Elements of critical thinking used in decision-making process by Romanian media consumers[1]

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Abstract: *This paper try to reveal the potential impact of critical thinking skills on Romanian media consumers. Nowadays, individuals are constantly exposed to large amounts of information through media, so it is essential to have the ability to critically evaluate and make informed decisions about the content they consume. This paper aims to explore the relationship between critical thinking skills, media consumption and decision-making processes. The objectives of this paper are to assess perceptions of critical thinking skills among media consumers by determining how they evaluate content . Second, the paper investigates the correlations between critical thinking skills, trust in media and decision-making processes, exploring how these factors are interrelated. Lastly, the research also considers the influence of demographic factors, such as education level, gender and age, on critical thinking skills in the context of media consumption.*

The results of the research reveal several significant findings. It was found that respondents generally perceive personal critical thinking skills as important in the effective use of media, and those who are in the habit of critically evaluating content are more likely to exhibit this behavior consistently.

Keywords: *critical thinking, key skills, media consumers, decision making, cognitive processes.*

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1. Introduction

The impact of critical thinking skills on media consumers has become an increasingly relevant and intriguing topic of study in recent years. With the rapid advances in technology and the widespread availability of media content, individuals are constantly bombarded with information from a variety of sources, and they need to acquire the skills to critically evaluate, analyse and interpret this information. This paper aims to deepen the relationship between critical thinking skills and media consumption, exploring the implications and significance of this connection.

The choice to explore the impact of critical thinking skills on media consumers stems from a recognition of the pervasive influence of media in today's society. Media has the power to shape opinions, influence decision-making and shape individuals' perceptions of reality. However, with the rise of fake news, misinformation and media bias, the need for individuals to critically evaluate and navigate the media space has become more urgent than ever.

Benslay et al. (2015) defined critical thinking as the ability to analyze information, evaluate its applicability, accuracy, and reach informed conclusions, with the existing literature providing valuable insights into the relationship between critical thinking skills and media consumption. Numerous studies have explored the cognitive processes involved in media consumption, such as information processing, source evaluation and media literacy. For example, research has highlighted the importance of media literacy in equipping individuals with the skills necessary to critically evaluate media content (Buckingham, 2019; Livingstone, 2020). In addition, studies have examined the influence of various factors, such as education level, gender, and age, on individuals' critical thinking skills in the context of media consumption (Mihaila & Stan, 2018; Vanacker et al., 2021).

However, while previous research has highlighted the general importance of critical thinking skills in media consumption, there is still a need for a deeper understanding of the specific cognitive processes and factors that contribute to effective media use. In addition, the current literature often lacks a comprehensive exploration of the relationship between critical thinking skills, trust in media, and the impact on individuals' decision-making processes. This study aims to reduce these gaps and contribute in a more detailed way to existing knowledge by examining these issues.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the relationship between critical thinking skills, media consumption and their impact on individuals' decision-making processes. By exploring the cognitive processes involved in critically evaluating media content, this study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the role of critical thinking skills in effective media use. In addition, this research aims to investigate the correlations between critical thinking skills, trust in media, and individuals' decision-making processes, thus highlighting the broader implications of critical thinking in media consumption.

The main objective, already mentioned above, is to investigate the impact of critical thinking skills on media consumers. Through a completely holistic approach, this paper captures various aspects of media consumption, for example the evaluation of individuals' personal critical thinking skills, as well as the assessment of media content, taking into account its accuracy, fairness and truthfulness.

In order to achieve the proposed objectives, an opinion questionnaire was developed and sent to a diverse sample of media consumers in order to collect first of all relevant data on consumers' perceptions in the use of personal critical thinking skills, trust in the media, ability to identify the essence of the news transmitted in the media, etc. The collected data were previously analysed in SPSS software, thus identifying strong correlations confirming or refuting the research hypotheses.

This study provides an insight into the impact of critical thinking skills on media consumers. By analysing data, especially strong correlations based on consumer responses, it explores their perceptions and how they decide to use these skills by thinking and reflecting critically about media content.

2. A theoretical approach to the use of elements of critical thinking in media decision making

2.1 Some relevant defining elements of critical thinking

Critical thinking is a cognitive process in which information is actively analysed, evaluated and synthesised to form reasoned judgements and make decisions. It is a widely recognized and valued skill in a variety of fields, including education, business, and healthcare (Facione, 2015). Critical thinking is not just about having an opinion, it involves a systematic approach to evidence-based thinking and reasoning (Moore & Parker, 2017).

Critical thinking is a sophisticated and complex skill that requires individuals to exercise independent judgment, question assumptions and evaluate sources. Critical thinking, in the words of Ennis (1985), involves "reasonable reflective thinking that is centered on the choice to believe or do". Critical thinking is similarly described by Facione (1990) as "intentional, self-regulating judgement that results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation and inference". The value of critical thinking is significant because it enables people to resolve difficult situations and make wise judgements. Critical thinking skills are essential for success in many facets of life, especially since we live in a fast-paced and complex environment today. This is especially true in professions such as medicine, law, and engineering, where choices can have a big impact (Halpern, 2014). Because it helps people evaluate information and arguments more accurately and explain their thoughts more clearly, critical thinking is also crucial for effective communication (Van Gelder, 2005).

Critical thinking skills can be taught and developed in a variety of ways. Direct instruction in critical thinking is promoted by some researchers, while others argue that inquiry-based learning and problem-based strategies are the best ways to build critical thinking (Ennis R. H., 2011). Regardless of the strategy, research indicates that critical thinking skills can be developed through practice and exposure to a variety of viewpoints and sources of information (Ku et al., 2013).

There is a strong correlation between critical thinking skills and success, for example, research by Bissell and Lemons (2006) indicated that in a sample of students, there is indeed a link between critical thinking knowledge, outcomes and academic success. Another study by Ku et al. (2013) showed a pattern of job performance of health care employees that was favorably related to their critical thinking skills.

Critical thinking is a sophisticated cognitive process that requires active analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information to reach informed conclusions and take action. It is a highly valued skill that is necessary for achievement in many spheres of life. Developing new critical thinking skills requires practice, exposure to many points of view and the use of methodical thinking processes. Over time there will be more and more studies indicating the value of critical thinking as interest in it grows significantly in various fields and situations.

Critical thinking skills refer to a set of cognitive abilities that enable individuals to analyze and evaluate information, identify underlying assumptions and biases, and draw rational and reasoned conclusions (Paul & Elder, 2019). They, according to Facione and Gittens (2016), are necessary for effective communication, collaboration and decision-making in complicated and unpredictable contexts. People with good critical thinking skills are better able to analyse risks, evaluate alternatives and make sound judgements.

According to research, improving critical thinking skills could also boost cognitive growth and academic achievement. According to Abrami et al. (2015), students who received training to develop critical thinking skills scored better academically than those who did not receive training.

Critical thinking skills are necessary for cognitive development, effective communication, and decision-making. Individuals with these skills can successfully analyze, evaluate and interpret information to make informed judgments. In order to build a culture of sound judgment and critical inquiry, critical thinking skills need to be developed through practice, reflection and continuous learning.

A vital skill that is often associated with business or management is certainly critical thinking. However, it has other uses than those mentioned, particularly in the medical field. Technically speaking, the practical skills of critical thinking are strictly reflected in clinical reasoning and decision making among healthcare professionals and is crucial for advancing diagnosis and

patient care with accuracy. For example, the 2020 article (Teaching Clinical Reasoning and Critical Thinking: From Cognitive Theory to Practical Application) by Richards, Hayes, and Schwartzstein provides a perceptive discussion of the real-world uses of critical thinking in clinical reasoning, helping healthcare professionals make wise decisions, solve problems, and make accurate diagnoses. The article (2020) also highlights the use of case-based learning by presenting students with real-life scenarios, forcing them to use their critical thinking skills to identify and diagnose clinical problems.

People who interact with various forms of media, such as television, newspapers, online platforms and social networks, are referred to as media consumers. They actively consume mediacontent of all kinds, such as news, entertainment and advertising, to be informed, entertained and connected to the world around them.

The relationship between media consumers and media is dynamic and present on different levels depending on users' taste, influenced to a large extent by technological factors and critical thinking skills. My dissertation explores this complex interplay between the two, focusing on preferred media consumption patterns, the importance of critical thinking skills, the fairness and accuracy of media sources, offering new insights into the evolution of media consumption and its implications for individuals and society.

Media consumption patterns have undergone significant transformations in recent years, shaped by the proliferation of digital media platforms and changing user preferences. With the emergence of social networks and online streaming services, individuals have gained unprecedented control over their media consumption choices (Sørensen, 2021). Users now have access to a wide range of content tailored to specific interests, resulting in personalised media experiences.

In addition, the rise of mobile devices has facilitated on-the-go media consumption, allowing people to access news, entertainment and social media platforms anytime and anywhere (Kim & Chock, 2021). However, increased flexibility and personalization of media consumption has also given rise to concerns about filter bubbles and echo chambers, where individuals are exposed to information that reinforces their existing beliefs, limiting their exposure to diverse perspectives (Bode & Vraga, 2020).

Social media platforms encourage content generation for users and facilitate real-time information dissemination (Purcell et al., 2019). The freedom to create media content, however, has also given rise to challenges related to misinformation and the spread of fake news (Guess et al., 2019). Media consumers must critically navigate this digital space, relying on critical thinking skills and the ability to discern credible from unreliable sources.

Critical thinking skills are essential for media consumers in evaluating information, identifying biases, and distinguishing credible sources (Pennycook & Rand, 2020). Individuals with strong critical thinking skills are more likely to approach media content with skepticism, seek multiple perspectives, and critically evaluate the authenticity of formulations (Jones & Estes, 2021).

2.2 Critical thinking theoretical concepts and the public sphere

In today's digital age, the media is essential in shaping public opinion and disseminating information. Media consumers are exposed to a diverse range of content from numerous sources, making critical thinking skills essential to properly navigate this rather complicated and complex media landscape. This theory section attempts to identify critical thinking skills and media consumers, examine significant paradigms and theories in the literature, offer contrasting views, and explain previous scholarly research that serves as a reference for the current study.

Critical thinking is the core from which other types of thinking derive (creative thinking, parallel thinking, constructive thinking, etc.), and there are important correlations between them. In a recent study, (Akcaoğlu et al., 2023) sought to assess the function of metacognitive awareness as a moderator in the link between self-regulation and critical thinking. These dimensions were found to be highly connected to each other, and metacognitive awareness was found to be a partial mediating variable between self-regulation and critical thinking. It is reasonable to consider that these notions should be taken into account to improve individuals' critical thinking skills. There is a substantial literature on the impact of critical thinking skills on media consumers. Cognitive psychology: this school of thought looks at how people take in information, develop opinions and solve problems. It can be used to examine how media users process and evaluate the information provided to them.

John R. Anderson's (2018) book Cognitive Psychology and Its Implications introduces the discipline of cognitive psychology. According to the author, cognition refers to the mental processes that underlie perception, attention, memory, and decision-making. He also discusses the history of cognitive psychology, including the evolution of information processing models and the birth of cognitive neuroscience. The author also elaborates on several key concepts in cognitive psychology, such as the concept of the mind as an information processing system, the significance of examining individual variation, and the function of context in influencing cognitive processes.

Media literacy - this paradigm emphasises the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and generate media material. It can be used to measure consumer understanding and engagement with media messages. In their paper, Renee Hobbs and Paul Mihailidis (2018) stress the importance of establishing media literacy skills that are relevant to the needs and interests of different communities. In their paper, the authors suggest a not-too-distant future in which society will have media literacy as a strategic goal for its citizens, with all the challenges and risks that come with it. At the same time, the authors examine other current and future societal trends and concerns in their paper, such as digital inequality, algorithmic bias and fake news.

The writers stress the importance of a participatory and critical approach to media literacy training. They argue that this should not only teach people how to consume and generatematerial, but ultimately enable them to participate in civic and social action. The authors point out the potential of media literacy to promote social justice and democratic engagement, urging educators and politicians to invest in media literacy training.

Critical theory - this method seeks to expose and challenge systems of power as well as cultural conventions, providing a critical examination of society with a particular focus on power relations and social inequalities. This theory emerged in the early 20th century in the German school of thought in Frankfurt, Germany, attempting to provide a comprehensive view of society that goes beyond the facades of society and reveals the underlying processes that are defined by domination and exploitation, which proves social connections (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972).

It can be used to investigate how media messages reinforce or undermine existing power structures and ideologies. This theory also stresses the importance of social transformation and

advocates the establishment of a more just and equitable society. From the critical theory, a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach emerges to analyse and critique the social, cultural and political institutions that create and sustain injustice and oppression.

Cultivation theory - investigates how media content influences viewers' perception of reality over time. At the same time, this theory can be used to investigate how media consumers' critical thinking skills alter their perception of the material they read. The cultivation theory proposed by George Gerbner in the 1960s argues that people's ideas about reality are changed by their exposure to media. According to this hypothesis, television provides a distorted view of reality, leading viewers to develop ideas and attitudes that are compatible with the content of television shows (Gerbner, 1998). Because they are exposed to more intense images of violence on television, frequent viewers are more likely to see the world as evil and dangerous than casual viewers (Gerbner, 1998; Gerbner et al., 2001). According to this theory, this cultivation effect is cumulative and long-term, because people who watch more television over time are more likelyto be convinced of their own fears.

Shah et al's (2020) study investigates the association between exposure to media violence and altruistic actions. Fear of victimization, the authors argue, decreases the likelihood of participating in altruistic activities. This paper defends cultivation theory by demonstrating that exposure to violent media content has a detrimental influence on individuals' charitable actions, and also highlights the need for more research on the complex interactions between media content and human behaviour.

Agenda-setting theory assumes that the media has the power to influence public opinion by selectively highlighting certain issues, thereby setting the public agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The critical thinking skills of media consumers can play a significant role in analysing and evaluating the information presented, allowing them to question the media agenda and form independent perspectives.

Social cognitive theory emphasises the role of observational learning and cognitive processes in shaping individuals' behaviour (Bandura, 1986). In the context of media consumption, critical thinking skills enable consumers to assess the credibility of sources, evaluate the potential

influence of media messages on their beliefs and behaviours, and make informed decisions about the information they encounter.

There are different perspectives on the impact of critical thinking skills on media consumers. Some argue that people with well-developed critical thinking skills are more likely to critically evaluate media content, identify misinformation, and make informed decisions (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). However, others argue that cognitive biases and confirmation biases can impede critical thinking, causing individuals to selectively consume media that aligns with their existing beliefs (Pennycook et al., 2020).

Previous scientific research provides insights into the relationship between critical thinking skills and media consumption. While the results of the present study will contribute to the impact of critical thinking skills on media consumers, it is essential to consider the latest existing research as a reference. For example, a study by Jones and Estes (2021) examined the relationship between critical thinking skills and media literacy among students. The findings revealed a positive correlation between higher levels of critical thinking skills and media literacy, suggesting that individuals with stronger critical thinking skills are more likely to engage in critical analysis of media content.

3. Case study

This section of the theory defined the key concepts of critical thinking skills and media consumers. It examined paradigms and theories such as agenda-setting theory and social cognitive theory, providing a theoretical basis for research. It presented divergent views on the impact of critical thinking skills on media consumers. In addition, previous scientific research findings were discussed, providing valuable reference points for the present study. The following sections of this paper will present the methodology, results and discussion based on the research conducted on the impact of critical thinking skills on media consumers.

3.1. Defining the purpose of the empirical approach and the research questions

The research undertaken in this article aims to explore the impact of critical thinking skills on the decisions made by Romanian media consumers. In particular, the applied research is carried out in the form of a quantitative sociological survey, which investigates how the subjects participating in the survey evaluate media content, using and evaluating their own acquired critical thinking skills.

In order to identify relevant aspects for the qualitative approaches of the applied research, a number of three research questions were defined, focusing on the use of critical thinking skills of the survey participants on the evaluation of the analysed media content.

The research questions proposed in this sociological research are:

Q1. To what extent can media consumers evaluate their personal critical thinking skills?

Q2. What are the main methods used by Romanian media consumers to evaluate content?

Q3. What is the importance given to critical thinking elements and skills in the media content evaluation decision-making process by Romanian media consumers?

3.2 Methodological elements of sociological research

The sociological research undertaken in the application part of this study is quantitative, with the research instrument centred on a questionnaire. The sample that was the basis of the sociological analysis consists of 103 people (both genders, from rural and urban social backgrounds, with different levels of education and training).

The sampling methodology used in the present study was a simple, random, non-probability sampling. The period of the sociological survey was 17.04.2023 -14.05.2023.

For the selected quantitative research method, sociological questionnaire was used as the research instrument, which consists of 27 questions comprising the following thematic categories:

- Socio-demographic profile (age, occupation, residence, etc.);
- Frequency of use of media content and its quality;

- Use of critical thinking in analysing media content;
- Analysis of news centred on criteria of reference data, statistics, legislation, level of credibility;
- Correctness and accuracy of media content;
- Trustworthiness of information transmitted by TV stations and public news websites in Romania;
- Types of information transmitted through social media networks in Romania;
- Typologies of reactions to media content testing beliefs ;
- The role and responsibility of the media in promoting critical thinking skills among media consumers;
- Typologies of critical thinking skills identified among media consumers.

3.2.1 Defining sociological assumptions

For the analysis and interpretation of the sociological survey data, a number of three research hypotheses have been defined, which are proposed to be tested in order to validate or invalidate them:

Hypothesis 1: The greater the habit of critically evaluating media content, the greater the perceived impact of personal critical thinking skills on media content use.

Hypothesis 2: The greater the impact of personal critical thinking skills on the effective use of media content, the more respondents are accustomed to critically evaluate media content.

Hypothesis 3: The greater the inclination in the media to centre information on reference data, (statistics, legislation, etc.), the greater the tendency to analyse information content from more than one information source.

3.3 Analysis and interpretation of statistical survey data

Following the collection, processing and interpretation of the survey data, the following centrally obtained information could be highlighted:

Of the total statistical population participating in the survey, consisting of 103 persons, the "male" gender accounted for 41.7% , while the "female" gender accounted for 58.3%. Regarding the variable "background" of the survey participants, 67% of them were from "urban" backgrounds, while 33% declared that they were from "rural" backgrounds.

In terms of the "age" variable, most of the participants in the survey were young people aged between 18 and 24 (35.9% of them), while 27% were aged between 25 and 34, 25% between 35 and 44, 11% between 45 and 54 and only 2% over 55.

Regarding the variable "level of education", the majority of the survey participants are graduates: 31% of respondents have a bachelor's degree, 39% a master's degree and 5% a doctoral degree.

Regarding the response given by survey participants under the variable "employability", the majority of respondents (41% of the total population surveyed) stated that they are employed full-time, 17% are employed part-time, 32% of participants are students, while others (8%) are not employed.

In the background questions of the questionnaire, consideration was given to identifying the typology of media content used by the survey participants, as well as relating to them with elements of criticism of that content.

In question no. 6 of the questionnaire, regarding the "frequency of consumption of media content" of the survey participants, most respondents (39% of the total survey population analysed) prefer to consume media content a few times a week, 29% of respondents say they consume daily, 27% consume once a week, while only 7% are concerned about media content rarely in the context of the comparative analysis based on residence environment, it could be seenthat the average response rate of subjects in urban areas (2.91) is not significantly higher than the average response rate of those in rural areas (2.82).

In other words, the preference of survey participants to be informed on the basis of media content is high, not significantly differentiated by criteria related to the environment of residence.

When asked specifically in question 7 of the survey "How do you rate the quality of media content?", 71% of respondents answered based on "relevance and accuracy", 68% based on "tone and style of content", 62% based on "source of content", 39% based on "exclusivity of content", 12% based on "how readable and commented on the content", and the remaining 1% focusing on "objectivity, credibility of source, whether ethical standards are met, whether the source is trustworthy, ethics of the material". It is interesting to note here that "relevance and accuracy" as well as "tone and content" of the information are considered very important by the survey participants, but only in the context of the validity of the "source of the content".

Following on from the relevance of critical thinking to one's own decision making, question 8 of the survey asked respondents "How important do you think critical thinking is when using media content?". Analysing the responses recorded, it emerged that only 35.5% of respondents rated critical thinking as very important in their decision-making process when analysing media content, while 54.4% of respondents rated this characteristic as moderately important to them.

Survey participants broadly appreciate the role and usefulness of critical thinking in analysing media content, but most give it a moderate importance rather than a very important one.

Analysing the mean response values by area of residence, respondents in urban areas (mean response = 3.49) place greater importance on critical thinking than those in rural areas (mean response = 3.24). However, the difference between the mean responses is not sociologically significant.

When survey participants were asked to self-assess their personal critical thinking skills when using media content in question 9 "How would you rate your personal critical thinking skills when using media content?", they were asked to rate their own critical thinking skills. ", an analysis of the recorded responses concluded that the majority of respondents (representing 97% of the total survey population) rated their critical thinking skills when using media content as "very good" (59%) or "moderate" (37%). This indicates that a significant proportion of respondents have a strongly positive perception of their critical thinking skills when interacting with media. In terms of the 'profile wings' of the statistical data distribution, only a smaller

percentage of the survey population (3% of respondents) rated their critical thinking skills as 'excellent', while only 1% of respondents rated their critical thinking skills as 'poor'.

Overall, the majority of respondents perceive their critical thinking skills in using media content as 'very good' or 'moderate', suggesting a relatively positive assessment of their skills in this area. Only a minority of respondents have a very favourable view of their own critical thinking skills in the context of media use. Another interesting perspective of the study undertaken in this article is testing the perceived importance of survey participants' perceptions ofthe impact of critical thinking on media content evaluation. Thus, in survey question 10 "How do you perceive the impact of personal critical thinking skills on the effective use of media content?", based on the analysis of the survey data, it was found that 53.4% of respondents believe that critical thinking skills have a "significant impact" on the effective use of media content. This suggests that a substantial proportion of participants recognise the importance of critical thinking skills in evaluating and engaging with media content in a meaningful way. A significant proportion of respondents, representing 41.7%, believe that critical thinking skills have a "moderate impact" on the effective use of media content. This indicates that a considerable number of participants recognise the relevance of critical thinking skills, but may not attribute as much weight to their influence as those in the 'significant impact' category. A small percentage ofrespondents, 2.9% and 1.9% respectively, consider critical thinking skills to have a 'slight impact'and a 'highly significant impact' on the effective use of media content. Another area explored in this study was the "habit of critically evaluating media content" in the current decision-making process of survey participants.

Thus, in survey question 12 "How used are you in general to critically evaluating the media content you use?", the majority of respondents (52.4%) stated that they are very used to critically evaluating media content. A significant proportion (38.8%) indicated that they are somewhat accustomed to critically evaluating media content as usual. A smaller percentage considered it unusual (4.9%) or extremely common (3.9%) to critically evaluate media content.

A first correlation analyzed is the one identified at the level of questions 10. and 11. It is about the correlation between the perception of the impact of using critical thinking skills on effective media use and the level using the critical thinking tools for media consume. The data are presented in Fig. 1:

			10. How do you perceive the impact of personal critical thinking skills on effective media use?	11. How often are you generally using, the critical thinking tools, for media consume?
Spearman's rho	10. How do you perceive the impact of personal critical thinking skills on effective media use?	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.667**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	103	103
	11. How often are you generally using the critical thinking tools for media consume?	Correlation Coefficient	.667**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	103	103
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Fig 1. Correlation relationship between the impact of personal critical thinking skills on effective media use and critical evaluation of media content used.

The correlation between the perceived impact of personal critical thinking skills on the effective use of media content and the habit of critically evaluating the media content used is 0.667**. This indicates a positive correlation between the perceived impact of personal critical thinking skills and the habit of critically evaluating the media content used. A correlation coefficient of 0.667** suggests a strong positive relationship.

This strong positive correlation suggests a strong and direct relationship between personal critical thinking skills, effective use of media content and the habit of critically evaluating media content. This implies that individuals who perceive their personal critical thinking skills as impactful are more likely to use media content effectively, and those who routinely critically evaluate media content are more likely to perceive the impact of personal critical thinking skills on effective media use.

A second set of correlation relationships studied within the present analysis of statistical data is centered on the confidence that subjects have about the information provided by the main public news websites and social media in Romania. Also, in the correlation panel there are envisaged the

way how the media industry values the critical thinking skills of their employees, as it could be observed in Fig.2:

		20. How much confidence do you have in the information provided by the main public news websites in Romania?	21. How much trust do you have in information transmitted via social media in Romania?	22. How much do you think the media industry values the critical thinking skills of their employees?
20. How much confidence do you have in the information provided by the main public news websites in Romania?	Pearson Correlation	1	.628**	.500**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	103	103	103
21. How much trust do you have in information transmitted via social media in Romania?	Pearson Correlation	.628**	1	.523**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	103	103	103
22. How much do you think the media industry values the critical thinking skills of their employees?	Pearson Correlation	.500**	.523**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	103	103	103
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Fig. 2 Various types of correlations centred on confidence in the information conveyed and appreciationof critical thinking skills

The results suggest that respondents in Romania generally have a moderate to high level of trust in the information provided by public news websites. Trust levels vary by education, gender and location. In addition, there are positive correlations between trust in public news sites and trust in TV stations, social media networks and the perceived value of critical thinking skills in the media industry.

Recall that the main objective of the paper was to explore the impact of critical thinking skills on media consumers and how individuals evaluate content. In guiding the research, the three hypotheses were proposed. Hypothesis 1 suggested the following: the more individuals typically

evaluate media content critically, the more they perceive the impact of their personal critical thinking skills on media use. This hypothesis assumes a positive relationship between frequency of critical evaluation and recognition of the influence of personal critical thinking skills on media consumption. Hypothesis 2 refers to the stronger the impact of personal critical thinking skills on effective media use, the more likely respondents are to engage in critical evaluation of media content.

This hypothesis assumes a positive relationship between the effectiveness of critical thinking skills in media use and the inclination to critically evaluate media content. Hypothesis 3 proposesthat as the media tends to focus on reference data, such as statistics and legislation, the tendency to analyse information content from multiple sources also changes. This hypothesis assumes that media users adapt their analytical approach when media sources rely primarily on reference data.

From the analysis of the survey data in correlations between several variables related to trust in the information conveyed by TV stations, public news sites and social media networks in Romania, as well as the perceived value of critical thinking skills in the media industry. Significance levels indicate the strength and reliability of the observed correlations. Doing a very brief micro-analysis, we observe that the correlation data and implications for the research objectives and hypotheses are confirmed:

Trust in national TV stations and trust in public news websites

- The correlation coefficient is 0.749**;

- Significance level is $p < 0.01$;

1. Trust in public news websites and trust in social networks

- Correlation coefficient is 0.628**;

- Level of significance is $p < 0.01$;

2. Trust in public news sites, trust in social media networks and perceived value of critical thinking skills in the media industry

- The correlation between trust in public news sites and perceived value of critical thinking skills is 0.500**;

- The correlation between trust in social media networks and perceived value of critical thinking skills is 0.523**;

- Significance level is $p < 0.01$.

The data demonstrates the relationship between trust in different media sources such as TV stations, public news sites and social media networks. There is a significant positive correlation between trust in TV stations with national coverage and trust in public news sites. It is also indicated that people who trust public news sites also tend to trust information delivered via social media.

The data support Hypothesis 1, which proposes that the habit of critically evaluating media content is related to the perceived impact of personal critical thinking skills on media use. The strong positive correlation between trust in media sources indicates that people who trust media content are more likely to perceive the influence of their critical thinking skills on media use.

Also from the analysis of sociological survey data, hypothesis 2 is confirmed, which suggests that the impact of personal critical thinking skills on effective media use is related to the propensity to critically evaluate content. Positive correlations between trust in media sources and perceived value of critical thinking skills indicate that individuals who trust media content are more likelyto value critical thinking skills.

The survey data analysed also confirms Hypothesis 3, which focuses on the tendency to analyse information content from multiple sources using critical thinking skills (which provide relevant insights into trust in different media sources). Significant positive correlations between trust in public news sites and social media networks suggest that individuals may adapt their analytical approach based on trust in different media sources.

Overall, the sociological survey data analyzed through the SPSS framework supports the research objectives by demonstrating relationships based on trust in different media sources.

4. Conclusion and recommendation

In conclusion, the sociological research undertaken in this article has examined the impact of critical thinking skills on media consumers, seeking to answer some relevant (related) research questions. For example, the extent to which critical thinking skills influence consumers' performance in identifying and resisting manipulation of media content, or how these same skills help consumers to discern the accuracy and credibility of sources, has been examined. Through analysis of responses from both male and female participants, it was found that critical thinking is considered moderately or very important when using media. The majority of respondents perceived their critical thinking skills when using media as 'very good' or 'moderate', indicating an overall positive assessment in this area.

One noteworthy finding is that respondents living in rural areas tended to have slightly higher mean scores for personal critical thinking skills when using media content than those in urban areas. This suggests that individuals from rural backgrounds may exhibit a slightly stronger inclination towards critical thinking in the context of media consumption. In addition, participants with a high school education were found to have higher scores for personal critical thinking skills compared to those with higher education.

The overall perception of personal critical thinking skills among respondents was positive, with a significant proportion rating their skills as 'Very good'. This finding suggests that media users are generally confident in their ability to think critically while using media. In addition, the data indicate that personal critical thinking skills have a significant impact on effective media use, with higher education, female and younger age groups perceiving this impact more strongly.

From the strong correlations presented, the first hypothesis is confirmed, the more the habit of critically evaluating media content, the greater the perceived impact of personal critical thinking skills on media content use.

Furthermore, the research identified positive correlations between the appreciation of fact-based information and the goal of identifying the essence of news. This suggests that people who value factual facts, statistics, law, and credibility in the media are more likely to engage in multi-source content analysis. It was also found that individuals generally have a moderate level of willingness to analyze information content from multiple sources. Factors such as level of education and

appreciation of reference data, statistics, legislation and media credibility positively influence this behaviour. In addition, a positive correlation was observed between the goal of identifying the essence of news and the willingness to analyse information from multiple sources. These data actually confirm hypotheses two and three of the paper.

Further, the study revealed a strong positive correlation between trust in the information provided by TV stations with national coverage and trust in the information provided by the main public news websites in Romania. Respondents generally demonstrated moderate to high levels of trust in information on public news websites, with levels varying by education, gender and location. In addition, positive correlations were found between trust in public news sites and trust in TV stations, social media networks and the perceived value of critical thinking skills in the media industry.

While these findings provide valuable insights into the impact of critical thinking skills on media consumers, it is important to recognize the limitations of the research. The study focused on a specific population in Romania and may not be fully representative of other contexts or cultures. Future research should aim to overcome these limitations by conducting cross-cultural studies and using objective measures of critical thinking skills and media consumption behaviours.

Following the findings of the study, some recommendations for future research on this topic can be made. First, further investigations could explore specific cognitive processes involved in critical thinking during media consumption, such as evaluating information, source checking, and bias identification. Furthermore, comparative studies from different countries and cultures would provide a broader understanding of the impact of critical thinking skills on media consumers around the world.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the existing literature by bringing out the importance of critical thinking skills in the context of media consumption. Findings suggest that individuals who possess strong critical thinking skills are more likely to engage in the habit of critically evaluating media content and exhibit higher levels of trust in information from various sources. The results also highlight the role of education, gender and age in influencing perceptions of personal critical thinking skills and their impact on effective media use. Recognising these factors and their correlations, policy makers and teachers can develop interventions to improve critical

thinking skills among media consumers, thereby promoting quality and responsible media content in an increasingly information-saturated society.

In drawing a broad conclusion about the relationship between trust in media sources, critical thinking skills and consumption, the data demonstrate significant positive correlations between trust in national TV stations, trust in public news sites and trust in social media networks. These correlations indicate that people who trust one media source are more likely to trust others. In addition, the data support the hypotheses that the habit of critically evaluating media content and the impact of personal critical thinking skills on effective media use are positively associated with trust in media sources. Individuals who trust media content are more likely to perceive the influence of their critical thinking skills on media use and value the importance of critical thinking skills. Indirectly it shows that individuals can adapt their analytical approach based on their trust in various media platforms. The findings clearly highlight the importance of trust in media sources, the role of critical thinking skills in evaluating content and their impact on media consumption.

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