Being Media Literate in Croatia: Characteristics and Selected Dimensions of Media Literacy as a Social Practice

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ABSTRACT

This paper combines social practice theory, new literacy studies, and critical media literacy. Media literacy allows citizens to participate in society through traditional and digital media. Using existing survey instruments such as the News Literacy Scale and the Internet Skills Survey with originally developed items, we observe media literacy as a social practice encompassing the dimensions of *critical thinking*, *content production,* and *technical skills*. The three dimensions were further operationalised into additive scales of the *Critical perception of traditional news media (CPTNMS)*, *Critical perception of digital tools (CPODTS)*, *Media and social justice issues (MSJIS)*, *Content production (CPSS)*, and *Internet information search skills (IISSS)*. The results from a stratified survey conducted on a sample of adult Croatian citizens (n=1033), representative of gender, age, region, and education, show that age is the main predictor for all scales. The relation between scales shows a positive correlation between CPTNMS, CPODTS, and MSJIS. At the same time, CPTNMS, CPODTS, and MSJIS correlate negatively with the IISS. Those less skilled in internet search are less critical of traditional media and digital tools and are less convinced that media should cover social justice issues. Additionally, being more skilled in content production does not imply any other attitudinal relationship except for a negative association with the lack of IISSS. This paper contributes to the operationalisation of media literacy for sociological research and a better understanding of media literacy in the general population of Croatia.

Key words: social practice, media literacy, critical thinking, news literacy, internet skills

1. INTRODUCTION

"Whatever we know about our society, or indeed about the world in which we live, we know through the mass media". So wrote Luhmann (2000: 1) in the opening of his book on the reality of the mass media. This is a misleadingly simple statement to make. Luhmann uses it as a rhetorical device that helps him theorise the mass media as reality-producing institutions within his systemic approach. Knowing everything, or even something, about society is no easy task. No entire essence of reality can ever be grasped, only segments and fragments from different vantage points and perspectives. Luhmann is not talking about scientific knowledge but the knowledge that provides orientation in everyday life. So how does this knowledge emerge "through the mass media"? Do people internalise mass media messages? Or do they create different perspectives regardless of what the mass media provides them? The answer, from the sociology of media perspective, is not clear-cut. It lies somewhere in the middle of these two extremes.

This paper would require more space to cover the nuances of the complex debate between structure and agency, economy, and culture within social and media theory. Instead, we will take a relatively modest approach. We will try to understand how people perceive news and what they do with the media. Their daily practices are neither totally manipulated by power structures nor fully independent from structural pressures. People are usually not and do not have to be aware of structural forces to go on with their lives. However, understanding some of them helps to evaluate media and news differently. At the same time, while they may be critical of certain commercial digital tools, they are likely still using them to produce their content, socialise, participate in political processes and consume cultural content. These are the apparent contradictions of contemporary quotidian activities.

We conceptualise those daily activities as social practices. We look at media literacy as a form of social practice that allows people to participate in society through traditional (newspapers, television, radio) and digital media (social media, search engines, streaming services). In that sense, we align with New Literacy Studies (e.g., Gee, 2005, 2015; Maybin, 2005; Street, 1985, 2003), which look at literacy as a social phenomenon, not a set of cognitive or individual capacities. While most approaches favour qualitative studies to uncover "situated practices" in local settings and cultures (Gee, 2005), we believe there is much to be gained from operationalising the approach in a quantitative study. In that sense, we are interested in social practices that are "zooming out" of micro situations (Nicolini, 2013) to form "practice-arrangement bundles" (Schatzki, 2016).

Given the fragmentation, sporadic implementation, and lack of political will to fully support media literacy education in formal and informal education in Croatia,

it is necessary to understand the practices of media use in the everyday lives of citizens. Those practices are based on tacit knowledge and trial-and-error media use. Social practice theory allows us to study them empirically since they occur outside the education system. To follow that reasoning, we created a media literacy questionnaire that contains the dimensions of *critical thinking*, *production of content*, and *technical skills*, grounded in theoretical research (e.g., Kellner and Share, 2007, 2019) and validated survey instruments (e.g., van Deursen, Helsper i Eynon., 2016; Vraga et al., 2016). The survey was conducted in March 2022 on a stratified, online and face-to-face quota sample. Our main goal was to determine the essential characteristics of media literacy within the general population. The specific objectives were to determine the relationship between age, gender, education and media literacy; and whether a correlation between media literacy dimensions forms a coherent social practice.

2. SOCIAL PRACTICES, TACIT KNOWLEDGE, AND LEARNING

Practice theory has its roots in the philosophy of Wittgenstein and Heidegger, and it gained sociological prominence in the 1970s and 1980s through the works of Giddens, Bourdieu, and Foucault. Social practice theory is part of a vibrant and intense discussion in philosophy, sociology, and anthropology. It sees social ontology as a field of embodied, materially interwoven practices organised around shared practical understandings (Schatzki, 2001a: 12). It is optional to speak of micro and macro categories of everyday life, social interactions, and language on the one hand or institutions, structures and systems on the other (e.g. Coulter, 2001; Nicolini, 2016; Spaargaren et al., 2016). Social order is theorised as the outcome of the specific field of practice and is a feature of the area of practice. The attribution of social order to the nexus of practices differentiates this approach from individualist and non-individualist approaches (Schatzki, 2001a: 14), subjective and structural accounts of the social (Spaargaren, Laamers and Wenink, 2016: 6).

Actions that people perform are the actions that make sense for them to perform. They perform practices based on "practical intelligibility", which is determined by orientations towards ends and meanings that people attribute to specific actions over others (Schatzki, 2001b: 55). From such a standpoint, social orders are arrangements of people and the artefacts, organisms, and things through which they coexist. These entities relate and possess identity and meanings. "To say that orders are established within practices is to say that arrangements – their relations, identities, and meanings – are determined there" (2001b: 61). Practices do not have to be rational, explicit and conscious. They often operate with the aid of back-

ground knowledge for dealing with specific social situations and fields of practice. They depend on "tacit knowledge" or things we know how to do but cannot explain to someone else. Or even something that we may not know that we know but still perform in certain situations (Collins, 2001: 116).

Tacit knowledge is the foundation for shared or collective symbolic knowledge structures that are the foundation for action and social order (Reckwitz, 2002). A practice is a routinised way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described, and the world is understood (2002: 250). Routines are not static, as they often change through learning. Learning occurs not only through formal education but also in day-to-day activities. In different situations, agents transform themselves by interacting in the context of shared practices with one another and with the things and artefacts involved (Alkemeyer and Buschmann, 2016: 12). To learn means "to come to participate in a practice by acquiring and performing the skills and the knowledge required of acceptable participation" (2016: 14). This means that some knowledge "pre-dates" social practice and can be internalised and transformed to shape new types of social practice, which, in turn, forms new knowledge. Practices, in other words, can be sites where autonomy is exercised or constrained, and goods are created and shared (or not) (Haslanger, 2018: 232). Social practices are patterns of learned behaviour that enable us to coordinate as members of a group in creating, distributing, managing, maintaining, and eliminating a resource (or multiple resources). This coordination arises from mutual responsiveness to each other's behaviour and the resource(s) in question, as interpreted through shared meanings and cultural schemas (2018: 245).

It is evident, however, that in a capitalist society, resources are not distributed equally. Resource scarcity can result from private ownership over specific resources and profit-seeking mechanisms for governing those resources. The fact that power constitutes an essential dimension of society is not foreign to practice theory. There is an explicit acknowledgement that while society is formed and evolves through interconnected practices, reproducing the web of social practices generates different kinds of inequalities (Spaargaren et al., 2016: 12). Human action is always influenced from elsewhere. The effect of power relations shapes action and the capacity to act (2016: 181). This is especially the case for practices in media-related social practice arrangements. Citizens are navigating their day-to-day practices within a context over which they have little influence. The range of options for mediated practice is given by factors such as the level of socio-economic development (e.g., internet access, connectivity), regulatory environment (e.g., freedom of speech or authoritarian rules, support for commercial versus public media), and social context (e.g., cultural schemas of content production versus

content consumption). Citizens perform all sorts of practices within the above and other factors. However, the horizon for these practices is not determined by the citizens themselves. It is determined by government and corporate practices creating and governing available (digital) tools for citizens' communication, socialisation, and social practice.

3. LITERACY AND SOCIAL PRACTICE

Individual skills and knowledge acquisition have become a trope in contemporary capitalism, a set of marketable skills usually conducive to better employability and adaptation to the market (Gee, 2005, 2015). Literacy becomes increasingly commodified through components that can be owned and relevant reading materials that can be restricted (Bloome and Green, 2015). The commodification and marketisation of literacy can be understood as cultural ideology connected with individualism, individual achievement, and values defined by a market: "once the bits and materials of literacy are made accessible, acquisition becomes an individual responsibility constrained by the cultural, social, and economic capital one can individually employ" (2015: 28).

Literacy is traditionally associated with educational institutions, curriculum development and formal school learning (Rowsell and Pahl, 2015). It is linked to educational outcomes in the form of individual and cognitive skills for solving specific tasks and adapting to particular situations. Hobbs (2019: 851) defines it as the "knowledge, competencies, and life skills needed to participate in contemporary society by accessing, analysing, evaluating, and creating media messages in a variety of forms." The field of New Literacy Studies focuses not so much on the formal acquisition of individual skills but on what it means to think of literacy as a social practice (Street, 1985, 2003). It entails the recognition of multiple literacies, varying according to time and space, contested in relations of power (Street, 2003: 77). One of the main concerns is understanding "literacy events" that provide points of interaction between micro-level knowledge, relationships and subjectivity and macro-level regimes of truth, structural positioning and identity (Maybin, 2005: 205).

Literacy practices can exist in the relations between people, within groups and communities, rather than a set of properties residing in individuals (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2005: 8). Literacy practices change, and new ones are frequently acquired through informal learning and sense-making, as well as formal education and training. Part of this learning is the internalisation of social processes (2005: 13), which permeates all aspects of life. It exists in homes and everyday life, communities, activism and resistance, workplace, schools, locally and globally, across borders and languages (Rowsell and Pahl, 2015: 1). New Literacy scholars argue

that literacy is a sociocultural rather than a mental phenomenon. Literacy is centred on social and cultural groups and should be studied in a full range of social, cultural, historical, and institutional contexts and practices (Gee, 2015: 35).

The context in which media literacy practice is performed today is primarily shaped by the privatised context of the declining public value of knowledge (Golding and Murdock, 2023). Weakened traditional media and the abuse of internet platform power (Bilić, Prug and Žitko, 2021; Smyrnaios, 2018) create an unstable information environment. Its features include the structural fragility of journalism (McChesney and Pickard, 2011; Pickard, 2013), platform control over the advertising market (Bilić and Primorac, 2018; Couldry and Turow, 2014; Turow, 2011), lack of privacy and surveillance (Foster and McChesney, 2014; Zuboff, 2015, 2019), native advertising indistinguishable from journalistic content (Hardy, 2021), news recommender systems and filter bubbles (Helberger, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2014), disinformation and false information (Fenton, 2018; Pickard, 2019), among other issues.

3.1. Critical thinking and essential dimensions of media literacy

In this research, we conceptualise media literacy as an unequally distributed social practice that consists of crucial dimensions of *critical thinking, content production, and technical skills*. Critical thinking is an essential dimension of media literacy due to its focus on broader social contexts and power relations. As Kellner and Share (2019: XIII) argue, the daily public pedagogy that the mass media (including social media) teach about race, gender, class, sexuality, consumption, fear, morals, and the like, reflect corporate profit motives and hegemonic ideologies at the expense of social concerns. The role of media literacy is to raise critical awareness that involves perception and action against oppression. "This critical pedagogical approach to literacy offers the dual possibility of building awareness of media domination through critical analysis and empowering individuals to create alternative media for the counter-hegemonic expression" (Kellner and Share, 2019: XIII). *Critical thinking, content production* and *technical skills* allow citizens to participate in social, economic, cultural, and political processes.

In this paper, we are interested in whether and how they form an interconnected practice among Croatian citizens. In that sense, we aim to understand whether these dimensions can be considered a "practice-arrangement bundle" or a bundle of connected practices in situations of co-presence (Schatzki, 2016: 29). All social phenomena are slices and aspects of a mass of linked practices and arrangements spread across the globe and change over time (2016: 32). Understanding related practices imply "zooming out" of local practice fields towards empirically

tracing practices, including causal and material connections, affect, enablement, constraint, conflict and interference between them (Nicolini, 2016: 231).

Critical thinking (Cappello, 2017, 2019; Kellner and Share, 2005, 2007, 2019) and critical media literacy imply skills that increase democratisation and participation (Kellner and Share, 2019: 6). They include an understanding of the social construction of media content, the specific language and semiotics of the media, the role of audiences in understanding media content, the politics of representation of ideas and ideologies, institutions and media production, the role of media in social justice issues (2019: 8). It addresses how ideological frameworks operate in the cultural milieu that collectively shapes and is shaped by the media and the people who engage with them (2019: 16). As critical thinking focuses on counter-hegemonic expression, content production is an essential related dimension.

In the context of the widespread availability of internet connectivity, smartphones, computers, and social networking services, *content production* has become more accessible. The dynamics of media production and consumption have changed with the internet. Amateurs and ordinary citizens can quickly produce content (Baron, 2019). This possibility was hailed as a democratic potential in the early 2000s. However, with the spread of misinformation, conspiracy theories, and hate speech, the negative consequences of the low barrier to accessing and distributing opinions in public debates have become more pronounced. *Technical skills* are increasingly emphasised with digital technologies (Ferrari, 2013; van Dijk and van Deursen, 2014; van Laar et al., 2017). A person with digital literacy skills can use modern technologies to access information, manoeuvre through the complex web of information made available by digital technologies, and read and understand messages on digital media (Baron, 2019: 344).

3.2. Previous empirical research

Media literacy research is well-developed in Croatia (e.g., Ciboci, 2018; Ciboci-Perša, Levak and Beljo, 2021; Ciboci and Labaš 2019; Kanižaj, 2019). Most studies, however, focus on individual dimensions of media literacy, such as critical thinking, or literacy in the context of digital media and videogames. Empirically, studies usually focus on elementary and high school children, adolescents, students or teachers with smaller or convenient samples. It is also common to approach media literacy from a normative perspective, outlining desired social goals, usually derived from technological and policy developments. Thus far, there has been no empirical research on news literacy or internet skills among the general population in Croatia. In addition, we have found no scientific research that con-

ceptualises the connection between news media literacy and internet skills as a "practice-arrangement bundle" (Schatzki, 2016).

International news literacy research has shown that those who are more news literate are also more sceptical of information quality on social media (Vraga and Tully, 2021), less likely to endorse conspiracy theories (Craft, Ashley, Maksl, 2017), better able to recognise fake news (Nagel, 2022), and more likely to reject COVID-19 misinformation (Ashley et al., 2022). Internet skills research shows that higher internet skills lead to a more remarkable ability to reduce risks of privacy loss online (Büchi, Just and Latzer, 2017). Higher internet skills lead to problem-solving skills, whereas all internet skills build on each other sequentially (Laar et al., 2019). The perception of digital belonging increases social well-being and internet skills (Büchi, Festic and Latzer, 2018). Differences in the adoption of internet skills lead to new types of inequalities (Helsper, 2021; Puckett, 2022).

4. METHODOLOGY

Media literacy research at the general population level in Croatia is still developing. Therefore, our methodology is descriptive rather than focusing on multivariate statistical analyses. It attempts to establish foundations for future research that are both theoretically informed regarding the relevance of certain dimensions of media literacy and empirically sound in terms of essential relations that can be expected in future research. Our main goal was, therefore, to determine the essential characteristics of media literacy within the general population. Specific objectives were to determine the relationship between age, gender, education, and media literacy; and whether a correlation between media literacy dimensions forms a coherent social practice. Our main hypotheses are that a) socio-demographics are an important component of media literacy and that b) the dimensions of media literacy do not represent a coherent social practice.

4.1. Sample

The survey was conducted in March 2022 using a stratified, online and face-to-face quota sample. The online quota (84%) was collected with a 54.57% response rate using Computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI) from an online panel consisting of 18,847 members. The remaining quota (16%) was collected face-to-face with Computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) to represent older citizens and internet non-users. The total sample of 1033 respondents is representative of the Croatian population in terms of gender, age, region, and education. Detailed sample information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.   Sample socio-demographics

GENDER	N	%
Male	500	48.4
Female	533	51.6
Total	1033	100.0

AGE	N	%
18–25	107	10.3
26–35	175	16.9
36–45	210	20.3
46–55	177	17.2
56–65	180	17.4
66–75	146	14.1
75 or older	39	3.8
Total	1033	100.0

EDUCATION	N	%
No formal education	1	0.1
Primary school (elementary education)	72	7.0
Lower secondary (secondary completed does not allow entry to university)	253	24.5
Upper secondary (allows entry to university)	565	54.7
Post-secondary, non-tertiary (other upper secondary programs)	59	5.7
Upper-level tertiary (Master, Doctor)	84	8.1
Total	1033	100.0

REGION	N	%
Slavonia	187	18.1
Central Croatia	121	11.7
Northern Croatia	131	12.7
Zagreb	255	24.7
Istria, Primorje	135	13.0
Dalmatia	204	19.8
Total	1033	100.0

All analyses were conducted with the help of the IBM SPSS 21.0 statistical package, using descriptive and inferential statistics procedures, factor analysis and scaling.

4.2. Instruments

4.2.1. Socio-demographics (independents)

Age was measured based on the self-reported year of birth, re-coded to the age of respondents at the year of conducting research. *Education* was measured by the self-reported level of finished education at the time of conducting research, using a scale from 1 – unfinished elementary school, 2 – finished elementary school, 3 – vocational school, 4 – gymnasium, 5 – college/baccalaureus degree, 6 – faculty, PhD. *Gender* is respondents' self-reported gender (male, female).

4.2.2. Attitudes and scales (dependents)

To operationalise media literacy, we partially relied on validated scales such as the News Media Literacy Scale (Vraga et al., 2016), which primarily measures news literacy in the traditional mass media context and the Internet Skills Scale (van Deursen et al., 2016), which includes various content production and technical skills. From the News Media Literacy Scale, we used dimensions of "authors and audiences", "messages and meanings", and "representations and reality". They correspond to the elements of critical thinking outlined by Kellner and Share, such as "social construction of media content", "the specific language and semiotics of the media", "the role of audiences in understanding media content", "the politics of representation of ideas and ideologies", and "institutions and media production" (2019: 8). We also developed original items that cover social inclusiveness issues such as the representation of minorities, gender equality, sexual orientations in the media, and the importance of civil society media for democracy. To cover digital media, we added items on the critical perception of digital tools and information truthfulness from news apps, search engines, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and messengers. We used the "information search" and "creative skills" dimensions from the Internet Skills Scale, which correspond to our conceptualisation of technical skills and content production.

Critical perception of the traditional news media is measured with the battery of 13 items from the News Media Literacy scale (Vraga et al., 2016) listed by the highest arithmetic mean in Table 2 (see next section). Those items are saturated on a single factor in an orthogonal varimax rotation (with communalities ranging

from .720 to .401, and an average communality of .652), and the internal consistency of the additive scale is very high, with a Cronbach Alpha of .857. Therefore, an additive scale of *critical perception of the traditional news media* (CPOTNMS) is created, where a higher result indicates a more critical perception.

The concept of the *Critical perception of digital tools* is measured with six items related to the question: Are you concerned about the truthfulness of the information you receive from the following sources? Sources are listed by the highest arithmetic mean in Table 3 (see the next section). The items are saturated on a single factor in an orthogonal varimax rotation (with communalities ranging from .87 to .77 and an average communality of .82), and the internal consistency of the additive scale is very high, with a Cronbach Alpha of .899. Therefore, an additive scale of *critical perception of digital tools* (CPODTS) is created; where a higher result on the scale indicates a more critical attitude toward digital tools.

The *media and social justice issues perception* concept is measured with four variables listed by the highest arithmetic mean in Table 4 (see next section). The four items are saturated on a single factor in an orthogonal varimax rotation (with communalities ranging from .81 to .67 and an average communality of .77), and the internal consistency of the additive scale is high, with a Cronbach Alpha of .773. Therefore, an additive scale of *media and social justice issues perception* (MSJIPS) is created, where a higher result on the scale indicates a more strongly perceived need for social engagement in media.

Internet information search skills are measured with eight items from the Internet Skills Survey (van Deursen et al., 2016) related to (lack of) self-reported skills, listed by the highest arithmetic mean in Table 5 (see the next section). Results were measured on a Likert scale ranging from *1 – strongly disagree* to *5 – strongly agree*. They are saturated on a single factor in an orthogonal varimax rotation (with communalities ranging from .80 to .66 and an average communality of .73), and the internal consistency of the additive scale is high, with a Cronbach Alpha of .874. Therefore, an additive scale of *internet information search skills* (IISSS) is created. The higher result on the scale indicates a more strongly perceived lack of skill.

Three variables measured practices related to *the production of media-related content*, with responses recorded as "1-yes" and "2-no", which were re-coded for analyses as "1-yes" and "0-no". The questions were: "a. In the last year, have you created media content (e.g. news or a magazine article, a letter to a newspaper, any form of written literature, video material or audio material)?", and "b. In the last year, have you created any content on the Internet (e.g. blogs, comments on portals, social networks, forums, etc.)?". In addition, those who answered "yes" to the question "b." were asked "c. In the last year, have you created media content

related to messages on social and political topics that are important to you (e.g. writing a letter, publishing your photo, commenting on a portal or social network)?"

Technical skills related to internet content were a set of statements that were presented only to those respondents who reported creating internet–related content in the previous year. It is a battery of five items, listed by the highest arithmetic mean in Table 6 (see the next chapter). The five items that measure respondents' skills related to internet content production are saturated on a single factor in an orthogonal varimax rotation (with communalities ranging from .83 to .64, and an average communality of .74). The internal consistency of the additive scale is high, with a Cronbach Alpha of .794. Therefore, an additive scale of *content production skills* (CPSS) is created. A higher result on the scale indicates a greater perceived possession of skill.

Three statements were used to assess *the evaluation of a web portal*: "When you visit a new portal, which of the following do you do?" Those were: "a. I evaluate the look and feel of the portal (e.g., Impressum)", "b. I check whether different sides and different views are represented on the portal", and "c. I check if the portal is in line with my attitudes". Results were recorded as "1- yes" and "2-no", and for analysis purposes, they were re-coded as "1-yes" and "0-no".

5. RESULTS

5.1. Target variables and related socio-demographics

First, we are interested in the distribution of respondents concerning the scale of *Critical perception of traditional news media (CPOTNMS).* In sum, 60.3% of the whole sample agree or completely agree with all the statements, which points to a high level of critical perception of traditional media in the sample.

Table 2.   Critical perception of traditional news media, variables and distribution

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/nor disagree	Agree	Completely agree
A news story about conflict is more likely to be featured prominently	1%	2%	6%	37%	55%
Two people might see the same news story and obtain different information from it	0%	1%	5%	40%	53%
News companies choose stories based on what will attract the largest audiences	1%	1%	7%	39%	52%
People are influenced by news, whether they realise it or not	1%	1%	7%	42%	49%
News is designed to attract an audience's attention	1%	2%	9%	42%	47%
The owner of a media company influences the content that is produced	0%	2%	11%	41%	45%
A news story that has good pictures is more likely to show up in the news	0%	2%	15%	43%	40%
Production techniques can be used to influence a viewer's perception	0%	3%	11%	51%	35%
Lighting is used to make certain people in the news look good or bad	1%	3%	15%	47%	35%
News makes things more dramatic than they really are	1%	3%	25%	36%	35%
News coverage of a political candidate will influence people's opinions	1%	4%	19%	50%	26%
When taking photographs, photographers decide what is most important	1%	4%	23%	43%	29%
Individuals find news sources that reflect their own political values	2%	5%	24%	44%	24%

We have tested for significant differences and correlations for the critical perception scale related to the gender, age, and education of respondents. Our findings suggest no differences in gender because critical thinking is equally supported by both genders. Still, critical thinking is more strongly supported by younger respondents (r=.103, p=0.002) and slightly more by those with higher levels of education (r=.095. p<0.005) (for more detailed results, see Appendix).

Second, we are interested in the distribution of respondents concerning the scale of *Critical perception of the digital tools (CPODTS)*. Here, the sample is reduced to users of digital media. We found that, in sum, 15.3% of these users are critical of all digital tools, while the others vary, being least distrustful of Google search and messaging applications (WhatsApp, Viber, etc.) and most concerned about Facebook and news portals.

Table 3.   Critical perception of digital tools, variables and distribution of answers

Are you concerned about the truthfulness of the information you receive from the following sources:	No	Yes
messengers (e.g., WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook Messenger)	55%	45%
Twitter	55%	45%
YouTube	49%	51%
portals or applications for news distribution	42%	58%
Facebook	38%	62%

We have tested for significant differences and correlations for the critical perception scale related to the gender, age, and education of respondents. There are no differences related to gender, with both genders being approximately equally (non) critical of digital tools. Additionally, there are no differences associated with the education of our respondents. However, there is a significant difference related to respondents' age, with younger ones being more critical of digital media (r=-.154, p<0.000) (for more detailed results, see Appendix).

Third, we are interested in the distribution concerning the scale of *Media and social justice issues perception (MSJIPS)*. In sum, 37.5% of the whole sample agree or completely agree with the four statements regarding the need for more social engagement in the media.

Table 4.　　Media and social justice issues perception, variables and distribution of answers

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/nor disagreed	Agree	Completely agree
Media should report on gender inequality	2%	5%	18%	46%	29%
Media should report on national minorities	3%	7%	26%	46%	18%
Civil society media are important for democracy	3%	5%	34%	43%	15%
Media should report on people of various sexual orientations	8%	11%	31%	33%	16%

More women express this view (t(923)=-5.69, p<0.022), and those with higher education are slightly more in favour of social engagement, too (r=.095, p<0.003). Additionally, compared to older respondents, younger people are more accepting of the idea that media should be socially engaged (r=-.125, p<0.000) (see Appendix).

Fourth, we are interested in the distribution of the scale of *Internet information search skills (IISSS)* related to socio-demographics. In sum, 75.0% of the whole sample have either no or moderate troubles while trying to find content over the internet (Table 5). While there are no significant differences related to the gender of our respondents, older respondents are slightly less skilled (r=.076, p<0.031), and those with lower education levels report more troubles with content search and related issues (r=-.117, p<0.001).

Table 5.   Internet information search skills, variables and distribution of
answers

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/nor disagree	Agree	Completely agree
Sometimes I end up on websites without knowing how I got there	16%	31%	23%	26%	3%
Sometimes I find it hard to verify the information I have retrieved	16%	28%	32%	20%	3%
I find the way in which many websites are designed confusing	15%	38%	28%	16%	3%
All the different website layouts make working with the internet difficult for me	15%	41%	29%	12%	2%
I find it hard to decide what keywords are the best to use for online searches	28%	33%	27%	11%	1%
I get tired when looking for information online	24%	43%	23%	8%	1%
I find it hard to find a website I visited before	32%	44%	18%	6%	0%
I should take a course on finding information online	44%	39%	11%	5%	1%

Fifth, a total of 5.6% of respondents answered that they sometimes produce news-related content in the traditional type of media, and 30.5% of the whole sample responded that they produce internet-related content. Regarding production skills, measured as described in the instruments section, on all variables related to skills, 28.5% of respondents provided answers and are included in the *content production skills scale (CPSS)*. Of those, respondents (19.7% of the subsamples) agree or completely agree with all five statements related to their possession of production skills. The least reported skills among the respondents are related to website design while those most reported are associated with evaluating the safety of software downloads and use. There are no significant differences related to the gender of our respondents. Older respondents report fewer production skills compared to younger ones (r=-.125, p<0.000), and there is no significant difference related to education. However, a difference can be observed (r=.133, p<0.058) (also see Appendix).

Paško Bilić, Marija Brajdić Vuković: Being Media Literate in Croatia...

REV
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Table 6.   Content production skills scales, variables and distribution of answers

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/nor disagree	Agree	Completely agree
I know how to decide whether a software or application is safe to download	3%	6%	31%	50%	11%
I can create new content from existing internet images, music or videos	8%	13%	27%	38%	13%
I know which intellectual property rights apply to all online content	3%	13%	42%	34%	8%
I can make basic changes to content that someone else has created, internet images, music or videos	8%	21%	29%	33%	9%
I know how to design a website	18%	36%	25%	13%	8%

5.2. Scale relationships

In our analyses, as shown in Table 6, we have found that the *critical perception of traditional news media* correlates positively with the *critical perception of digital tools* and *media and social justice issues*. There is also no significant correlation between the critical perception of traditional news media and content production skills. At the same time, the *critical perception of traditional news media* correlates negatively with the perceived lack of personal skills related to *internet information search.* It means that those who perceive themselves as less skilled in internet information search, that is, those who report having more problems in that area, are also those who are less critical of traditional news media and are less convinced that there is a need for media to be more socially engaged (as seen in Table 1). While they report more problems with internet information search, they are also more critical of digital tools.

Media and social justice issues are perceived as more important (in addition) by those who base their additional research of conflicting information on *value judgment*. Interestingly, being *more skilled in internet content production* does not necessarily imply any other attitudinal relationship, except for a negative association with the lack of *internet information search skills*. This indicates that those who are less skilled in information search also have fewer content production skills.

Table 6.   Correlations between scales (Pearson's correlation coefficient (r)).

	COPTNMS	MSJIPS	CPODTS	CPSS	IISSS
Critical perception of traditional news media scale (CPOTNMS)	1	**.206**[**]	**.123**[**]	,097	**-.206**[**]
Media and social justice issues scale (MSJIPS)	**.206**[**]	1	.018	.039	**-.105**[**]
Critical perception of digital tools scale (CPODTS)	**.123**[**]	.018	1	.019	**.112**[**]
Content production scale (CPSS)	.097	.039	.019	1	**-.217**[**]
Internet information search skills scale (IISSS)	**-.206**[**]	**-.105**[**]	**.112**[**]	**-.217**[**]	1

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

5.3. Content production and social practice

Only 6.5% of respondents have created traditional media-type content, and 32.3% of the whole sample have created internet-related content. In addition, 46.1% of the subsample have reported creating content related to social or political issues. Regarding socio-demographics, while there is a significant difference in traditional media content production, with men being more frequent creators, there is no significant gender difference in the production of internet-related content, not even if the type of content is related to social or political issues. However, internet content creators tend to be younger (r=-.150, p<0.000), especially those dealing with social and political issues in their content (r=-.185, p<0.000). Traditional media content creators tend to be somewhat more educated (r=.068, p<0.036), and internet content creators tend to be more educated in a more significant matter (r=.184, p=0.000). There are no differences in education regarding the content of a more social and political issue.

Those creating internet content are interested in the portal's visual outlook and overall impression (r=.158, p<0.000). They are also interested in whether the portal presents different views and attitudes, and sides of a story (r=.149, p<0.000) but also, even though slightly more than not, whether the outlet is in line with their

attitudes (r=.093, p<0.013). However, those creating content related to social and political issues are mainly interested in the portal's visual outlook and overall impression (r=.225, p<0.000) while other described features are insignificant to them.

Those producing content on the internet, generally, are at the same time those who are slightly more critical of traditional media (r=.084, p<0.013). They are also more skilled in searching for information online (r=-.126, p<0.000). There are no significant relationships related to the critical perception of digital tools or the social engagement of media. Those creating content related to social or political issues are also more critical of traditional media (r=.216, p<0.000) and are more skilled in internet information search (r=.208, p<0.000). There are no other significant correlations related to previously described additive scales.

6. DISCUSSION

Our main goal was to understand the essential characteristics of media literacy among the general population. Age is the main predictor for all of the additive scales, although not always in the expected ways. Older citizens use traditional media more than younger ones, who rely more on digital tools. It might have been reasonable to assume that senior citizens are also more critically aware of how news is constructed and disseminated. Contrary to this expectation, our results show that younger citizens are more critical of traditional media (CPOTNMS), more critical of digital tools (CPODTS), and more supportive of social justice issues in the media (MSJIPS). At the same time, older respondents are less skilled in information search (IISS) and content production (CPSS). This points to the importance of expanding formal and informal media literacy education to lifelong learning.

On the other hand, it might also suggest that younger citizens are following news and current events information less due to their disillusionment with the structural features of traditional media. The structural features of the contemporary media environment form an *a priori* to media literacy practice and our (tacit) "knowledge of the world in which we live", to paraphrase Luhmann. There is autonomy in the way that structural practices can be interpreted and adopted by citizens, especially if aided by educational processes. For this to occur, an understanding of the structural context should be acquired. However, given that formal education in the field of media literacy in Croatia is fragmented and in its early stages, older citizens are left to "become media literate" on their own, through trial-and-error activities. Our results show that those with higher levels of education express greater critical awareness of traditional news media (CPOTNMS), are more in favour of social justice issues in the media (MSJIPS), and have less trouble when searching

for information online (IISS). Gender is the main predictor only for social justice issues (MSJIPS), with women being more supportive of media coverage related to minorities, gender, sexual orientations, and civil society media.

We conceptualised media literacy as a social practice based on "practical intelligibility", which is determined by orientations towards ends and meanings that people attribute to specific actions (Schatzki, 2001b: 55). In the context of critical media literacy, it is expected that critical awareness of media domination empowers individuals to create alternative media and engage in counter-hegemonic expression (Kellner and Share, 2019: XIII). Our results show that critical awareness of traditional news media (CPOTNMS) correlates positively with the critical perception of digital tools (CPODTS) and social justice issues (MSJIPS). However, contrary to theoretical expectations, there is no positive correlation between critical awareness, content production (CPSS), and information search (IISS). The only positive correlation observed is between higher content production (CPSS) and higher internet search skills (IISS). This shows that critical media literacy, as conceptualised in this research, is not necessarily a "practice-arrangement bundle" (Schatzki, 2016) since citizens do not use critical awareness to be more participative and engaged in digital public spaces. In general, only 32.3% of the sample have created internet-related content. Less than half of those (46.1% of the subsample) have created social or political-related content. This points to the fact that "tacit knowledge" (Collins, 2001; Reckwitz, 2002) is not sufficient to create media-literate citizens that utilise critical thinking, content production, and technical skills to participate in society and social processes through active engagement. The learned behaviour of trial-and-error literacy in everyday life (Haslanger, 2018) results in fragmented media literacy practices.

Internet content creators are generally younger. Politically engaged citizens online evaluate news web portals based solely on the portals' visual outlook and overall impression (e.g., checking the Impressum). They are less interested in whether the portal represents different views and attitudes or is in line with their pre-existing attitudes. At the same time, critical perception of traditional media (CPOTNMS) correlates negatively with a lack of information search skills (IISS). Those who are less skilled in searching for information are less critical of traditional news media (CPOTNMS) and are less convinced that media should be socially engaged (MSJIPS). Interestingly, they do have a positive correlation with the critical perception of digital tools (CPODTS). Nonetheless, this finding is the most concerning as it shows that some segments of the population are more susceptible to uncritically evaluating information. Comparative international research has shown that those who are less critical of traditional news media (CPOTNMS) and have lower levels of news media literacy are also more susceptible to conspiracy theories (Craft et

al., 2017), fake news (Nagel, 2022), and COVID-19 misinformation (Ashley et al., 2022). Moreover, those with fewer internet skills, particularly in information search (IISS), encounter more problems in reducing their online privacy risks (Büchi et al., 2017).

7. CONCLUSION

Even amid disinformation, privacy abuse, and surveillance, media literacy may not seem like a burning social or political issue compared to crises like environmental challenges, war, and poverty. However, unless we are experts in ecology, security, or social well-being, all that we know about these issues is obtained through the media, to paraphrase Luhmann. Yet, Luhmann ignored the matter of media literacy and the fact that different news received through different channels provides varying types of "knowledge" and sometimes even outright false statements. Media are not neutral carriers of information. Information is always constructed, produced, and consumed within a political, economic, and cultural context. Awareness of the contextual "a priori" makes citizens media literate in their social practices. However, our research results indicate that media literacy does not form a coherent, connected set of dimensions. Nonetheless, there are also limits to how far we can take this argument. The technical skills dimension is minimal since it is operationalised only within the context of information search, while content production is analysed separately. In future research, technical skills should be expanded to include managing digital files, software, data, privacy, social engagement, data sharing, and communication in online spaces. Due to the use of tested and validated scales, multivariate methods could have been utilised to provide further insights and more fine-grained conclusions. However, due to the complexity of media literacy, we decided to look for simple correlations between the analysed dimensions to determine whether they form a coherent social practice. Future research should engage more with the questions of why such fragmentation exists and why critical thinking does not lead to more active participation. Future policy development should aim to develop formal and informal learning as a holistic practice that provides orientation, critical evaluation, and engagement in contemporary society. Media literacy should not be seen as a set of competencies an individual possesses but rather as a social practice that develops through education, family socialisation, peer group participation and communication in public spaces. Tackling the fragmentation of media literacy within Croatia's general population and educational curriculum requires an integrated and holistic approach.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

Ethical approval was issued by Institute for Development and International Relations on 26 January 2022

DATA ACCESS AND TRANSPARENCY

Anonymised data and analytical materials are available from the author upon request.

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APPENDIX

Table 8.   Scales and gender (mean, SD, and range)

		CPOTNMS	CPODTS	MSJIPS	IISSS	CPSS
Male	Mean	54.36	3.08	14.13	18.89	16.29
	N	441	292	451	406	161
	Std. Deviation	6.41	2.44	3.02	5.91	3.91
	Range	35.00	6.00	16.00	32.00	18.00
Female	Mean	54.85	3.23	15.21	18.16	15.66
	N	452	262	474	405	133
	Std. Deviation	5.74	2.41	2.76	5.59	3.80
	Range	28.00	6.00	16.00	26.00	20.00
Total	Mean	54.61	3.15	14.68	18.52	16.01
	N	893	553	925	811	294
	Std. Deviation	6.08	2.43	2.94	5.76	3.87
	Range	35.00	6.00	16.00	32.00	20.00

Table 9.   Scales and education (mean, SD, and range)

		CPOTNMS	CPODTS	MSJIPS	IISSS	CPSS
Primary school (elementary education)	Mean	51.93	3.08	14.38	20.68	14.12
	N	56	17	62	18	5
	Std. Dev.	5.99	2.79	2.25	5.41	3.56
	Range	26.00	6.00	11.00	15.00	8.00
Lower secondary (secondary completed does not allow entry to university)	Mean	54.28	3.13	14.23	19.53	15.11
	N	203	93	201	149	49
	Std. Dev.	6.43	2.49	3.03	5.96	3.47
	Range	27.00	6.00	14.00	27.00	15.00

		CPOTNMS	CPODTS	MSJIPS	IISSS	CPSS
Upper secondary (allows entry to university)	Mean	54.76	3.09	14.77	18.48	16.05
	N	501	346	528	505	187
	Std. Dev.	6.05	2.41	2.91	5.68	3.96
	Range	35.00	6.00	16.00	32.00	20.00
Post-secondary, non-tertiary (other upper secondary programs)	Mean	55.79	3.26	14.63	17.51	16.79
	N	55	41	55	56	20
	Std. Dev.	5.43	2.34	3.28	6.019	3.97
	Range	29.00	6.00	16.00	24.00	16.00
Upper-level tertiary (Master, Doctor)	Mean	55.52	3.46	15.44	17.17	16.79
	N	78	56	79	84	34
	Std. Dev.	5.26	2.42	2.96	5.37	3.69
	Range	28.00	6.00	16.00	24.00	17.00
Total	Mean	54.60	3.14	14.68	18.52	16.01
	N	893	553	925	811	294
	Std. Dev.	6.07	2.42	2.94	5.76	3.87
	Range	35.00	6.00	16.00	32.00	20.00

Table 10.   Scales and age of respondent (mean, SD, and range)

		CPOTNMS	CPODTS	MSJIPS	IISSS	CPSS
18-25	Mean	55.29	3.61	15.02	19.16	16.89
	N	83	82	90	101	43
	Std. Deviation	6.44	2.38	2.67	5.89	4.94
	Range	29.00	6.00	11.00	25.00	20.00
26-35	Mean	55.84	3.91	14.19	17.75	16.61
	N	153	117	154	168	58
	Std. Deviation	5.76	2.15	3.21	5.25	4.11
	Range	29.00	6.00	16.00	24.00	18.00
36-45	Mean	54.56	2.79	14.49	17.63	16.70
	N	184	141	184	206	71
	Std. Deviation	6.64	2.35	3.12	6.05	2.98
	Range	35.00	6.00	16.00	32.00	15.00
46-55	Mean	54.55	2.75	14.68	19.10	15.84
	N	162	106	167	161	60
	Std. Deviation	5.47	2.55	2.88	5.66	3.43
	Range	26.00	6.00	16.00	25.00	14.00
56-65	Mean	54.12	2.88	15.05	18.79	14.08
	N	159	62	165	106	43
	Std. Deviation	5.84	2.57	2.82	5.98	3.53
	Range	28.00	6.00	16.00	27.00	18.00
66-75	Mean	53.38	2.41	14.89	20.65	13.58
	N	120	31	130	47	13
	Std. Deviation	6.51	2.33	2.64	5.50	3.93
	Range	27.00	6.00	14.00	23.00	13.00
75 or older	Mean	54.58	3.62	14.53	19.84	16.55
	N	31	13	34	22	6
	Std. Deviation	4.60	2.71	3.20	4.44	2.82
	Range	25.00	6.00	13.00	21.00	11.00
Total	Mean	54.61	3.15	14.68	18.52	16.01
	N	893	553	925	811	294
	Std. Deviation	6.08	2.43	2.94	5.76	3.87
	Range	35.00	6.00	16.00	32.00	20.00

Biti medijski pismen u Hrvatskoj: karakteristike i odabrane dimenzije medijske pismenosti kao društvene prakse

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SAŽETAK

U ovom se radu koriste teorije društvene prakse, nove studije pismenosti i kritike medijske pismenosti. Medijska pismenost omogućuje građanima sudjelovanje u društvu putem tradicionalnih i digitalnih medija. Primjenom odabranih dimenzija postojećih instrumenata kao što su *News media literacy scale* i *Internet skills survey* te originalno razvijenih čestica, medijsku pismenost promatramo kao društvenu praksu kritičkog mišljenja, proizvodnje sadržaja i dimenzije tehničkih vještina. Tri su dimenzije dalje operacionalizirane u aditivne ljestvice kritičke percepcije tradicionalnih medija (KPTM), kritičke percepcije digitalnih alata (KPDA), društvene uključivosti u medijima (DUM), proizvodnje sadržaja (PS) i vještina pretraživanja internetskih informacija (PII). Rezultati istraživanja provedenog na uzorku odraslih hrvatskih građana (n=1033) reprezentativnih za spol, dob, regiju i obrazovanje pokazuju da je dob glavni prediktor za sve ljestvice. Odnos između ljestvica pokazuje pozitivnu korelaciju između KPTM-a, KPDA-a i DUM-a. U isto vrijeme, KPTM, KPDA i DUM u negativnoj su korelaciji s PII-jem. Oni manje vješti u internetskom pretraživanju manje su kritični prema tradicionalnim medijima i digitalnim alatima i manje su uvjereni da mediji trebaju pokrivati pitanja društvene uključivosti. Također, biti vještiji u proizvodnji sadržaja ne podrazumijeva nikakav drugi odnos, samo onaj koji se odnosi na negativnu povezanost s nedostatkom PII-ja. Ovaj rad pridonosi operacionalizaciji medijske pismenosti za sociološka istraživanja i boljem razumijevanju medijske pismenosti u općoj populaciji u Hrvatskoj.

Ključne riječi: društvena praksa, medijska pismenost, kritičko mišljenje, pismenost o vijestima, internetske vještine