

Digital Media Literacy Report

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Bulgaria

2020

Overview

The aim of this report is to analyse the results of a survey on digital media literacy among youth in Bulgaria that was part of the Erasmus+ project 'Digital media literacy for youth employment and social realisation'. The survey was anonymous and was distributed between February and June 2020 among young people aged 11-24. This report presents and evaluates the results of the survey and researches the specific country context and contextual factors that influenced the results, such as national school curricula in digital media literacy and national educational policies.

A total of 203 respondents participated in the survey. 91.6% of the respondents were born between 2003 and 2006 (age 14 – 18), corresponding with the age level of secondary school students in Bulgaria, with an additional 3% born between 2007-8 in junior high school.

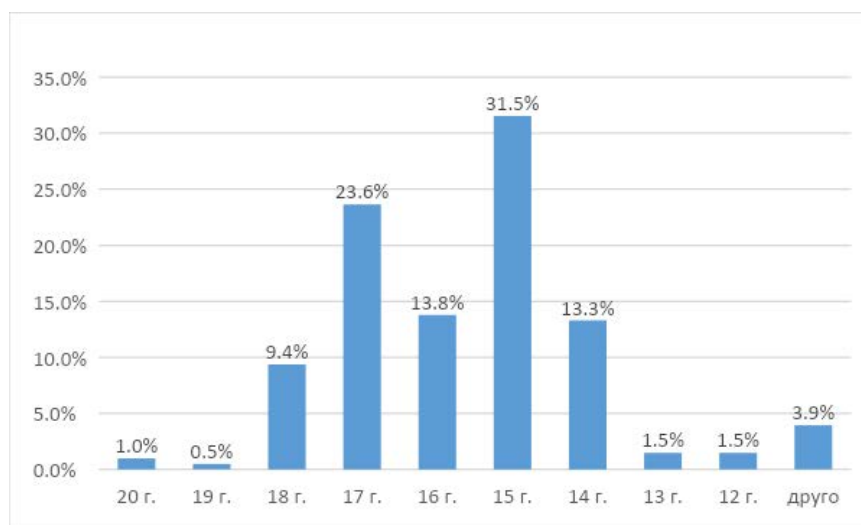


Fig.1 Age groups of respondents

Country context

The total population of Bulgaria is 6 838 937¹. In 2020, 78.9% of the households had access to the internet at home (a growth of 3.8%, compared to the previous year). The relative share of households using broadband internet connection is 78.6% and for mobile internet- 68%.²

The complex economic and political environment in the past years and the active participation of the media have contributed to the escalation of polarization in society

by frequent use of hate speech and smear campaigns. According to a Country report published in 2020 by the European University Institute³, the low levels of digital competencies among the population in Bulgaria expand the risks to media literacy and to media pluralism as a whole. Only 29% of the population has basic or above basic overall digital skills, while 38% have low overall digital skills. Both figures indicate higher risks than the EU average. Nevertheless, the same report shows that compared to 2017 the media literacy indicator scores medium risk (66%) and actually identifies some progress regarding media literacy developments in the country.

When it comes to the field of education, a national media literacy strategy is being developed by the Ministry of Education and Science⁴. The Ministry is working to integrate digital media literacy into the daily work of teachers by updating material facilities. Media literacy classes are scheduled for the first time in the 2018/2019 school year, but only in a limited number of schools and on an experimental basis. Media literacy is still not present in the compulsory primary or high school education curriculum. Non-formal education on the matter has been maintained on a project-by-project basis by civil society organisations.

Almost all media literacy educational initiatives are designed to prevent or counteract hate speech, fake news, online harassment and other related topics. At the same time, such initiatives are still of limited scope and are implemented mainly in the field of non-formal education. Here enclosed are several examples:

- The Association of European Journalists aims to improve the media environment and the quality of journalism in Bulgaria by providing expertise, trainings and support to journalists, and contributing to the increased literacy of all media users. In 2018 it has initiated a project “Media literacy in the classroom”⁵ aimed not only at increasing media literacy among students but among teachers as well. It proposes a reform in the methods of teaching so they can address the development of digital skills. The duration of the project was 15 months, in partnership with Bulgarian-American Fulbright Exchange Commission and financially supported by the America for Bulgaria Foundation.
- The National Center for Safe Internet⁶ has developed methodologies for primary schools, approved by the MoES, which aim to develop digital media skills in early educational stages. In 2018 they initiated two projects to be implemented at schools “From digital competence to digital citizenship” and “ From digital childhood to digital citizenship”. For both of them the center collaborates with

teachers, experts, and representatives of MoES so that the methodologies can be easily implemented in the classrooms. More than 90 teachers from different regions in Bulgaria were trained in the new methods in November 2019.

- Coalition for Media Literacy⁷ works to fully integrate media literacy in the educational process and increase media literacy in society. The goal is the development of digital media literacy from the beginning to the end of the educational process, building partnerships and cooperation with all organizations and institutions related to education and media literacy in Bulgaria (ministries, non-governmental organizations, media, etc.) and promoting the importance of digital media literacy among various target groups (parents, teachers, media and the general public). One of the most important projects realized by the coalition in a partnership with Lachezar Tsotsorkov Foundation, Znam.be and Global Libraries-Bulgaria Foundation, is “ [Media literacy online-lifelong learning](#)”. During the implementation of the project several trainings were conducted for both children and adults about how to recognize and prevent disinformation, propaganda, conspiracy, fake news and frauds online. Another important issue addressed during the trainings was the development of skills for safe communication via social media.

It is quite evident, the delivery of media literacy education is very fragmented, incomplete, and does not correspond to the needs of the current requirements. YDML project will lay the foundations of a new, complete and adequate methodology which will elevate the digital and media literacy education to a higher level.

Presentation of the results

Behavioural patterns (Use of digital technology)

To the question how regularly respondents use the following devices, almost all replied the most frequently used device is the smartphone (99%), followed by laptop (65%). Among the not so frequently used devices are chromebook (20%), personal computer (17,7%), and tablet 10,3%. Respondents usually use their phones to communicate with family and friends, another great part use it for entertainment and only few responses indicate use of phones for knowledge and learning. For school projects and education, respondents prefer personal computers, which is also used for watching movies and playing games. 10 respondents do not use a PC at all.

Even though digital devices are actively used, only 37% of respondents feel confident in easily editing advanced settings on digital devices, online services and applications, and 5,4% do not know how to do this at all. Similar picture illustrates the tendency to experiment with new digital devices and applications, interest in new smartphones, conversations about new gadgets or technological advances. Only 38,4% of respondents feel confident in learning how to use new digital devices, online services or software, 3% - totally not.

When it comes to the use of social media, the picture is quite diverse (fig.2). Nevertheless, the most social profiles are on Instagram (93%), followed by YouTube (92%). The platforms preferred for social connections are Facebook (86.7%), Viber (82.8%), TikTok (60%) and Snapchat (63%). Modes for getting in touch with friends are almost equally distributed among phone calls (78,8%), chatting on messenger (76,8%) and meeting face to face (70%). Still video chats aren't that popular among Bulgarian youth with only 36,5% using them.

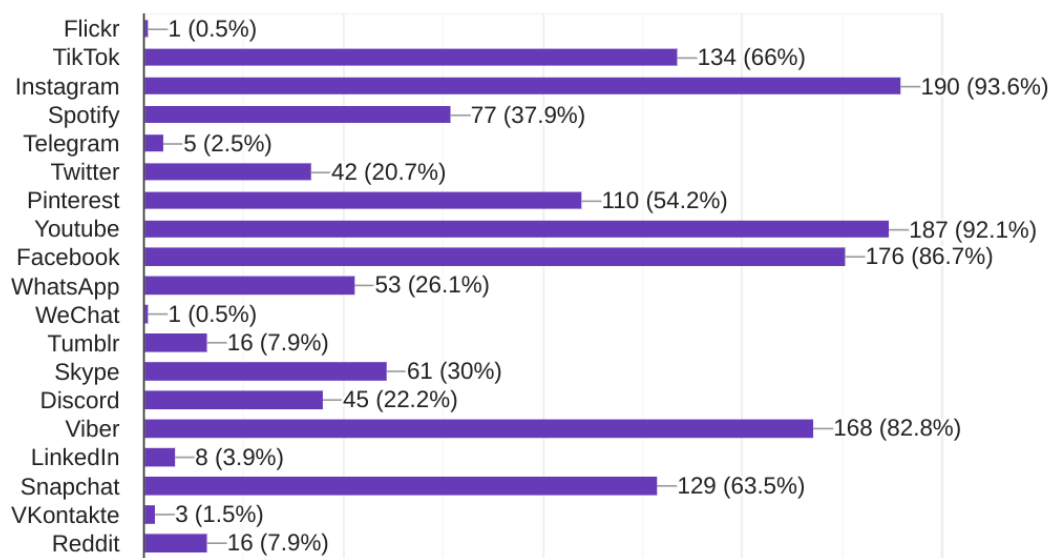


Fig.2 Frequency of social media usage

Communication (Netiquette, etc.)

The following results regard the attitude towards online communication. Although young people use different types of social media to connect with each other, only 56,7% have a good understanding of the effects of communicating through different types of media, 28% have less confidence and 10,3% not so well. In relation to these results, 61.1% manage to always evaluate the recipients and to carefully tailor their communication accordingly, 23.3% are less confident in this and 9.9% do not manage well.

Similar hesitancy appears in regard to the choice of the most suitable type of media (e.g. text, photo, video, animation, etc.) to achieve the desired result: 48,3% feel totally confident they can pick the right content, 1% (2 respondents) absolutely not.

More varied results were obtained to the question “Do you have an in-depth understanding of how social media influences different forms of communities and democracy?” (Fig.3)

32% of respondents give a total ‘yes’ to the question, whereas 60.6% do not feel confident to evaluate to what extent the influence of social-media on communities and democracy (if they understand the question at all).

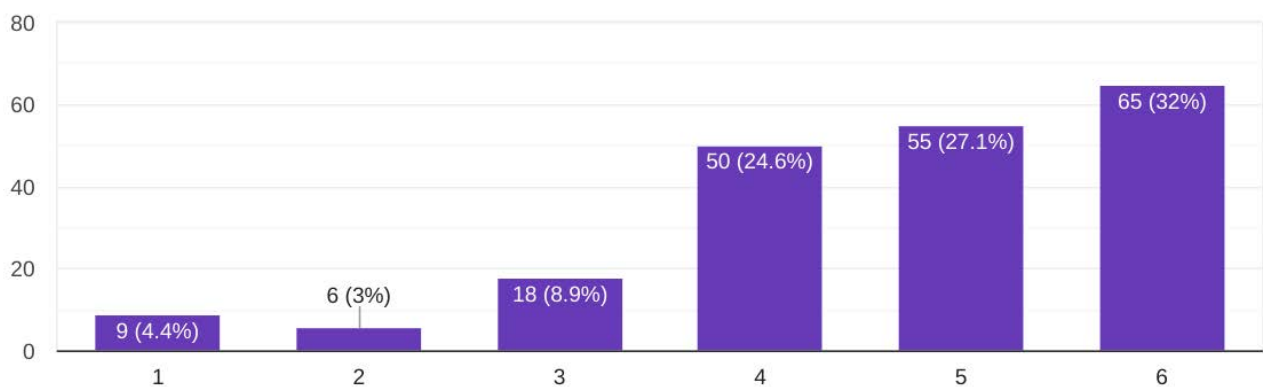


Fig.3 “I have an in-depth understanding of how social media influences different forms of communities and democracy” (1- not at all, 6- absolutely yes)

One interesting portion of results indicate the degree to which respondents enjoy expressing thoughts and opinions through relevant social media (Fig.4). Answers vary to a similar degree between “I don’t enjoy it at all” (18.2%) to “I enjoy it totally” (19.2%). This could indicate that respondents are either not confident to express their own opinion or do not know how to do it.

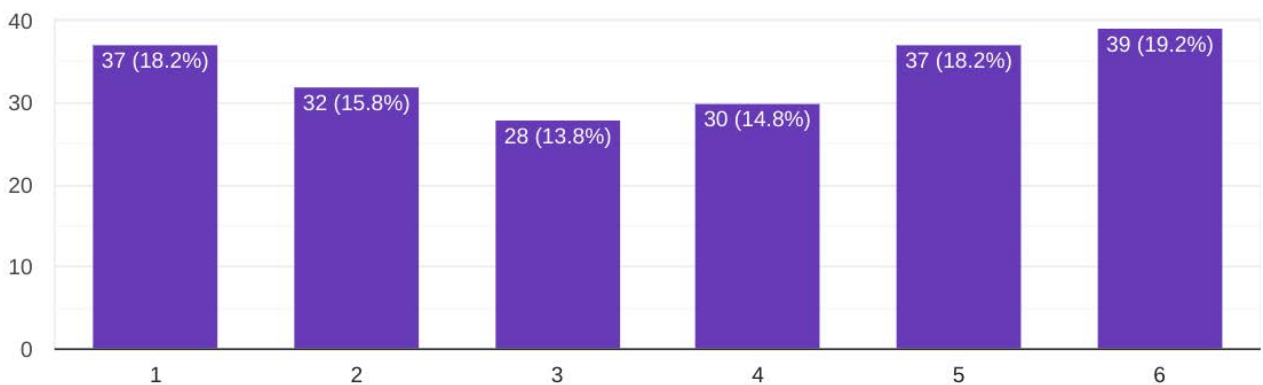


Fig.4 “I enjoy expressing thoughts and opinions through relevant social media” (1- not at all, 6- absolutely yes)

Responsible use of technologies & Health

In this section the results are relatively consistent in terms of responsible use of technologies. Most respondents (71%) answered they totally pay attention to how online activities can affect the life and reputation of them and others. Only 5 people (2.5%) don't see this influence at all. The ability to differentiate between inappropriate and illegal online behavior has 73,9% of the respondents, 11% do not feel that confident.

The results are not that good when it comes to good strategies for handling the improper behaviour of others (Fig.5). Only 37.9% are absolutely confident in tackling this issue. Cyberbullying is a growing issue in Bulgaria, according to research by the Coalition for Media Literacy⁸. Unfortunately, education on how to cope with such kind of behaviour is almost non-existent.

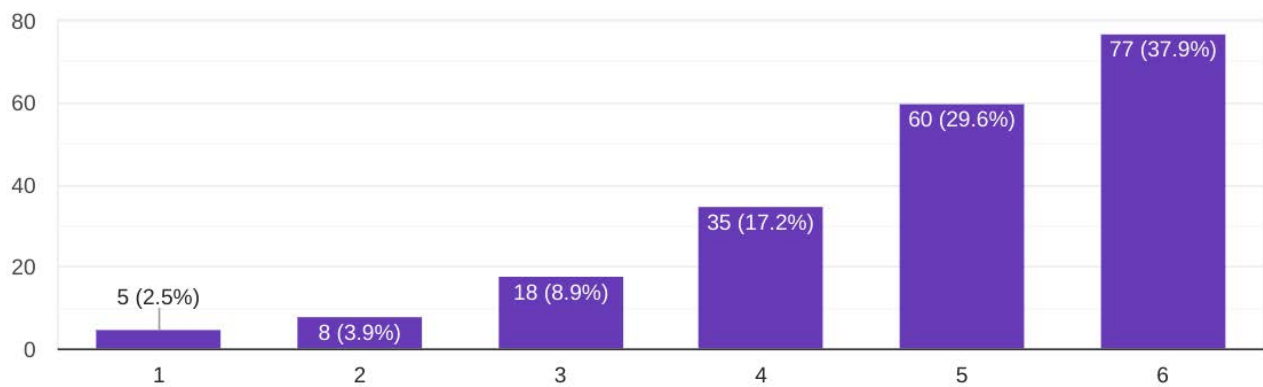


Fig.5 Handling of improper behaviour online (1- not at all, 6- absolutely yes)

One very distinctive pattern of online communication is the distance between the participants when often they can't see each other and thus, observe body language and emotions. Very indicative of this are the results for the question whether respondents are good at showing empathy and creating communities with others through digital communication where only 44,3% totally agree, 28,6% are confident to a lesser degree (grade 5), and 13,8% are even more reluctant in reading others' emotions online. Interestingly, 66% answered that they have a good understanding of how certain online behaviour can negatively influence a person's digital identity and 29,6% do not understand it that well.

The following figure shows whether and how much respondents pay attention to physical symptoms that may be related to overuse of technology. The reluctant results show that young people do not know how to use technologies in a moderate and sensible way.

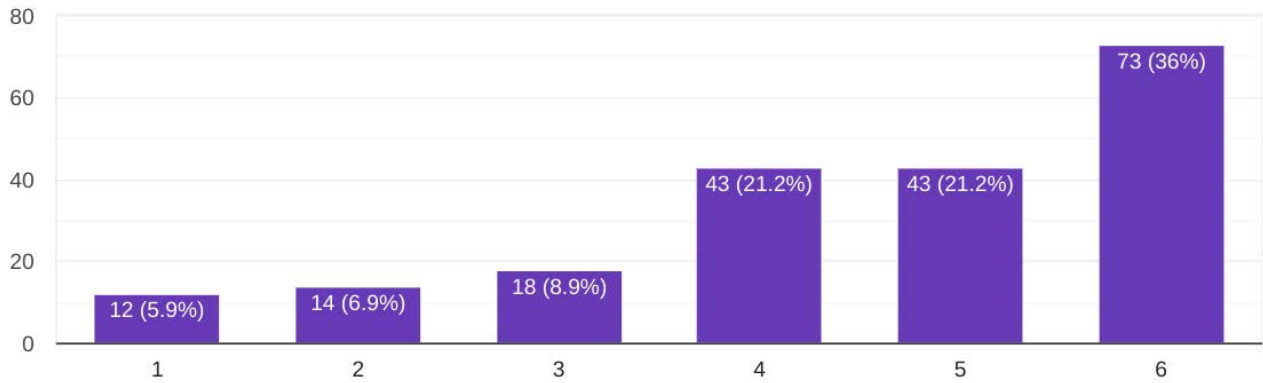


Fig.6 How much respondents pay attention to physical symptoms that may be related to overuse of technology (1- not at all, 6- absolutely yes)

Attitude toward sources (Critical thinking)

Critical thinking is the next important criteria to be evaluated. The results show a worrying tendency of not understanding how the digital environment works and how to navigate in it. Only 39.4% answered they have a habit of evaluating information critically (considering both the source and placement) with 3.9% not knowing how to do this at all. At the same time, 51.7% feel confident they know what fake news are and have strategies to deal with them (Fig.7)

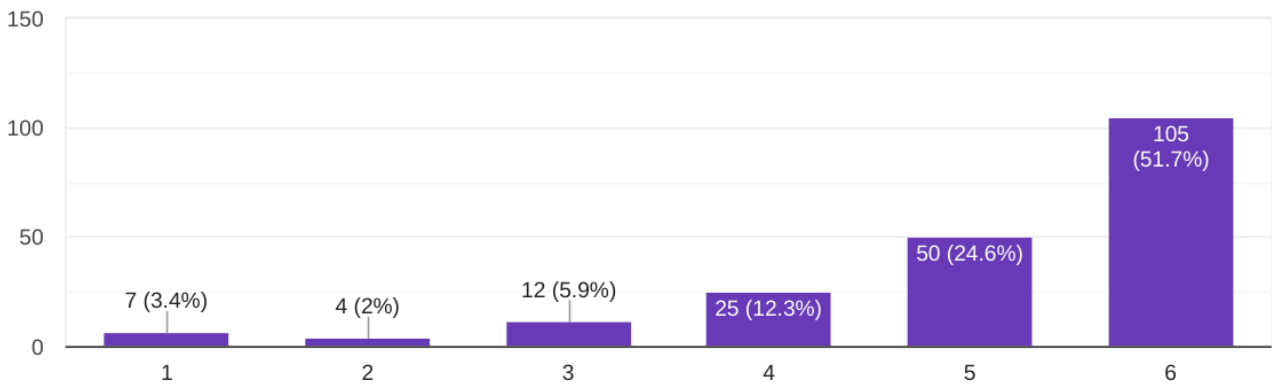


Fig.7 "I know what fake news are and have strategies to deal with them" (1- not at all, 6- absolutely yes)

The respondents are even more reluctant when it comes to understanding how search engines operate, classify and display results: 48.8% are absolutely sure they understand, 3.9 % totally not. (Fig.8)

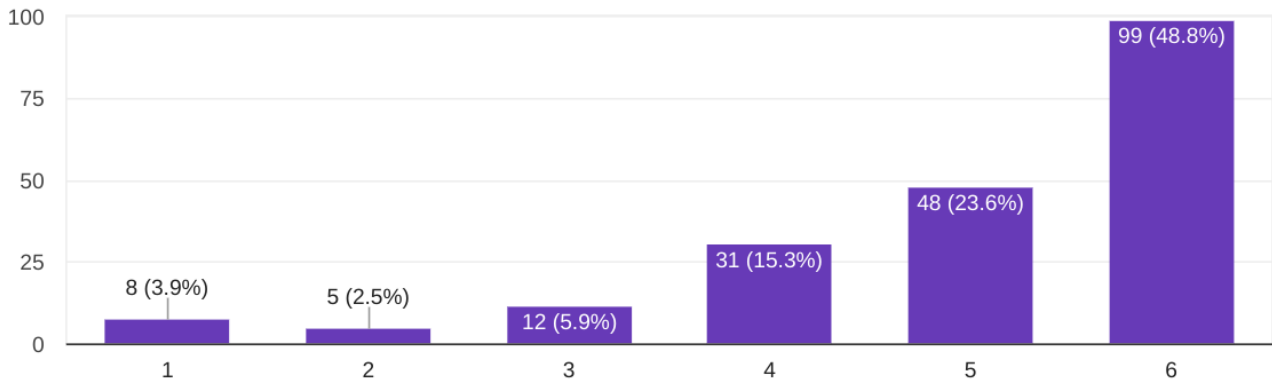


Fig.8 "I understand how well the search engines operate" (1- not at all, 6- absolutely yes)

Similar is the situation about a very proactive attitude towards finding and collecting information from the internet: 42.4% answered they are very proactive in finding and collecting information from the Internet, 31,5% are less proactive, 14.3% aren't sure how to do it and 6 people replied they have no idea how to search and collect information online.

Creation of content

As it became evident above, not many respondents (48,3%) feel totally confident they can pick the right content (text, photo, video, animation) to achieve a desired result but the percentage is even less when it comes to creation or editing a digital content- only 28.1% are excited about it, 7.9% don't like it at all. (Fig.9)

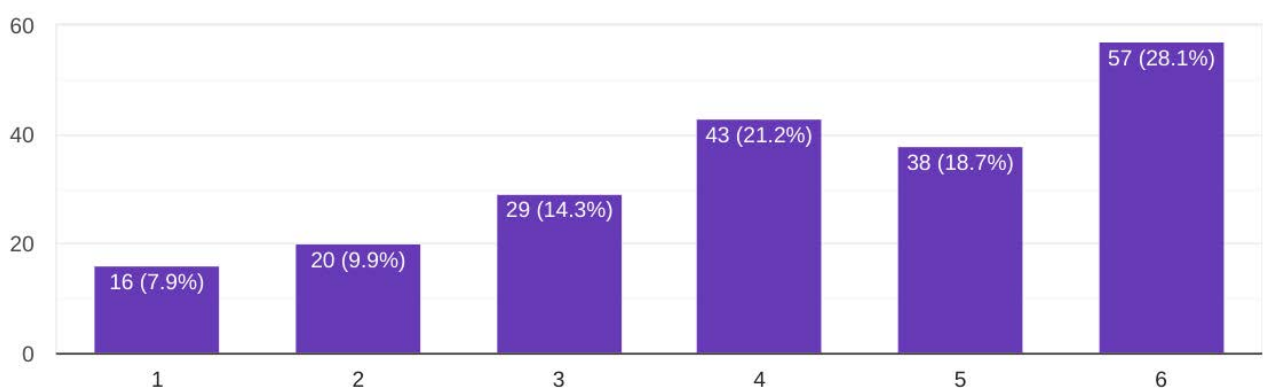


Fig.9 "I feel excited about creating and editing a digital content" (1- not at all, 6- absolutely yes)

These numbers can be related to some extent to the abovementioned results (section *Behavioural patterns*) that only 38,4% of respondents feel confident in learning how to use new digital devices, online services or software. Also, the young people don't feel skilled enough at using applications to create relevant multimedia- 39.4% replied with

certainty they can but the rest vary between 4.9% totally unskilled and 20.7 % for skilled to a lesser degree.

As it is evident from the next figure, only 39.4% have an experience in using apps for creating suitable multimedia content. All these results indicate that the respondents don't know how to use technologies creatively.

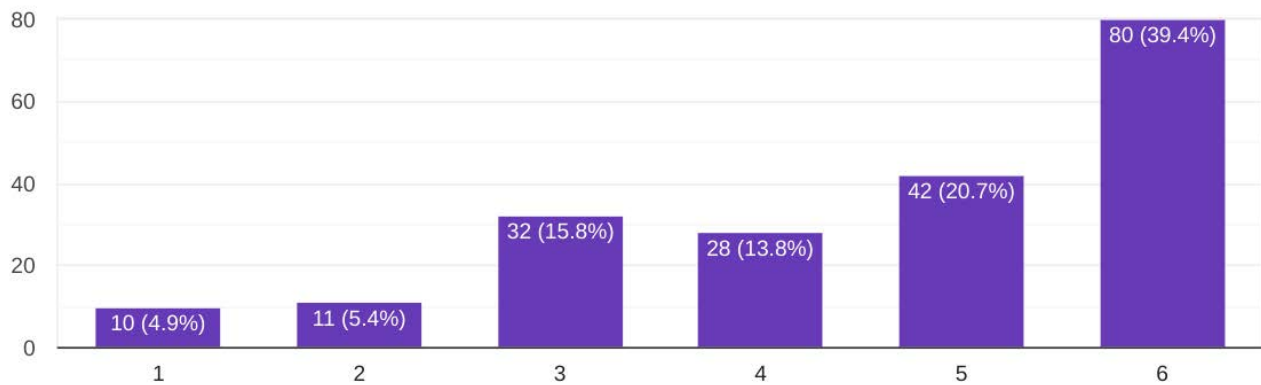


Fig.10 "I know how to use technology in a creative way" (1- not at all, 6- absolutely yes)

Conclusion

Digital and media literacy is growing in importance among the basic skills necessary for the 21st century. New generations start to use different devices at a very early age. But, as it became evident from the realized survey, very few know how to use them in a wholesome and creative way. Smartphones and computers are mainly used for communication and entertainment, using different social media to share and browse through content.

A significant portion of the respondents do not feel confident to use search engines properly and aren't proactive in learning new applications and softwares to advance their studies or to create. Although many respondents realize the impact social media has on one's reputation and emotional well-being, few know how to cope with improper online behaviour.

The survey clearly shows significant deficits in DML which impact the offline lives of the young people and their future as active citizens. Teachers play an important role in tackling these deficits. They themselves have to be updated and trained in the newest technologies and methodologies in teaching DML. The Bulgarian authorities in this field

don't provide any consistent and effective way for that to happen. That is why YDML project is so important and will enhance the abilities and confidence in teachers to provide a high-quality and a relevant to the contemporary times set of skills for navigating in the digital environment.

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The project “Digital media literacy for youth employment and social realisation” (YDML) is implemented with support from the European Commission under Erasmus+ program, KA2: Capacity Building in the Field of Youth (ref. No 608788-EPP-1-2019-1-BG-EPPKA2-CBY-ACPALA). The European Commission's support for the production of this newsletter does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

