



Media Literacy and Digital Participation

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Short CV

- Doctor of Communication Science (2014)
- Docent at the University of Latvia and Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences
- Media literacy project manager and media literacy trainer (10+ years experience)
- Expert position at the Ministry of Culture, Media Policy Division (2015-2019)
- In my young days – journalist

- Distinguished Humphrey Fellowship Program at the University of Washington (programme «Media and information» in 2021)

Exploring the paradox:

**digital participation
as meaningful
empowerment
(opportunity) or just
superficiality?**

Agenda of the workshop

1. Examples of digital participation in the context of media literacy

2. Group work in 3 groups (15-20 min)

3. Presentation of the group work (5 min each)

4. Summary, Q&A

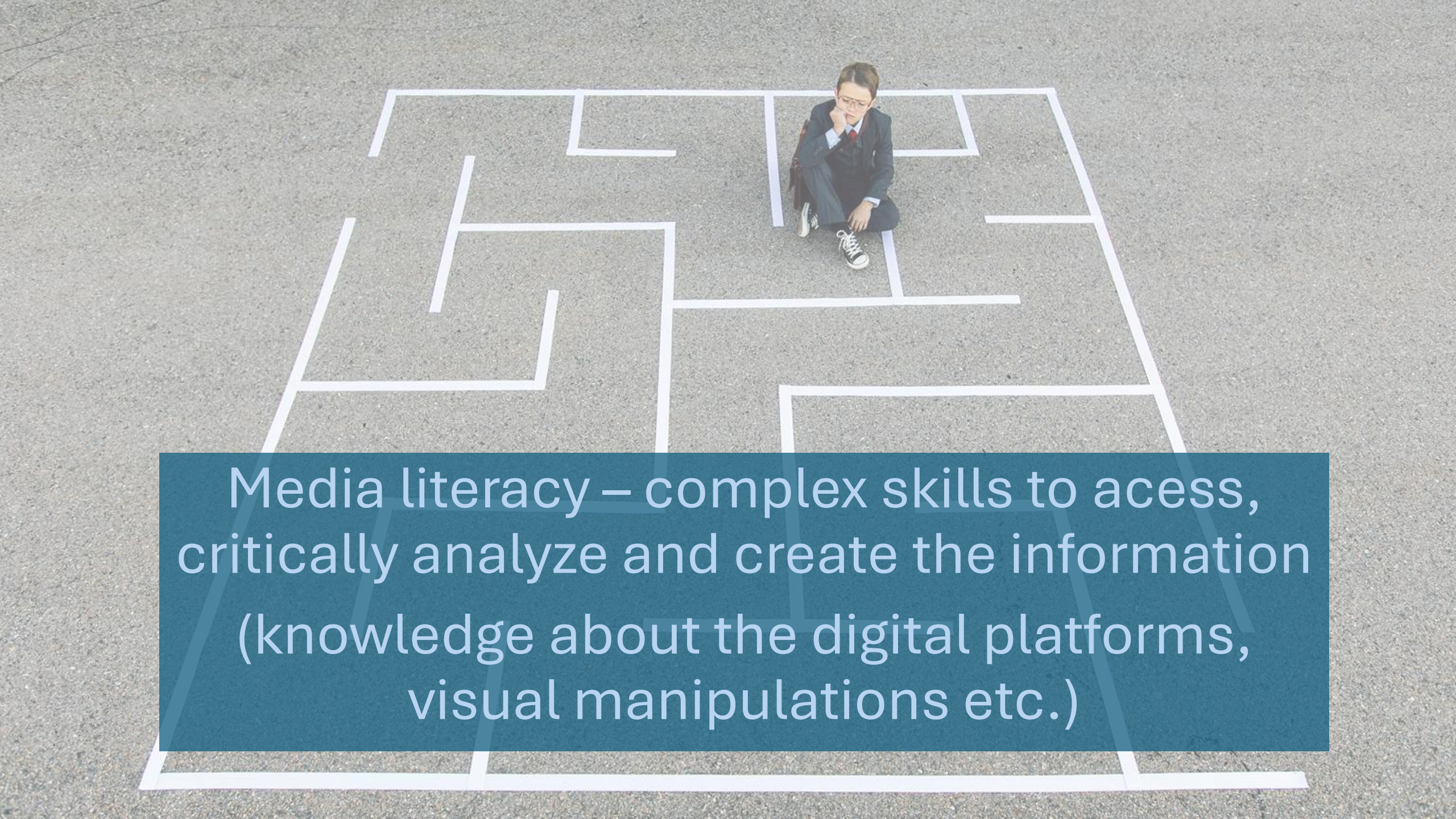


Let's vote!

To what extent do you think digital participation represents meaningful engagement rather than superficial action?

1 = very superficial

10 = very meaningful

A young boy in a school uniform is sitting in the center of a large maze drawn on a paved surface. He is looking thoughtful, with his hand on his chin. The maze is composed of white lines on a grey asphalt background. The boy is wearing a dark suit, a white shirt, a red tie, and glasses. He has a brown bag slung over his shoulder.

Media literacy – complex skills to access, critically analyze and create the information (knowledge about the digital platforms, visual manipulations etc.)

Examples of digital participation

1

Digital slactivism

«Activity that uses the internet to support political or social causes in a way that does not need much effort, for example creating or signing online petitions»

Cambridge Dictionary

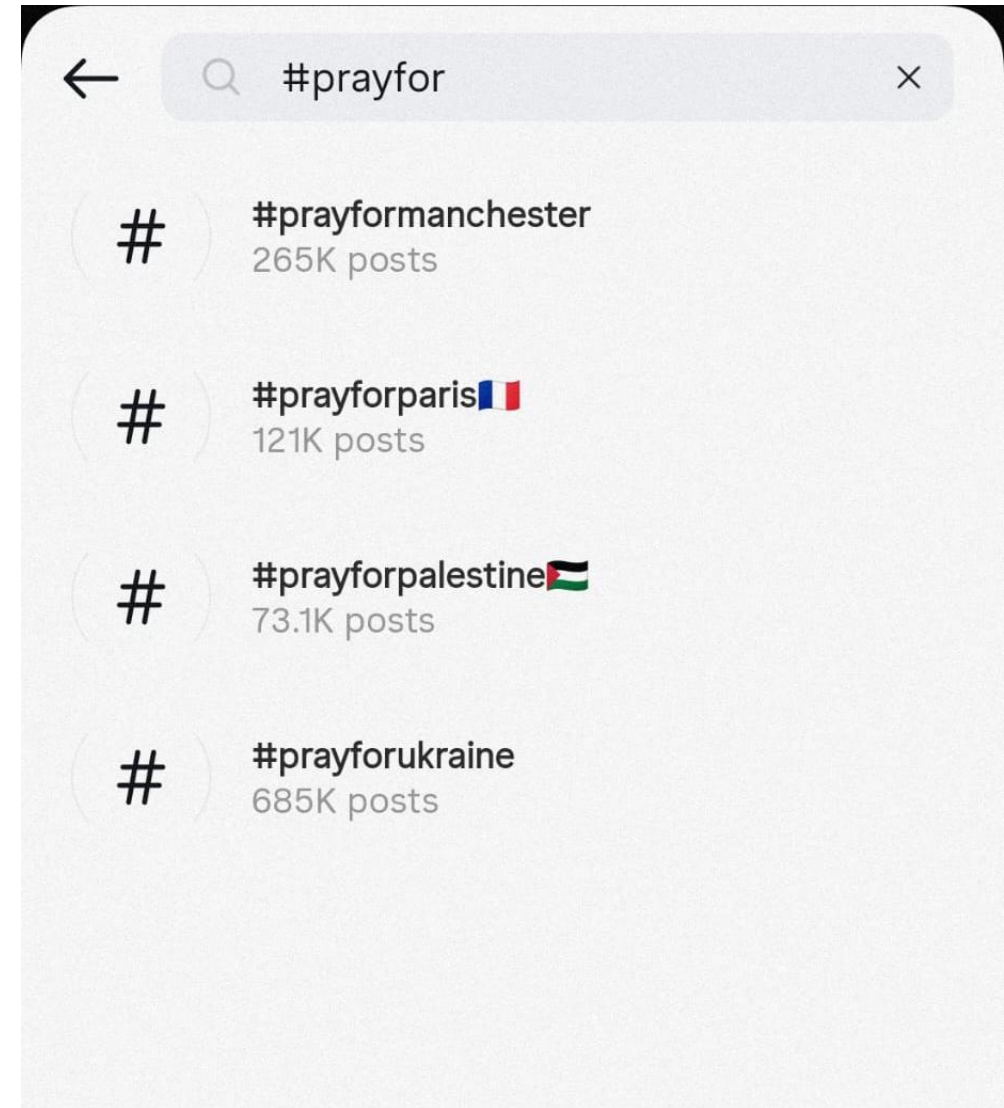
#PrayFor...



X (Twitter), Instagram, Facebook

**For example, #PrayForParis,
#PrayForUkraine**

- Symbol of digital empathy
- Creates an illusion of active participation, rarely followed by real donations, help, or political change.
- Emotional and empathetic, yet a form of passive solidarity.



*Screenshot from Instagram
Explore (October 25, 2025)*

Emoji

- **Often a sign of social belonging** – “I saw a post, I am with you”.
- **Fuel for platform algorithms** – it is still possible that angry emojis help make polarising and disinformational content more visible.
- **Not bad, but superficial** – usually it does not lead to real action + people may use emojis just to show themselves rather than express genuine care (**blurred lines between authentic participation and social performance**).
- **However**, this micro-engagement can create a “mass” effect that attracts media attention or generates political pressure.

Most Commonly Used Emojis



Share this post if you care” / “Change your profile picture to support...”

- The only activity – one click
- Do they really help or just create the illusion that you have already done your part?



Good that this article not only teaches to change profile picture for showing support, but also offers links for real donation!



<https://www.kapwing.com/resources/how-to-add-the-ukraine-flag-to-social-media-profiles/>



Ice Bucket Challenge (2014)

Facebook, Instagram, Youtube

- People poured icy water on themselves, filmed and shared the videos **to raise awareness and encourage donations for ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis – a neurodegenerative disease) research.**
- Although many participants only posted videos without donating, the campaign still raised millions of dollars, showing that **a viral format can create real impact.**



<https://time.com/3173833/als-ice-bucket-challenge-fundraising-total/>

#SaveTheTurtles / “VSCO girl” movement (2019–2020)

TikTok

- Young people posted video critisizing plastic straws (“Save the turtles!”).
- Became an aesthetic trend – repeating phrases and showing off reusable bottles, often without genuine understanding of environmental problems.
- **“Trend-based” participation** – a clear example of how a social issue can turn into a fashion statement.



<https://www.businessinsider.com/how-to-be-a-vsco-girl-checklist-starter-kit>

The VSCO girl is taking over the internet — here's the ultimate starter kit for becoming the latest 'it' girl

By [Hillary Hoffower](#)



- «Named after the photo-editing [VSCO app](#), the VSCO girl is easy to spot on Instagram or IRL (in real life). She can be the girl on the street, but she can also be a popular influencer, like Emma Chamberlain.»



Stemming from their concern for the environment, VSCO girls often interject “save the turtles” into their conversations - meaning **they literally want you to save the animals, possible by using a metal straw of your own**. 2019. gada 25. nov.



The Independent

<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/vsco-girl-a...>

VSCO girl: Where did 'and I oop' and 'sksksk' come from? ✓

#FreeBritney – both meaningful and problematic digital participation

Mobilized global awareness and legal change, but also blurred the line between activism and entertainment.



#FreeBritney shows how people can join together and use their voices to enact change.
AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

What The #FreeBritney Movement Teaches About The Power Of Community

By [Blake Morgan](#), Senior Contributor. © I am a Customer Experience Futurist, ...

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Published Sep 07, 2021, 06:07pm EDT, Updated Sep 07, 2021, 06:07pm EDT

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/blakemorgan/2021/09/07/what-the-freebritney-movement-teaches-about-the-power-of-community/>

Questions for discussion

1. What counted as **real participation** in these cases, and what was just a **symbolic gesture in digital environment**?
2. Why are people drawn to engage in such online campaigns?
3. Is **slacktivism necessarily bad** – or can it be a **first step** toward real, meaningful activism?

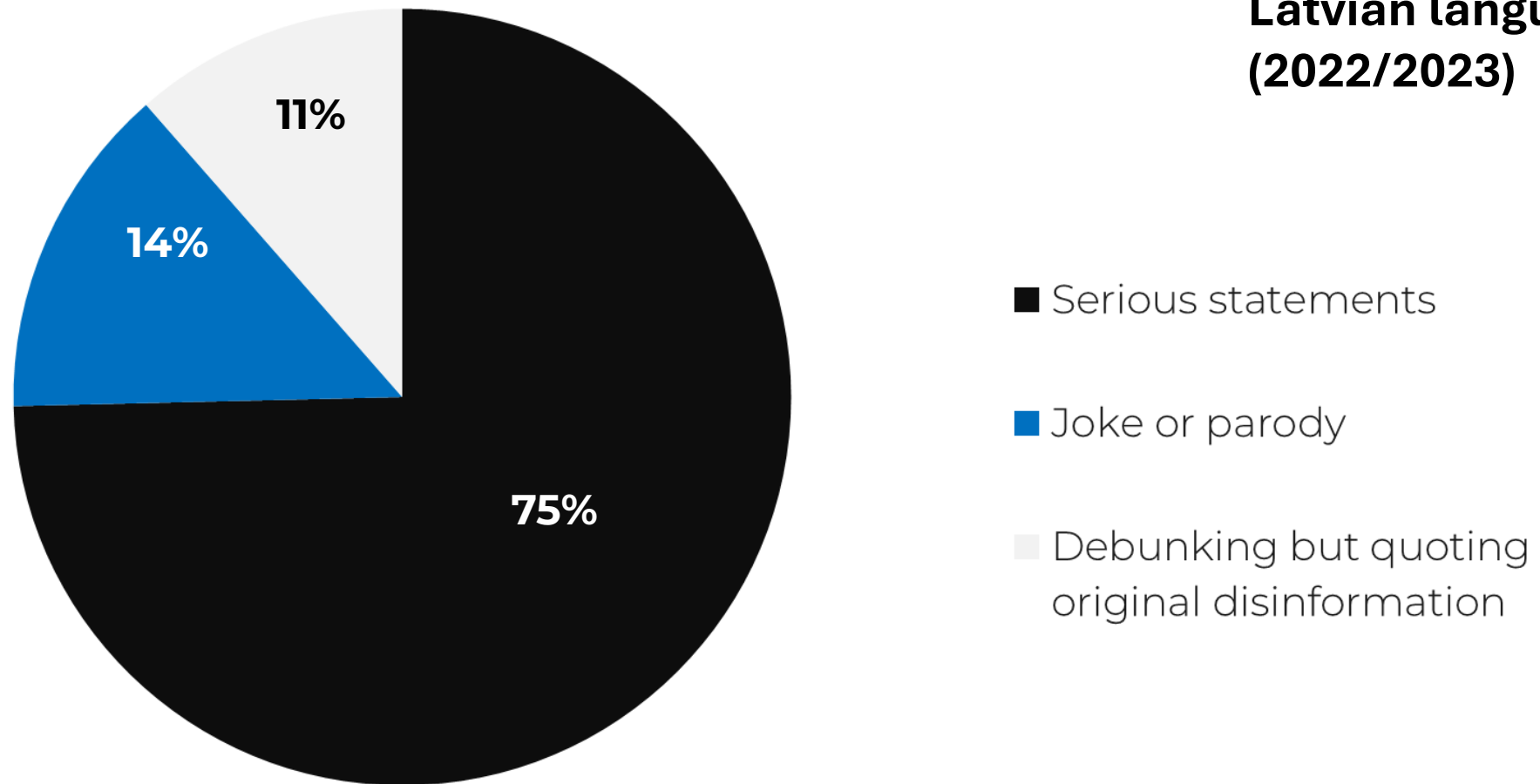
Examples of digital participation

2

**Unsuccessful debunking
of disinformation**

Tone of the statements (N=200)

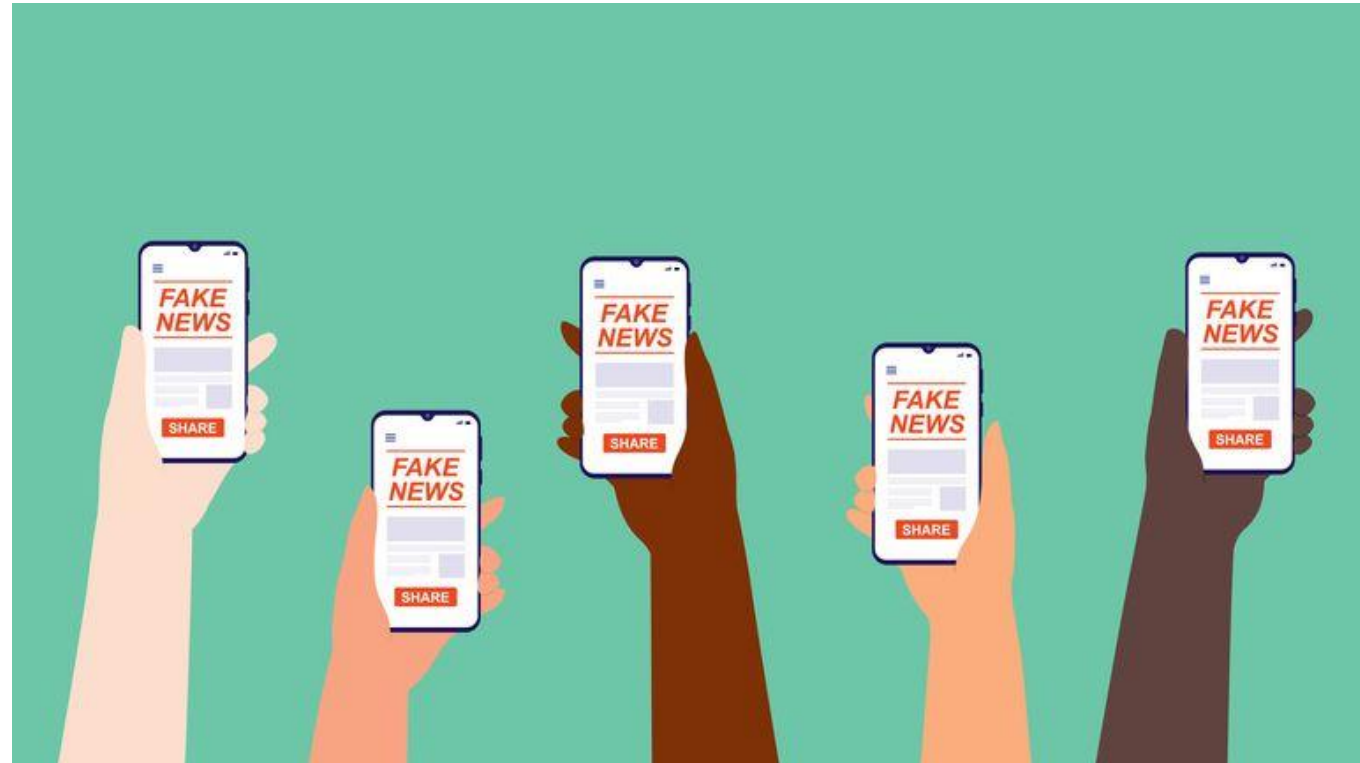
**Research on
disinformation on
social media in
Latvian language
(2022/2023)**



This research was funded by the Ministry of Education and Science, project "Innovative and inclusive governance for the promotion of social involvement, trust, and communication", project No. VPP-LETONIKA-2021/3-0004"

Unsuccessful debunking attempts

- Participation driven **by good intentions can sometimes amplify exactly what it aimed to weaken.**
- This phenomenon is often referred to as the *backfire effect*, *amplification effect*, or *misinformation amplification*.



Influences on digital participation


3

Internet algorithms

- **Internet algorithms** decide what see on social media – **not only represent «conversation», but also shape it.**
- **Usually, algorithms prioritize content that provokes reactions – likes, comments, views, shares.**
 - As result, emotional, sensational or polarizing content might be highlighted more than calm or informative content.
 - **Rage-bait about political issues can become more viral than analytical commentaries.**
- **Information bubbles (echo-chambers) –** participation not in a dialogue but in fight «we against you» (discussions might get one-sided)



Algorithmic audiencing: Why we need to rethink free speech on social media

Journal of Information Technology
1–18
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DOI: 10.1177/02683962211013358
journals.sagepub.com/jinf


Kai Riemer  and Sandra Peter 

- **Those who know how to craft messages that appeal to the algorithm (or have resources to hire professional marketing specialists – political parties, big companies) can reach larger audiences** than those with similar messages but without that skill.
- In public discourse, algorithms determine that we mostly see ideas that are simply better marketed to appear in our social media news feeds.

Internet algorithms also can

- Help to mobilize people for donation campaigns, offering help in natural disasters.
- **If the content is adapted to users' interests, it could inspire more to participate actively.**





Young people (up to age 25)



Economically active (up to age 65)



Seniors (age 65+)



Group work

1. SWOT analysis about your target groups' digital participation:

Strengths
Weaknesses
Opportunities
Threats

2. How to promote meaningful digital participation in your target audience?

“Be mindful of stereotypes!”



Let's vote again!

Feel free to move your sticky note to another place on the scale.

To what extent do you think **digital participation** represents meaningful engagement rather than superficial action?

1 = very superficial

10 = very meaningful



Summary

**Thank you for your
attention!**

A cat for less stress 😊

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