics of mass media or business on the Internet. On the issue of adverse effects of insufficient knowledge and skills, all respondents highlight the preservation of human material values and safety, much less relevant to the content of information (received and created).

A comparison of the media usage of the two surveys shows that respondents from older generations do not stay within the technology and media usage of their youth, older adults gradually embrace use of the Internet and digital media. The use of Internet and digital media gives respondents to older group more confidence in their MIL knowledge and skills and leads to greater appreciation of the importance of MIL.

In the answers to questions about MIL skills, which should be improved in order to address the dangers posed by insufficient MIL competences to the public older adults choose mostly the skills to use digital devices and services. This could mean that a large proportion of respondents interpret MIL narrowly by associating it with modern communication technologies. This view may have been promoted by the current MIL policies and activities offered. The policy highlights the impact of the digital environment on the lives of individuals and society as a whole, highlighting the importance of digital literacy and focused on young audiences. The representatives of younger generations associated with the formal education process

are easier to reach for the organisers of MIL events (Nordicom, 2010). Excluding senior generation from MIL policy preserves the fact that part of society benefits from the availability of the Internet, web media and digital services to a limited extent.

RQ3: how does belonging to a particular age group and media usage habits affect the skills of MIL tested in the study?

The comparison of the data from the MIL skill testing shows that a lower share of digital technologies and services is not directly linked to lower knowledge of the criteria for recognizing, verifying, evaluating information, and quality of media content. Thus, critical literacy competencies are not directly dependent on age and media use. The lower self-assessment of senior group in the study is therefore unwarranted, since respondents aged 55-75 years are equally well employed with MIL competencies associated with the assessment of information compared with those of other groups. In the same time, it cannot be ignored that there is still a large proportion of respondents in different age groups, including seniors, with low MIL competencies.

Although the population groups selected for the study represent two generations, they are not homogeneous in terms of MIL perception. Thus, from the three Karl Mannheim's statuses of generations (Aroldi & Colombo, 2013) ("generational status" as a simple link between people born at the same time, "generation as actuality", which means participation in the common destiny of this historical and social entity), the third status - "generational unit" is usable for data interpretation. Belonging to a "generation unit" means to share a common view (Aroldi & Colombo, 2013), to see phenomena and concepts in a special sense, the psychological and intellectual impulses which are determined by the group. The "formation years" of the younger group of respondents (55 - 63), representatives of "thaw" generation coincides with the formation of a pluralistic media system in Latvia and the beginning of digitisation of communication technologies worldwide. Therefore, this group is accustomed to regularly adapting to media technologies by integrating them into their daily lives. However, in this group, media usage habits have not affected interest in the relatively new concept of MIL that has entered modern socio-political discourse.

The second respondents' group (64 -75) differs in this respect. Data show that in the older generation, whose years of formation are related to Soviet stagnation period, with limited access to pluralistic media, two subgroups or generational units can be clearly identified. First subgroup is older adults who still maintain their previous media use habits, and the second subgroup, whose media use corresponds to the opportunities of modern technology development. Traditional media use means lower interest in MIL, lower levels of education and income. Therefore, improving the digital skills of seniors should be a part of media policy measures. The first Soviet generation representatives' perception of MIL reflects Aroldi's and Colombo's (2013) critique of the technologically determined generations'

distinction between ‘digital locals’ and ‘digital immigrants’. Thus, separating generations according to their digital technology use strengthens the discourse of exclusion and creates grounds for discrimination.

MIL skills related to the content of public information (information quality assessment, misinformation recognition, etc.) are not affected by belonging to a particular generation. Thus, the “generational hypothesis” defined by technological development simplifies intergenerational understanding (Aroldi & Colombo, 2013) by highlighting cognitive patterns, but speaks very little about content, excluding social and historical events from the analysis.

The use of specific technologies is directly linked to human biological age and life cycle. New technology opportunities are becoming part of the experience of different generations, learner experience is essential in the perspective of the Ideological model of literacy. Moreover, the same information assessment criteria and approaches for all groups (including intergenerational) may indicate similar values and standards highlighted in the Ideological model of literacy. Therefore, ignoring the differences in experience of MIL within each generation and the need for MIL education of each age group contributes to inequality (Street, 2011, European Commission, 2020) in MIL competences development. It is important to conclude that the priorities defined by Latvian media policy, organised activities (Rožukalne et al., 2020) and practices at the current stage underestimate the wider social context of MIL education.

This is the first study which focuses on the interrelations between media use and MIL perception by older adult generations in Latvia. The asset of this research project is that the findings are useful both for the improvement of Latvian media policy and contribution to theoretical explanation of significant media studies questions on the problems of relations between media usage and MIL education of different generations. Detailed data allows to review stereotypes that associate older adults with lower MIL skills.

The limitations of this study are related, first of all, to the lack of research on generations in Latvia, which makes it more difficult to deeper understand older generations’ characteristics; second, only socio-demographic indicators have been used to understand the interpretation of generations’ attitudes towards MIL in this study, but they are not sufficient to describe the values and behavioural patterns relevant to each generation or ‘generational unit’ in relation to modern media landscape and MIL.

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Annexes

Annex 1. Evaluation of negative consequences of insufficient MIL knowledge and skills. N=1017, May 2019 (%)

Thinking about the negative consequences that could arise if you do not know how to act on the Internet or your knowledge is weak, which of the things mentioned worries you the most? What worries me the most is that I might ...	all respondents %	55 - 63 years old	64 - 75 years old
... be robbed	41%	41%	39%
... be defrauded	37%	36%	32%
... suffer from emotional abuse	13%	9%	8%
... make bad, wrong decisions	19%	14%	17%
... not get important information (not know where to look, find incorrect or outdated)	24%	17%	23%
... to be considered foolish because I have believed misleading information	14%	9%	11%
... face problems at work, in career	14%	12%	8%
... face threats to your or your property's security	22%	16%	16%
... harm someone else (intentionally or unintentionally)	15%	9%	14%
... encourage false information, misconceptions	15%	15%	9%
... violate the law (e.g. copyright)	10%	8%	7%
... limit the opportunities to communicate with friends, relatives	9%	7%	9%
Other	0,4%	1,20%	0%
Nothing to worry about, no threat	26%	29%	33%
No answer	7%	10%	12%

Annex 2. Please indicate which of these situations you would clearly recognize? N=1014, May 2019 (%)

Type of information, media content, situation	all respondents %	55 - 63 years old	64 - 75 years old
Social media algorithms	23%	17%	12%
False information	25%	21%	24%
Attempt to sell something in the format of invitation, congratulation, offer etc.	25%	19%	14%
Politically biased content in a seemingly neutral context	17%	11%	16%
High-quality media	16%	10%	15%
Threat to children (inappropriate content etc.)	36%	28%	24%
Reliable sources on politics, health, society, economy etc.	17%	8%	9%
Copyrighted content	11%	6%	4%
Clickbait	24%	15%	12%
None	24%	36%	37%
I don't know/ NA	14%	13%	16%

Annex 3. Which of the following have you done in the last 12 months? N=1017 (May 2019); N= 1005 (August 2019) (%)

	1st survey			2nd survey		
	All respondents	Age group 55 - 63	Age group 64 - 75	All respondents	Age group 55 - 63	Age group 64 - 75
Followed media articles and broadcasts on misleading information	15%	15%	8%	30%	29%	33%
Studied, attended courses (including on the Internet) on safe media use	5%	4%	4%	6%	4%	4%
Acquired new skills and knowledge on the Internet	15%	10%	15%	22%	22%	21%
Used state e-resources	30%	19%	12%	59%	51%	37%

Checked the mass media objectivity, professionalism	8%	6%	7%	23%	15%	19%
Reported false or illegal information to social media administrators	5%	3%	2%	10%	3%	3%
Analysed, verified information before sharing it on social networks, recommend to others	11%	7%	3%	32%	23%	22%
Controlled whether time spent on the Internet is useful	7%	4%	2%	12%	9%	7%
Controlled privacy settings for social media accounts	10%	6%	5%	26%	11%	10%
Studied information about personal data protection	8%	9%	5%	18%	12%	11%
Recommended useful and quality content on social media to friends	12%	9%	3%	20%	14%	21%
Engaged in discussions on social media	10%	8%	4%	16%	15%	15%
Shared information on great deals	14%	12%	4%	15%	14%	13%
Created or operated an existing personal website	3%	1%	0%	7%	2%	4%
Mastered digital video or photo processing on the Internet	5%	3%	3%	7%	7%	10%
I have not done any of this	38%	47%	61%	14%	18%	24%
No answer	7%	10%	6%	4%	6%	7%

Annex 4. Screenshot of the picture of a Syrian refugee child Alan Kurdi taken by photographer Nilufer Demir



Annex 5. Photos by Yevgeny Khaldey depicting a raising a flag over the Reichstag in Berlin at the end of World War II used in survey.

Explanation: first photo (bright black and white image) is a retouched, changed picture; second (faded, grey) photo is an original picture with the two watches on the both of soldier's wrists.

1. Retouched photo without a retouched watch on soldier's right wrist



2. Original picture with two watches

