


# Youth Vulnerability to disinformation **in Kosovo**

Mini Study Report

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# Introduction

## Summary

In recent years, the information environment has undergone a significant transformation, particularly due to the widespread use of social media and digital platforms. Young people are among the most active users of these platforms, relying heavily on them for news, communication, and social interaction. While this digital ecosystem provides unprecedented access to information, it also increases exposure to misinformation and disinformation, which can spread quickly and influence perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.

Disinformation—defined as false or misleading information spread intentionally or unintentionally—has become a growing concern globally and at the local level. In contexts where political, social, and interethnic issues are sensitive, such as in Kosovo, the impact of disinformation can be particularly significant. It can shape public opinion, deepen divisions, and undermine trust in institutions and media.

This mini study was conducted between October 2025 and March 2026 to better understand how young people engage with information online, how frequently they encounter misleading content, and how they respond to it. The study also examines the level of awareness and trust in fact-checking mechanisms, as well as the extent to which young people feel vulnerable to disinformation.

By analyzing both quantitative data and qualitative responses, this report aims to provide evidence-based insights into youth behavior and perceptions. The findings are intended to inform civil society organizations (CSOs), educators, media professionals, and policymakers in designing more effective interventions to counter disinformation and strengthen media literacy among young people.

# Findings

## Demographics and Background

**The respondent group is primarily composed of young adults, with the largest share aged 23–26 (approximately one-third). This is followed by respondents aged 27–29 (around 30%) and 19–22 (around one-quarter), while a smaller proportion (around 10%) are aged 15–18. This distribution indicates that the study largely reflects the perspectives of young adults who are likely to be active both academically and professionally.**

In terms of gender, female respondents represent the majority (around 60%), while male respondents account for approximately 35%, and a small percentage identify as other or prefer not to disclose. This distribution suggests that the findings may slightly reflect stronger engagement or participation among female respondents.

**Regarding occupation, the sample is relatively balanced between employed individuals (just over half) and students (around 40%), with a small proportion unemployed. This diversity provides insights into how both students and working youth interact with information in their daily lives.**

# Media Consumption Patterns

The data clearly shows that social media platforms dominate the information ecosystem for young people. A strong majority report using platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, while TikTok is also widely used, reflecting current global trends in digital media consumption. Traditional media sources such as television and online news portals are still present but play a secondary role. Additionally, many respondents indicated that they receive information through informal channels such as friends and family, which suggests that information flows through both digital and interpersonal networks.

Time spent online is notably high, with the vast majority of respondents spending at least 3 hours per day online, and a significant proportion exceeding 5 hours daily.

**70%**

Of respondents use Instagram and Facebook

This level of engagement increases the likelihood of repeated exposure to both accurate and misleading information, making it more difficult to distinguish between the two.

## The findings confirm that social media is the dominant source of news among youth.

- TikTok is used by approximately 60%, highlighting its growing importance
- Online portals and TV remain relevant but secondary (around 40–50%)

Additionally, informal sources such as friends and family are frequently mentioned, indicating that information circulates not only through formal media but also through personal networks.

Time spent online is notably high:

- Around 45% spend more than 5 hours per day online
- Around 40% spend 3–5 hours
- Only a small minority spend less than 3 hours

This high level of exposure significantly increases the likelihood of encountering misleading information.

## Exposure to Disinformation

Exposure to disinformation is widespread and frequent among respondents. Approximately 70% report encountering false or misleading information often or very often, indicating that such content is a regular part of their online experience rather than an occasional occurrence.

The analysis of open-ended responses reveals that politics is by far the most common topic associated with misinformation, mentioned by the majority of respondents. This includes local political developments, international relations, and geopolitical conflicts.

For example, one respondent noted:

***“I most often see misinformation related to daily politics and relations between communities... especially during times of crisis.”***

Other frequently mentioned areas include health (especially vaccines), global conflicts, and public figures. However, respondents generally perceive political misinformation as more impactful and potentially harmful compared to other types, such as entertainment or celebrity news.

Exposure to disinformation is widespread and frequent:

- Around 70% report seeing false or misleading information often or very often
- Only a negligible percentage report never encountering such content

This indicates that disinformation is not occasional but rather a regular part of the online experience for youth.

When asked about topics, respondents overwhelmingly identified politics as the primary area of misinformation (over 70%), followed by:

- Global conflicts and wars
- Health-related topics (e.g., vaccines)
- Public figures and entertainment

These responses highlight that disinformation is especially prevalent in highly sensitive or emotionally charged topics, where it can influence public perception and social dynamics.

Another respondent emphasized:

***“Global news, particularly topics related to war and politics, appears to be a major source of misinformation.”***

# Sharing Behavior and Influence

A key finding of the study is that a significant proportion of respondents have engaged in sharing information that later turned out to be false. Around 40% acknowledge that they have done so, while an additional 35% are uncertain, suggesting that they may have unknowingly contributed to the spread of misinformation.

This highlights the role of users not only as consumers but also as active participants in the dissemination of information, often without full awareness of its accuracy.

Furthermore, the data indicates that online information has a considerable influence on individuals:

- **Around 55–60% report that online content has influenced their opinions or decisions**
- **Approximately 30% are unsure, suggesting indirect or unrecognized influence**

This demonstrates that digital content has a tangible impact on attitudes and decision-making processes, reinforcing the importance of addressing misinformation at its source.

# Ability to Identify Disinformation

Respondents demonstrate moderate confidence in their ability to identify false information:

- Most rate themselves 3 or 4 out of 5
- Around 20% feel highly confident
- A smaller group (around 15%) report low confidence

This indicates that while many believe they can detect misinformation, there is still significant uncertainty and room for improvement.

When identifying suspicious content, respondents rely on several key indicators:

- Lack of a credible source (over 70%)
- Political bias (around 60%)
- Emotional or sensational language (around 60%)
- Clickbait headlines and excessive advertising (around 50%)

These findings suggest that youth are aware of common characteristics of disinformation, particularly manipulative language and lack of transparency.

# Verification Practices

Verification behaviors vary significantly:

- Over 80% use Google search as a primary verification tool
- Around 60% consult official sources
- Only 30–35% use fact-checking platforms

However, 15–20% report not verifying information at all, which represents a critical vulnerability.

Some respondents highlighted the need for better tools and skills:

***“Having reliable ways and sources to verify information myself would help.”***

Others acknowledged inconsistent behavior:

***“Depending on the topic sometimes I check, sometimes not.”***

This suggests that verification is often situational rather than habitual.

# Awareness and Trust in Fact-Checking Platforms

Awareness of fact-checking initiatives remains limited:

- Around 40% have heard of them but lack knowledge
- Around 35% are not aware at all
- Around 20% are aware but do not follow their work
- Less than 10% actively follow fact-checking platforms

Trust levels are mixed:

- Around half express neutral attitudes
- 30–35% view them as trustworthy
- A smaller portion express skepticism

Qualitative responses reveal both appreciation and concern. For example:

***“They are essential for fighting misinformation and help people reach accurate news.”***

At the same time:

***“These platforms can be controlled and manipulated... to serve powerful interests.”***  
***This reflects a broader issue of trust in institutions and media credibility.***

# Perceived Vulnerability of Youth

A strong consensus exists regarding vulnerability:

- Approximately 85–90% believe young people are vulnerable to disinformation

Respondents attribute this to:

- High exposure to social media
- rapid spread information
- Limited verification habits
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However, some nuanced views emerged:

***“Young people can be vulnerable...  
but they are also more prone to identifying it.”***

This suggests that youth are both at risk and potentially capable of developing resilience, depending on education and awareness

# Discussion

The findings reveal a complex relationship between youth and disinformation. On one hand, young people are highly connected, digitally active, and aware of misinformation risks. On the other hand, their high exposure, combined with inconsistent verification practices, makes them vulnerable.

Social media platforms play a central role, acting as both primary information sources and key channels for disinformation spread. Political content, in particular, dominates misinformation narratives, which can have broader implications for democratic processes and social cohesion.

While respondents demonstrate some critical awareness, there is a clear gap between recognition and action. Many can identify suspicious content but do not consistently verify it, and a notable proportion still shares misleading information.

Additionally, limited awareness and mixed trust in fact-checking platforms indicate that these tools are underutilized and not fully integrated into users' habits.

# Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight a complex and evolving relationship between young people and the digital information environment. On one hand, youth are highly engaged, digitally connected, and aware of the presence of disinformation. On the other hand, their high exposure to online content, combined with inconsistent verification practices, makes them particularly vulnerable.

Social media platforms play a central role in shaping how information is consumed and shared. While they provide accessibility and speed, they also facilitate the widespread circulation of misleading content, particularly in politically sensitive areas. The dominance of political misinformation identified in this study raises important concerns about its potential impact on public opinion, democratic processes, and social cohesion.

Although respondents demonstrate a basic ability to recognize common indicators of misinformation, this awareness is not always accompanied by consistent critical behavior. The gap between recognizing false information and actively verifying it remains a key challenge.

Furthermore, limited awareness and mixed trust in fact-checking platforms suggest that existing mechanisms to counter disinformation are not fully reaching or engaging young audiences. Strengthening trust, visibility, and accessibility of these platforms is essential.

Overall, the study confirms that youth are both at risk and part of the solution. With the right tools, education, and institutional support, they can become more resilient and responsible consumers and sharers of information.

Addressing youth vulnerability to disinformation requires a comprehensive approach that combines media literacy education, institutional action, and stronger collaboration between civil society, media, and policymakers. Only through such coordinated efforts can the impact of disinformation be effectively reduced and a more informed and critical society be fostered.

# Recommendations

## For Educators

- Integrate media and digital literacy into formal education
- Encourage critical thinking and fact-checking skills from an early age

## For Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

- Organize trainings, workshops, and awareness campaigns targeting youth
- Develop practical tools and resources for identifying disinformation

## For Media and Fact-Checking Organizations

- Increase visibility and accessibility of fact-checking platforms
- Build trust through transparency, independence, and clear communication

## For Policymakers and Institutions

- Support regulation of digital platforms, especially regarding misleading content
- Invest in public awareness campaigns
- Strengthen cooperation with NGOs and media actors

