



AUTORITÀ PER LE
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COMUNICAZIONI

MEDIA AND DIGITAL LITERACY NEEDS

SUMMARY REPORT



LITERACY



JUNE 2025

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of media and digital literacy is equipping people with the skills needed to use digital media and technology in a safe and responsible manner, developing critical thinking capacities that allow them to make assessments and analyze complex realities. It is a key factor in modern democracies for making informed decisions and represents a challenge for every regulator in the digital media and services sector, requiring a thorough reflection on the effectiveness and appropriateness of the tools employed.

This report, aimed at identifying the main media and digital literacy needs among the Italian population, is based on research work carried out through a survey, on the basis of a questionnaire developed by the Authority and administered to a sample of 7,053 individuals representative of the Italian population from 6 years of age onwards, resident in Italy¹.

¹ SWG s.p.a. was entrusted with conducting the survey. For minors aged 6 to 15, the questionnaire was completed by their parents. The sampling plan used area of residence, gender and age class as variables. Sample distribution was based on ISTAT data as of 01 January 2023. To reflect the specific needs of the research activity, over-sampling of cells was applied to the age groups 6-13 years and 14-17 years (approximately 800 interviews in total per group). The interviews were conducted in spring 2024 in CAWI mode (75% of the cases) – CATI mode (25% of the cases).

RESULTS OVERVIEW

Availability of devices with internet access

- **Major technological devices are widely and homogeneously available** among the population: 91% of Italians use a smartphone, two out of three use smart TVs and laptops. Consoles and virtual assistants are mainly used by younger persons.
- **90% of Italians access the internet every day, 48% for at least 4 hours.** Young adults and adults have the highest level of consumption, minors and older adults the lowest.
- Among **the most frequent online activities** are retrieving information, searching for news (adults and older adults), communicating with friends (older minors) and consuming audiovisual content.
- 80% of Italians continue to access the media during meals, watching television programs in four out of five cases, while 20% of individuals aged between 6 and 34 access social media and video-sharing platforms.

Parents and children: limitations and prohibitions

- **Eight out of ten parents regulate their children's access to media**, while 13% impose an absolute ban and 4.8% grant them unrestricted access.
- The most common rules (adopted by 2 out of 10 parents) are time limits and time slots for media usage, monitoring usage, and blocking specific content.
- 10.6% of parents change the privacy settings of their children's accounts, and only 12.5% talk about the online browsing experience.
- Parents aged over 45 and graduates use monitoring and co-using strategies, while younger and less educated parents prefer restrictions.

Hate speech, social media challenges and cyberbullying are major concerns.

- **8 out of 10 Italians are concerned** about content and activities that may pose risks, regardless of the specific media involved; in particular, more than **4 out of 10 are very concerned about hate speech, illegal content, social media challenges, disinformation and cyberbullying.**
- **Only 15%** of citizens are very concerned about the presence of audiovisual content that is not protected by **copyright.**
- While **minors are less concerned** about content and activities that may pose risks, over 50% of **older adults** are very concerned about hate speech, illegal content, social media challenges.

- More than half of the Italian population has come across disinformation, revenge porn and hate speech, and **more than 4 out of 10 Italians** (43.5%) say they have come across them **frequently**.
- Disinformation and hate speech are the only types of content for which greater user concern is associated with direct exposure to the phenomenon.
- About **three in four minors have been exposed to negative user-generated content** (social media challenges, cyberbullying, revenge porn), encouraging eating disorders, use of illegal drugs and unwanted sexual content.

Countermeasures

- More than **8 out of 10 citizens** take **some kind of action** when they encounter activities/content that may pose risks. **More than half** of them avoid accessing a given channel/outlet/site/platform after coming across risky content, and about **one third** verifies the source of the potentially risky content or news.
- The higher the education level of individuals, the greater the frequency of reporting and source verification.
- **Most citizens** place **some degree of trust** in the capacity of different social and economic actors to protect users, and minors in schools especially.
- **Almost half of the population** (44.1%) does not turn to anyone for guidance and advice on critical and conscious use of communication media.
- A significant share of minors (over 50%) turns to their family members, teachers (about 33%) and, in the case of older minors, friends and schoolmates (30%) for guidance.

Algorithms and conscious use

- **More than half of the Italian population** aged 14 and over (58.9%) is aware of the **role of recommendation algorithms** used by major online platforms, albeit with a large gap between older adults (35.9%) and young adults (73.3%).
- **Only 7% of Italians have an optimal degree of algorithmic literacy**, while **64.6% have zero or poor algorithmic literacy** (83% of older adults) and just over a quarter have a fair to good level.
- **48%** of the Italian population **is aware of the possibility to personalize** their online platform experience via content curation or reporting, with higher awareness among older minors and young adults and lower among older adults. Among those aware of these possibilities, 80%

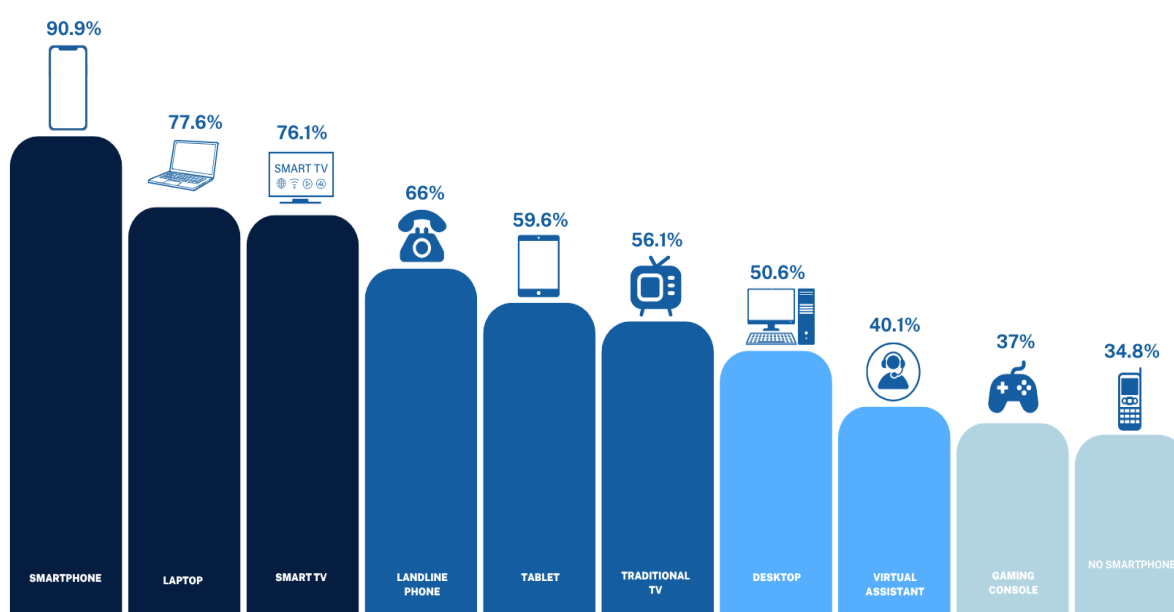
say they have used at least one content curation tool, and more than 60% say they have used at least one content reporting tool.

1. GENERAL OVERVIEW

90% of Italians access the internet daily

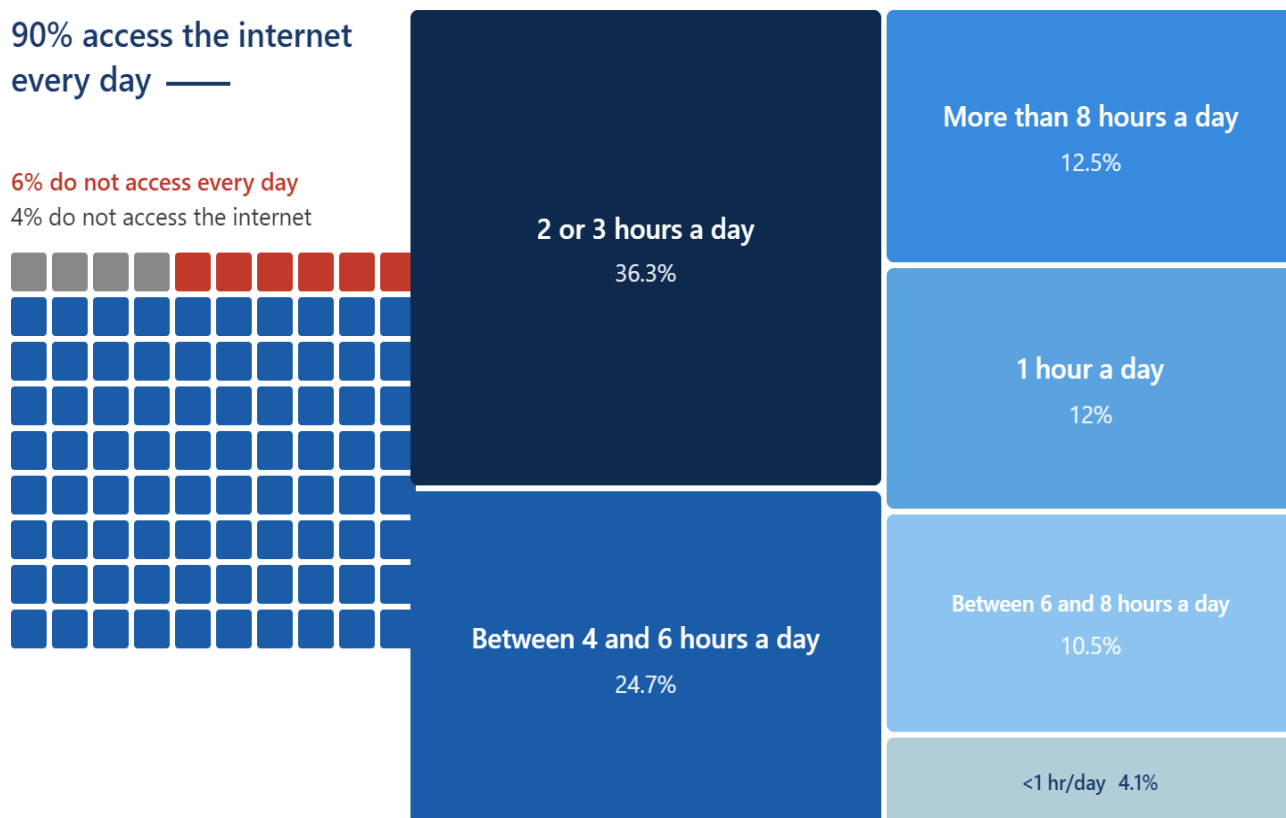
Smartphone is the most used device by the Italian population (Figure 1); more than three-quarters of Italians also use a laptop and a smart TV. While in the latter case younger persons within the household are likely to influence the configuration of the set of available devices, consoles and virtual assistants remain mainly single-user experiences and hence predominantly used by younger persons, with minors and older minors as the most inclined to use age segments.

Figure 1: Availability of technological devices (% of the Italian population aged 6 and over)



Only 4% of the Italian population aged 6 and over does not **access the Internet** (Figure 2) and 6% does not access it every day, proving the deep pervasiveness of digital communication in contemporary society. Internet usage levels are not only extensive, in terms of daily hours spent online (more than 4 hrs. in 47.7% of cases), but also varied with regard to the number of activities performed, with specific differences between younger and older persons.

Figure 2: Frequency of Internet access (% of the Italian population aged 6 and over)



It should be noted that searching for information, consuming news (on societal and political current affairs) and communicating with friends are the **most frequent online activities** (performed by just under 50% of the population) (Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3: Most popular online activities in the last week (% of the Italian population aged 6 and over accessing the Internet)

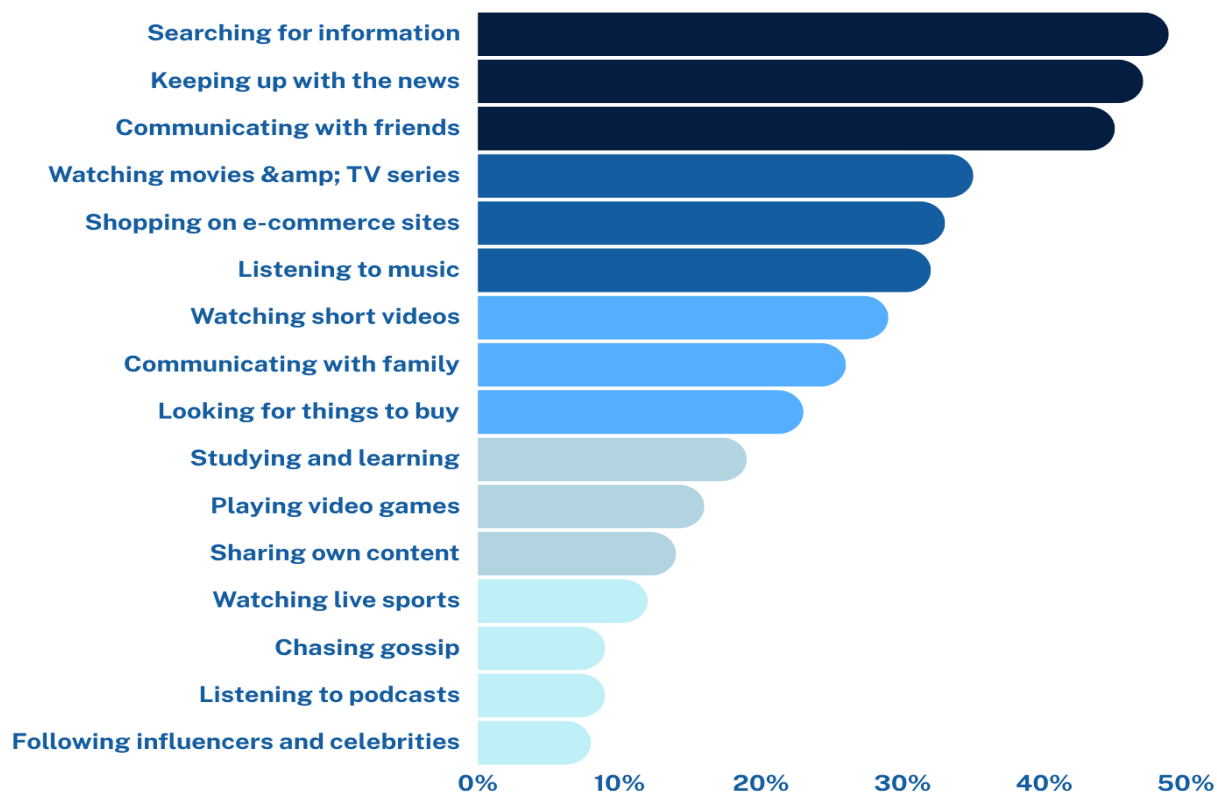
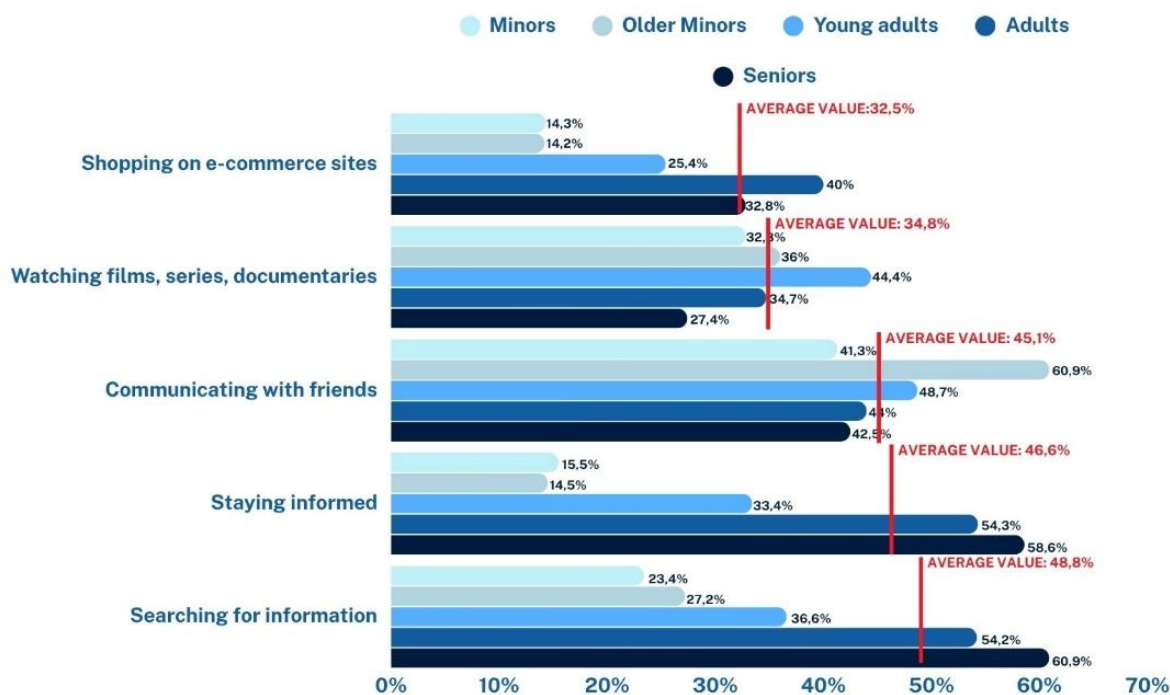


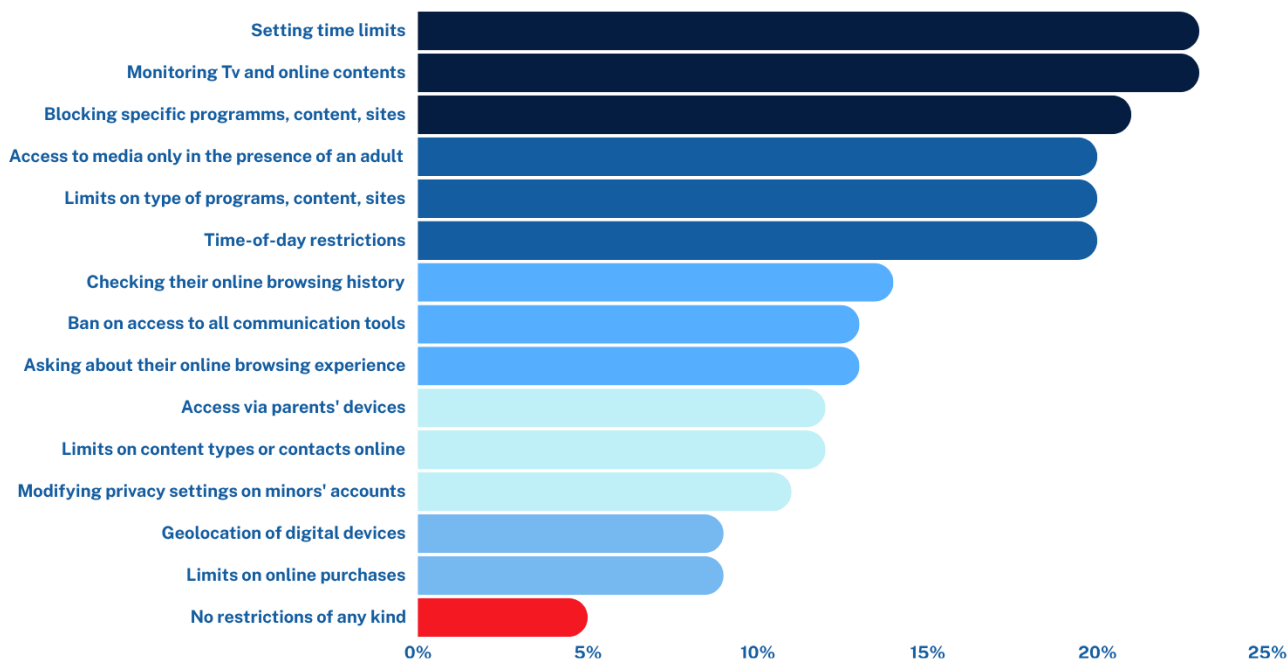
Figure 4: Main online activities by age group



Eight out of ten parents set rules for their children.

As regards **how parents regulate access to media for their children** (aged less than 16), a varied distribution emerged (Figure 5), with parental mediation strategies widely adopted.

Figure 5: Ways to regulate children's access to media (% of parents of children under 16)



It emerged that **older parents** tend not to adopt a **restrictive strategy** either because they are more sensitive to the child's individual development – not to be limited by the imposition of boundaries – or because they are less aware of potential exposure to negative content. Parents with higher education levels (graduates) leverage on their higher cultural and social capital and adopt a **co-using strategy**, in line with a parental ethics focused on empowering the child's expressiveness.

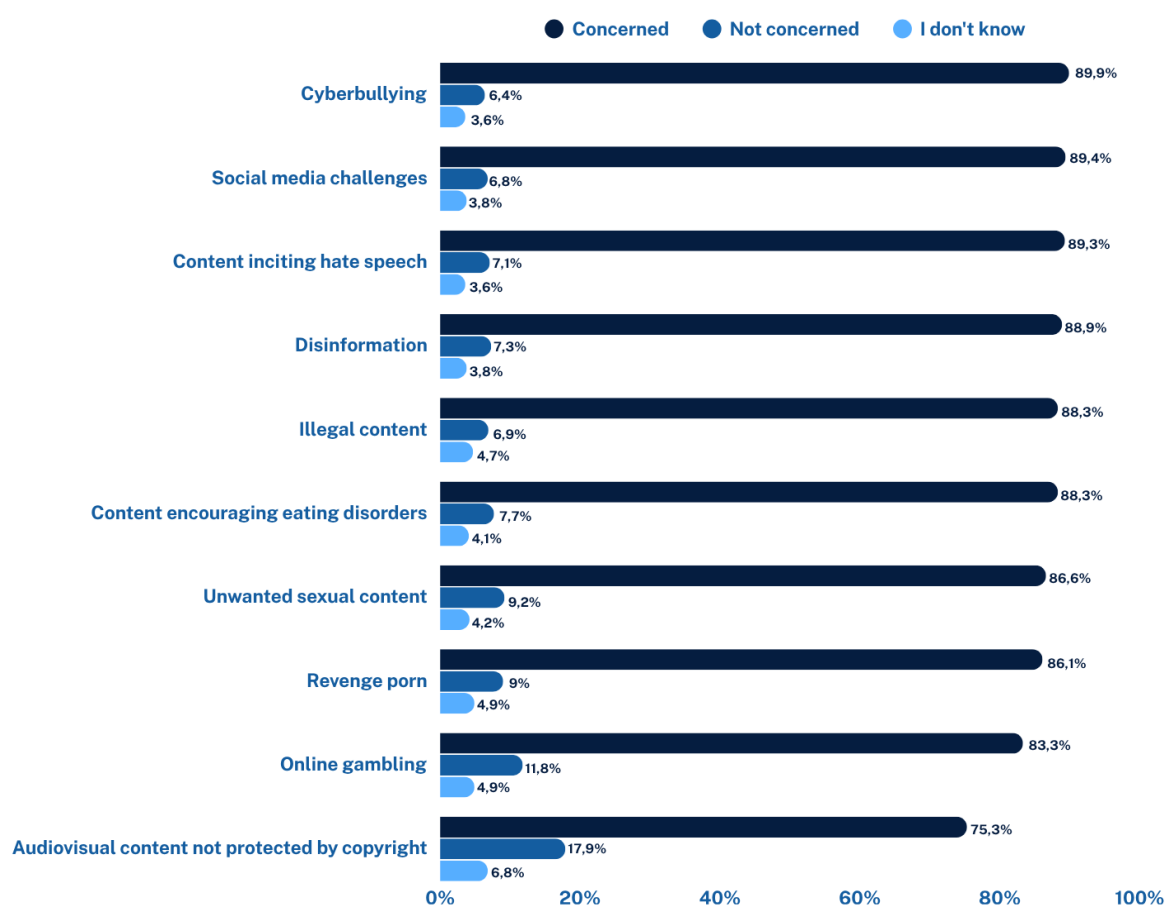
2. DIGITAL AND MEDIA LITERACY NEEDS

Hate speech, social media challenges, cyberbullying: minors are less concerned than adults

With regard to the **level of concern for various content and activities that are sources of risk in the media**, there is greater concern for the dissemination of content having a negative impact on the individual sphere (unwanted sexual content, content encouraging eating disorders or excessive alcohol, tobacco and drugs consumption), collective sphere (cyberbullying, revenge porn, social media challenges) and societal sphere (disinformation, hate speech) vis-à-vis content that is not protected by copyright or gambling-related content.

While more than 8 in 10 Italians express general concern for content and activities that may pose risks, more than 4 in 10 express concern for hate speech, illegal content of different kinds, social media challenges, cyberbullying and disinformation (Figure 6). Moreover, while **minors declare themselves less concerned than the average**, over 50% of older adults express concern for hate speech, illegal content, social media challenges, and cyberbullying.

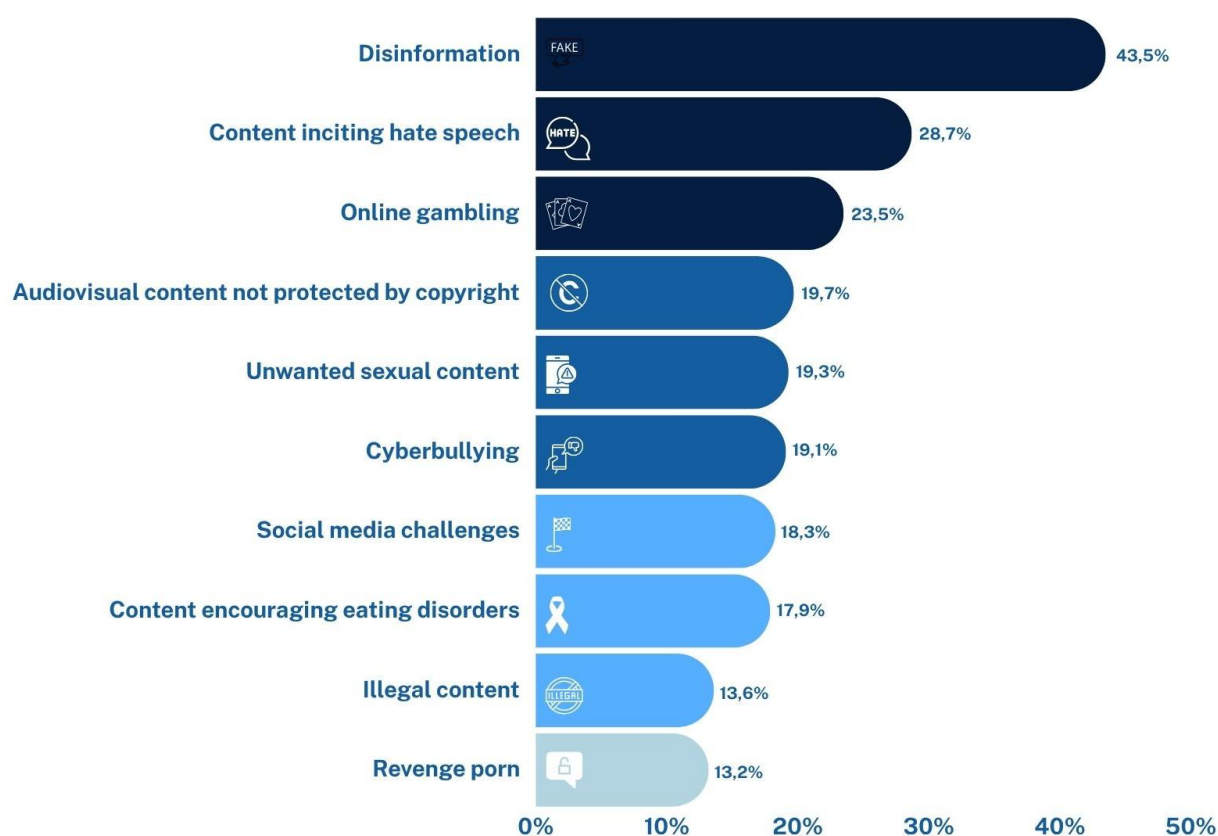
Figure 6: Concern about the dissemination of activities/types of content across all media (% of the Italian population aged 6 and over)



Over 40% of citizens are exposed to disinformation.

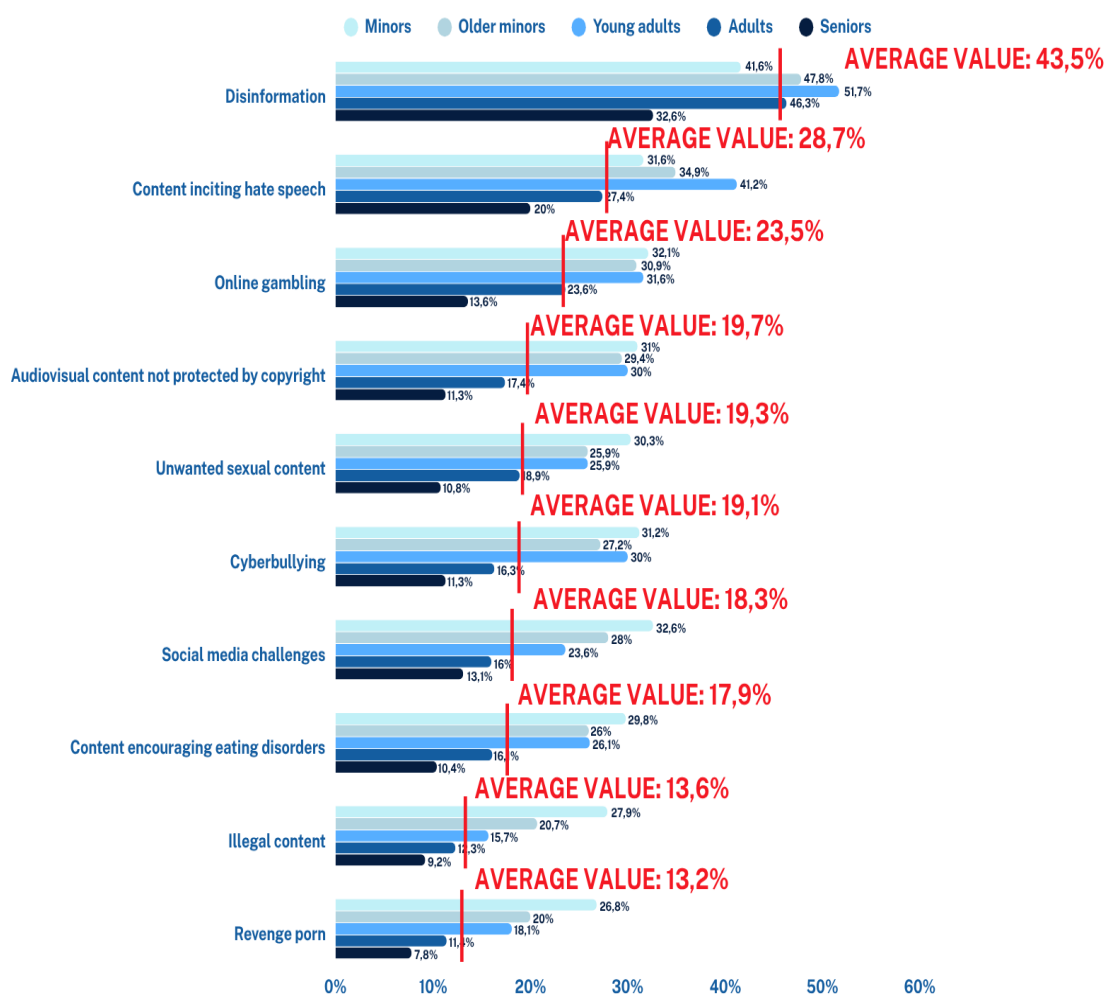
Regarding exposure to various risk factors, the percentage of citizens encountering this type of content exceeds half the population only in the case of disinformation, revenge porn and hate speech. In particular, more than 4 out of 10 Italians report frequently coming across disinformation content (Figure 7).

Figure 7: High level of exposure to risk factors (% of the Italian population aged 6 and over)



Young adults and minors encounter **risky** content/activities more frequently. Disinformation and hate speech are the only types of content for which greater user concern is associated with direct exposure to the phenomenon (Figure 8).

Figure 8: High level of exposure to risk factors by age group (% of the Italian population aged 6 and over)

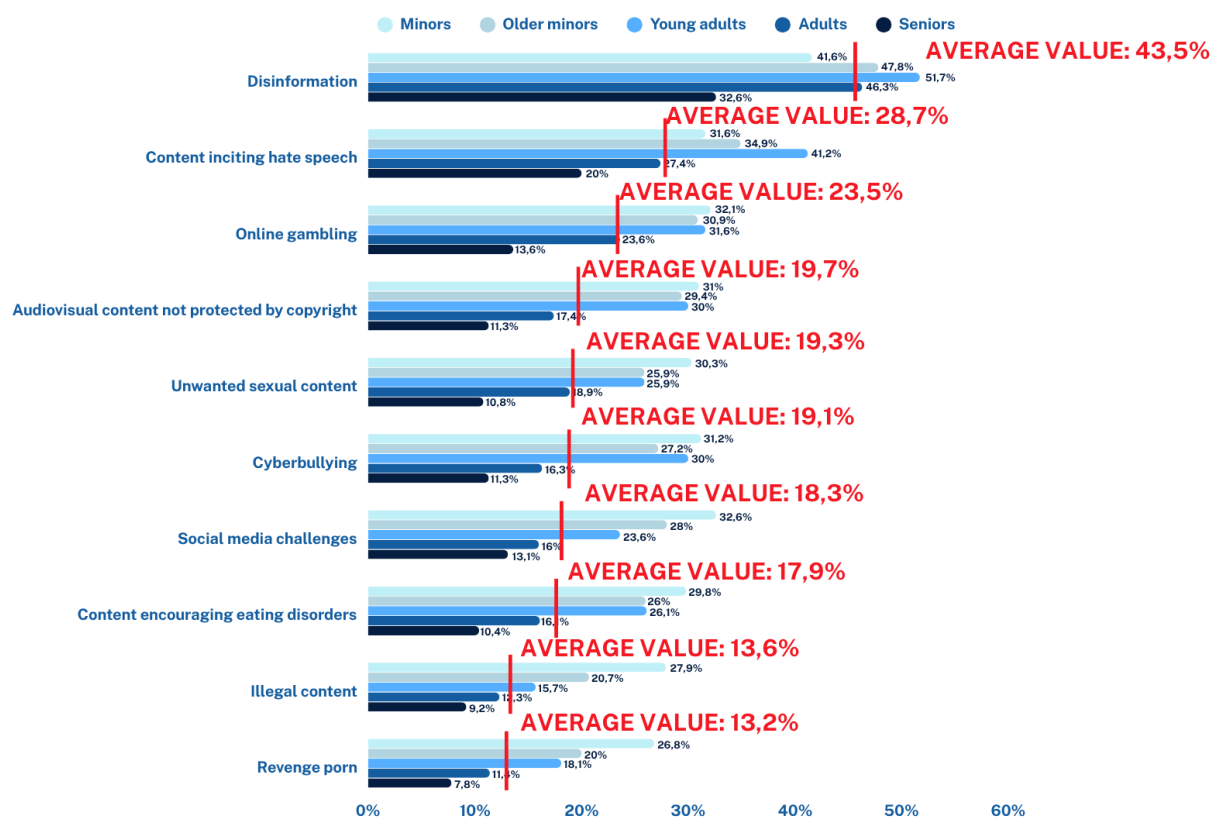


The trust minors place in schools to counter risks.

More than 8 in 10 citizens take **some kind of action** when they come across activities/content that may pose risks; over 50% avoid accessing a channel/outlet/website/platform after encountering that type of content, rather than verifying sources, reporting the content or changing their own access settings. Older adults tend to avoid accessing platforms that display risky content.

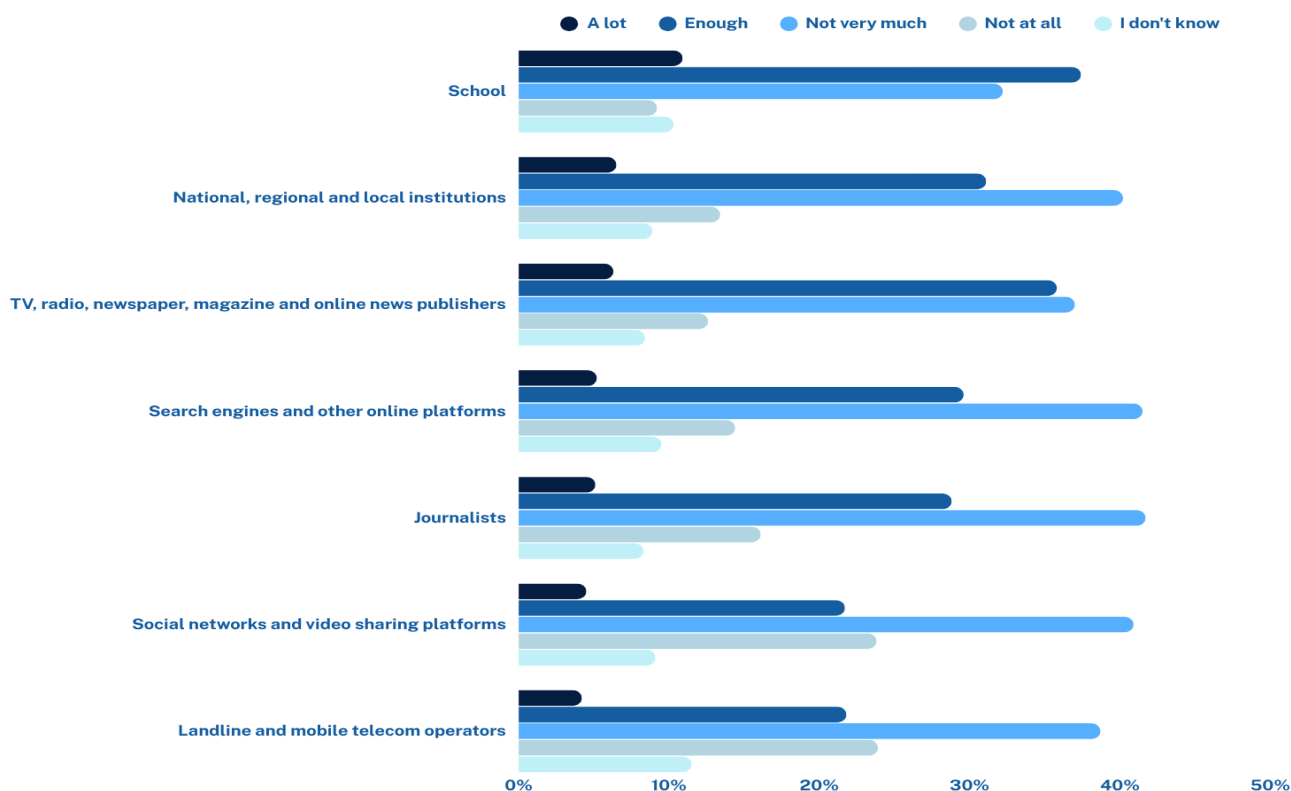
Young adults tend to **report risky content** to the platform publisher/provider, an action demanding greater proactivity. On the contrary, minors and older minors are more likely to seek help from those close to them (parents, friends, teachers, etc.) (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Citizens' behavior when encountering risk-factor content/activities by age group (% of the Italian population aged 6 and over)



In general, **most persons** place **some degree of trust** in the capacity of social and economic actors to protect users and encourage critical and conscious media use (Figure 10).

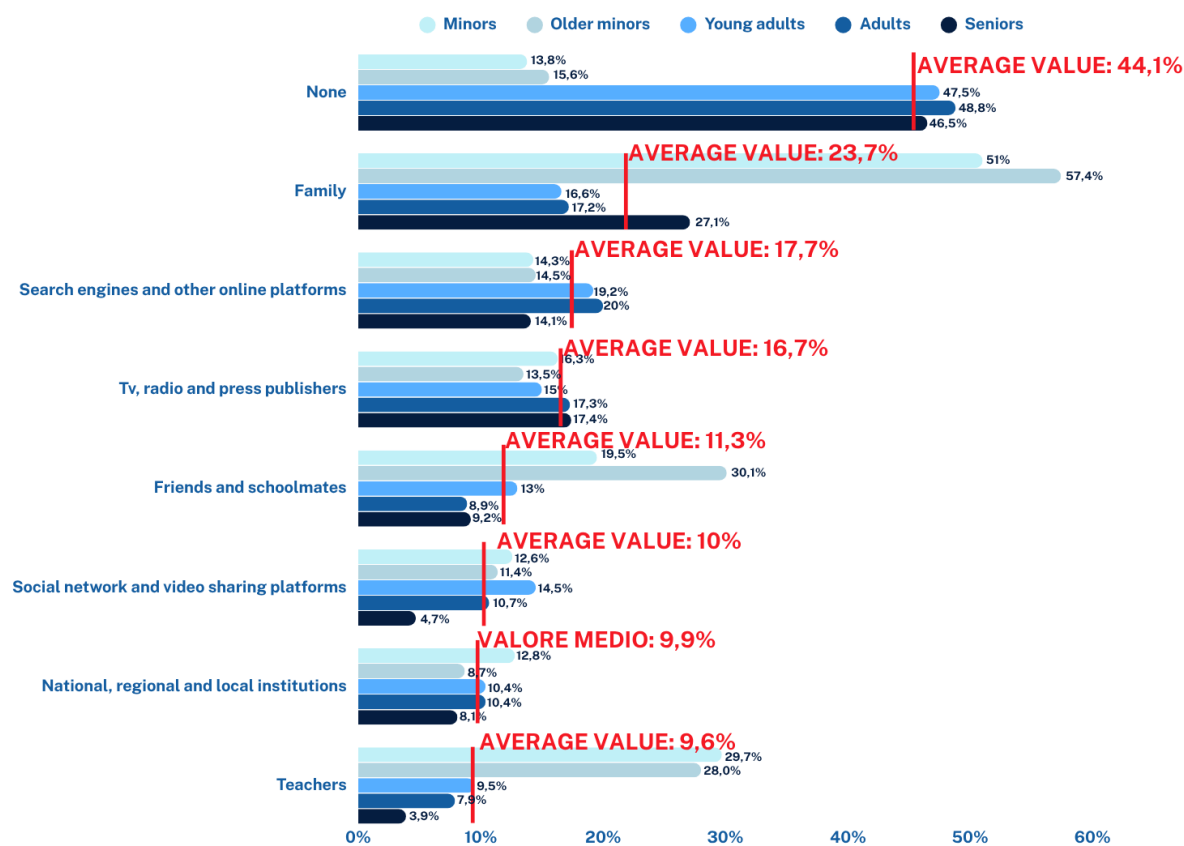
Figure 10: Level of trust in the ability of entities to protect users and commit to promoting a critical and conscious use of the media (% of the Italian population aged 6 and over)



Over 50% of minors turn to family for conscious media use.

Nearly **half of the population** (44.1%) does not turn to anyone for guidance and advice on **critical and conscious use of communication media**. In particular, **minors** mainly turn to family, teachers, friends, and schoolmates for guidance (Figure 11). Furthermore, although they place greater trust in institutions, online platforms, and publishers, they do not actually rely on these entities for guidance on media literacy.

Figure 11: Citizens seeking advice and suggestions from other people, institutions and agencies on critical and conscious media use by age group (% of the Italian population aged 6 and over)



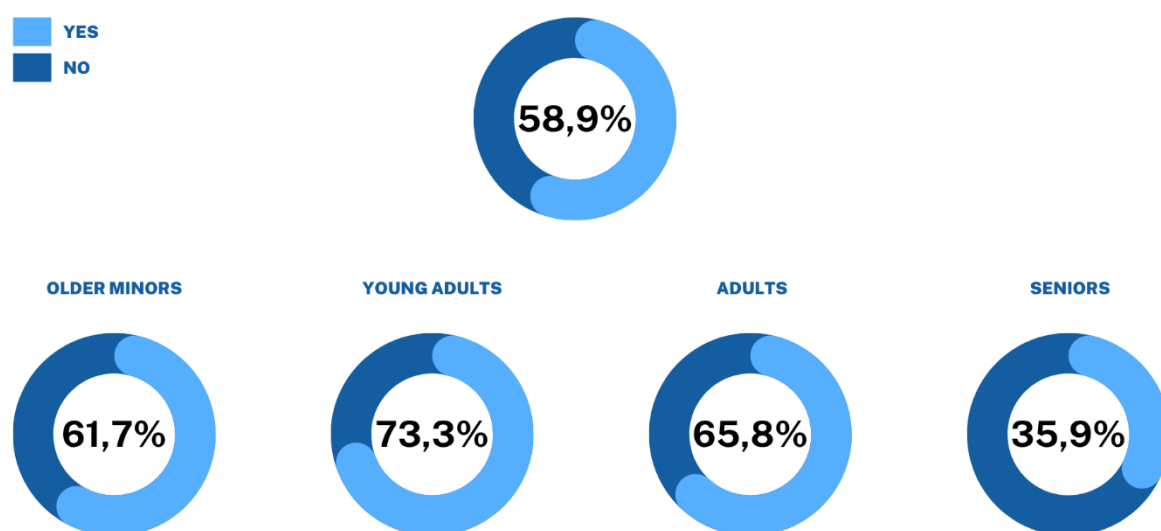
3. ALGORITHMIC LITERACY IN THE DIGITAL MEDIA SYSTEM

Over 50% of respondents are aware of the role of recommendation algorithms.

The research then focused on the topic of algorithmic literacy, examining algorithmic awareness levels and the use of the main curation² and reporting tools provided by online platforms among the Italian population.

Over 50% of Italians are aware of the role played by content recommendation algorithms in the way major online platforms operate (Figure 12), with awareness levels above average for young adults and below average for older ones.

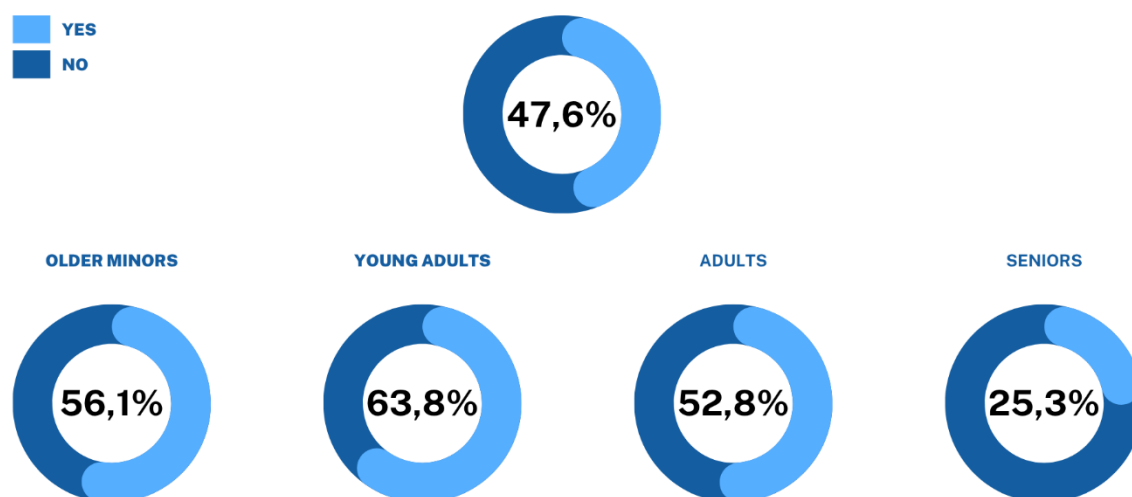
Figure 12: Awareness of content recommendation algorithms (% of the Italian population aged 14 and over)



47.6% of the population is aware of the opportunity to **personalize their online platforms experience** through content curation or reporting, with a higher-than-average level of knowledge for older minors and young adults and lower knowledge levels for older adults. In addition, 80% say they have used at least one curation tool and more than 60% say they have used at least one content reporting tool (Figure 13).

² Curation is defined as a set of activities aimed at changing the way in which content or advertising content or the main page is presented (feed, For You, etc.) and the way in which personal information and data are managed, as well as the viewing or searching for additional information on that same content on online platforms (social media, video-sharing platforms, etc.).

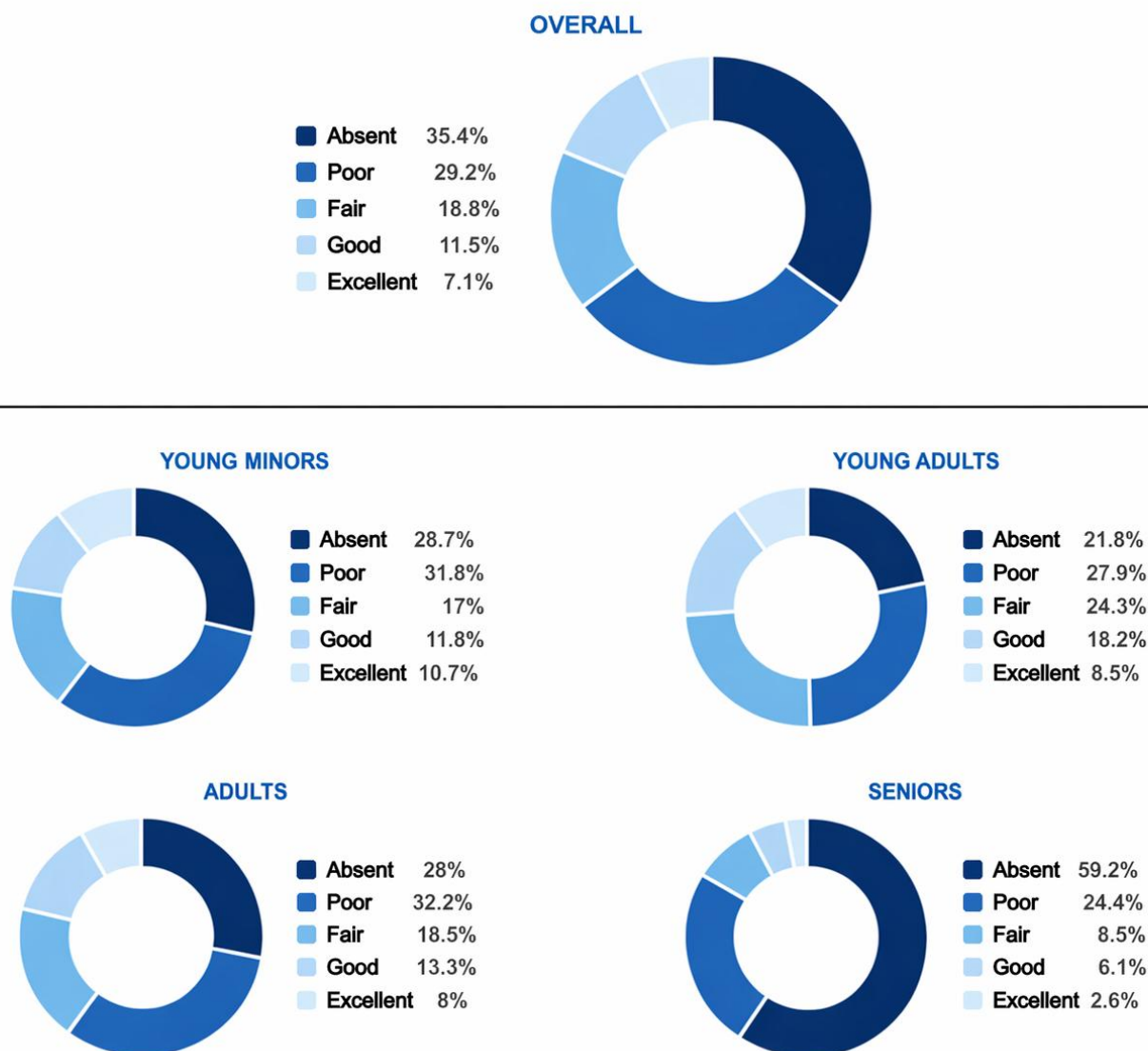
Figure 13: Awareness of the possibility of personalising one's experience of using online platforms through content curation or reporting methods (% of the Italian population aged 14 and over)



Algorithms, one in three Italians lacks any literacy.

Subsequently, an **algorithmic literacy index** was developed (Figure 14), assessing both the level of knowledge of algorithmic recommendation systems and personalization tools of the online platform usage experience, as well as the ability to independently perform content curation and reporting actions.

Figure 14: Level of algorithmic literacy (% of the Italian population aged 14 and over)



Nearly **one-third of the Italian population** aged 14 and over **lacks any degree of algorithmic literacy**, being unaware of the algorithmic mechanisms underlying the functioning of online platforms. 64.6% of the Italian population has zero or poor algorithmic literacy (limited to awareness aspects). On the contrary, just above 25% of the population has a fair or good degree of literacy, being fully aware of the matter and capable of performing certain content curation actions. Finally, only 7% achieves optimal awareness and has the ability to use curation and content reporting systems.

If lack of algorithmic literacy prevails among older adults, the literacy degree of young adults is fair/good. Among older minors, the share of individuals with excellent algorithmic literacy (10.7%) slightly exceeds the overall average, though their know-how is not particularly superior to that of the rest of the population. In particular, a medium-to-high level of algorithmic literacy is more prevalent

among young adults and among users with a broader and more varied range of online activities and internet uses.

4. CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the analysis conducted and the main empirical findings, specific policy recommendations were developed for each age group, as well as for programs, measures and initiatives on topics related to digital and media literacy.

With regard to **minors**, parental involvement appears crucial for their proper digital civic education, in which other family members and the entire school educational community can also intervene. Emphasis should be placed on targeted digital and media literacy programs seeking greater engagement with minors through innovative methods that effectively promote reporting and denunciation opportunities among this population segment – the most exposed to risky content, yet the least concerned. Schools remain a key reference point; in this context, both the active role of media educators, specialized trainers and experts, and the adoption of a digital citizenship education approach complementing digital and media literacy pathways are desirable.

For **adults**, specific interventions should be put in place on disinformation and hate speech, as well as initiatives and programs in media language literacy aimed at developing the specific skills needed to consume content in digital environments, with particular reference to the so-called audiovisual content piracy and to online gambling.

Finally, the data point to a greater vulnerability of **older adults**, suggesting that initiatives focused on achieving a better understanding of the media environment should be prioritized, including targeted interventions on practical aspects and tools connected to the most popular online platforms.

With regard to proposals on specific digital and media literacy policy recommendations, programs, measures and initiatives in the area of **disinformation**, priority should be given to developing educational curricula centered on the actions that users can take rather than solely on how to interpret media content, helping people develop the ability to think critically and analyze information in the digital world. The beneficiaries of such interventions should also include user categories highly inclined to seek news online, but who are typically not the focus of media literacy programs and initiatives (e.g. older adults or adults with medium/high education levels).

With regard to **hate speech**, the survey has highlighted the need for programs focusing on intensive internet users, given the widespread presence of this phenomenon in the information ecosystems of online platforms. As hate speech is also linked to information disorder, it would be useful to

complement measures on disinformation with awareness-raising interventions, rather than focusing solely on source verification.

As regards **copyright** protection and the prevention and combating of **online gambling**, it would be beneficial to focus on targeted programs and initiatives promoting a clear understanding that misusing protected content is unlawful and educating users on the proper ways to approach audiovisual and gambling content in the digital media environment. Given the specificities at stake, such interventions should be regarded as distinct from media literacy initiatives covering the other topics examined in this research.

On the specific issue of **algorithmic literacy** the landscape seems rather uneven, as shown on the one hand by the link between the extensive and varied number of online activities performed by users and their level of awareness of the role played by algorithms (algorithmic awareness), and on the other hand by the use of reporting tools by individuals experienced in consuming different types of content. Such evidence should prompt all stakeholders to develop algorithmic literacy programs and adequately diversify initiatives by target audience and type of intervention – from actions promoting a greater algorithmic awareness among the population to those educating citizens on how to use adequate protection or personalization tools when consuming online content.

Finally, with reference to the **role of institutions**, the research shows their strong potential for educating citizens – through targeted digital and media literacy programs and initiatives – both on specific user actions to report content and sources verification, and on how to seek assistance from competent authorities.