



Mass Media Impact and Food Consumption Patterns in the Republic of Moldova

Nicolae Mocanu*, Silviu Stanciu**

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received March 18, 2026
Accepted April 14, 2026
Available online April 30, 2026

JEL Classification
M37, D12, L82

Keywords:
IoT, online marketing, food market,
consumption, digital advertising

ABSTRACT

With a population of approximately 2.44 million residents, the Republic of Moldova registered over 2.14 million internet users in January 2024, at a penetration rate of 63.5% of the total population. The e-commerce market, currently estimated at 320 million euros, records continuous growth, with projections exceeding 500% over the next three years. This paper proposes an analysis of the media consumption patterns of the Moldovan population, with the aim of identifying the primary channels for food advertising. The study is based on secondary data from open-access scientific literature and institutional reports for documentation, while the legislative framework was accessed through public institutions. The research drew upon publicly available data from the National Bureau of Statistics, Thomson Reuters reports, Statcounter Global Stats, and specialized media monitoring studies. Results showed that social networks and search engines are the main sources of information, followed by television and news aggregators. This study is part of an ongoing doctoral research project.

Economics and Applied Informatics © 2026 is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

1. Introduction

The Republic of Moldova occupies a unique position in the Eastern European media landscape. As a small state navigating the intersection of European integration and Eastern influences, its population has rapidly transitioned toward digital media consumption, mirroring broader global trends while retaining context-specific characteristics shaped by linguistic duality, limited economic resources, and a complex geopolitical environment.

Media consumption is no longer a passive activity confined to television screens or print newspapers. The proliferation of smartphones, affordable mobile data plans, and social media platforms has transformed the relationship between the Moldovan population and information. This transformation carries significant implications not only for public discourse and political communication but also for commercial activity — particularly advertising and e-commerce.

The present research aims to map the current media information landscape in the Republic of Moldova by examining internet penetration rates, the distribution of information sources across demographic groups, the dominance of social networks as primary news and advertising channels, and the implications for digital commerce, particularly in the food sector. Understanding these patterns is essential for academics, policymakers, and market actors seeking to engage with Moldovan audiences effectively.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant literature; Section 3 describes the research methodology; Section 4 presents the results regarding internet access and media consumption by region and age group; Section 5 analyses the primary news sources and social media landscape in Moldova; Section 6 discusses implications for e-commerce and advertising; and Section 7 offers conclusions and recommendations.

2. Literature review

The study of media consumption and its societal impact have attracted growing scholarly attention over the past two decades. Foundational work by McQuail (2010) established that media consumption is inherently social, shaped by cultural context, economic conditions, and technological infrastructure. These variables are particularly salient in transitional economies such as Moldova.

Research on post-Soviet media landscapes (Mickiewicz, 2008; Voltmer, 2013) documents the contested nature of media credibility and the fragmentation of trust in information sources following the

* Dunărea de Jos University of Galați, Romania, ** Dunărea de Jos University of Galați, Romania / Romanian Academy, "Costin C. Kirilăscu" National Institute of Economic Research, Bucharest, Romania. E-mail addresses: nicolae.mocanu@ugal.ro (N. Mocanu), sstanciu@ugal.ro (Corresponding author - S. Stanciu).

dissolution of the Soviet Union. In Moldova, this dynamic is amplified by the coexistence of Romanian- and Russian-language media ecosystems, which often carry divergent political and cultural messages (Gross, 2002; Bajomi-Lajár, 2014).

Food consumption behavior in Eastern Europe has undergone noticeable changes in recent years. According to Manolache et al. (2025), these shifts are associated with income dynamics, lifestyle changes, and increased exposure to digital information. Their findings indicate a growing reliance on online sources and social media in food-related decision-making. This highlights the increasing relevance of media channels in shaping consumer choices, particularly in emerging markets such as the Republic of Moldova.

The rise of digital media has been documented across Central and Eastern Europe. Hallin and Mancini (2017) observe that while legacy media such as television retains significant reach in lower-income countries, younger demographics increasingly turn to online platforms for news. This generational shift has direct consequences for advertising strategies. Studies on digital advertising in emerging markets (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022) confirm that social media platforms — particularly Facebook and YouTube — represent the most cost-effective channels for reaching digitally engaged populations.

Moldova-specific research remains limited but growing. The *Internews Moldova* study (2023) and reports from the Independent Journalism Center (CJI, 2022) provide empirical foundations for understanding how Moldovans access and evaluate information. The *Media Ownership Monitor Moldova* project has produced detailed analyses of ownership concentration and its impact on editorial independence, raising concerns about the potential for media capture (RSF, 2023). The Reuters Institute's Digital News Report, while not yet including Moldova as a standalone market, provides comparative benchmarks from neighbouring countries that inform the present analysis.

In the domain of e-commerce and digital advertising, Statista (2024) and DataReportal (2024) offer quantitative data on user behaviour, device preferences, and platform adoption. These datasets, triangulated with national statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova (BNS), form the empirical backbone of this study.

Beyond behavioural aspects, food consumption is also shaped by structural economic and food security factors. Food consumption patterns in the Republic of Moldova are closely connected to broader issues of food security and economic constraints. Mocanu and Stanciu (2025) highlight that factors such as income levels, agricultural output, and access to food significantly influence consumption behaviour. Their findings also point to the growing importance of information access, especially through digital channels, in guiding consumer decisions. In this context, media plays a relevant role in shaping both demand and consumption habits.

In this context, the reliability of information sources becomes increasingly important. Consumer decisions in the food sector are increasingly influenced by access to information and trust in available sources. Stanciu (2026) emphasizes that modern agro-food markets are characterized by higher complexity, where consumers depend on digital content to evaluate product quality and authenticity. The study also underlines the risks associated with misinformation, which can affect purchasing behaviour. This highlights the importance of reliable media channels in supporting informed food consumption.

3. Materials and Methods

This research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative secondary data analysis with qualitative synthesis of existing institutional reports and academic literature. The study does not involve primary data collection through surveys or interviews; instead, it critically analyses publicly available datasets and institutional reports.

The primary data sources consulted include: The National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (BNS) (for demographic, infrastructure, and ICT usage statistics); DataReportal Digital 2024: Moldova (for internet penetration, social media user counts, and device usage data); Statcounter Global Stats (for real-time market share data on social media platforms in Moldova); The Electronic Government Agency of Moldova (AGE) (for data from the Annual National Survey 2023 on the use of electronic public services); *Internews Moldova* and the Independent Journalism Center (for national surveys on media perception and competency); *Media Ownership Monitor Moldova* (for data on media consumption by type and trust levels); *BizLaw.md* (for e-commerce market size and growth projections).

The analysis is structured around three thematic axes: (1) access to the internet and digital infrastructure by geographic area and age group; (2) the identification of primary news sources and social media usage in Moldova; and (3) the implications of these consumption patterns for e-commerce and digital food advertising.

Methodological limitations include the uneven availability of recent data, the exclusion of Transnistrian territory from most national statistics, and the potential underrepresentation of rural populations in digitally administered surveys. These caveats are acknowledged throughout the analysis.

4. Internet Access in the Republic of Moldova: Regional and Demographic Dimensions

4.1 General Internet Penetration

According to DataReportal (2024), there were 2.14 million internet users in the Republic of Moldova at the start of 2024, representing a penetration rate of 63.5% of the total population. This figure places Moldova below the European Union average but reflects substantial progress from earlier years, driven by significant investment in broadband infrastructure.

The country has earned recognition for the quality and affordability of its fixed broadband infrastructure. Moldova ranks among the top three countries globally in terms of gigabit network coverage, with approximately 90% of the population having the option to subscribe to a gigabit-speed plan (DataReportal, 2024). The average cost of a 100 Mbit/s fixed broadband plan remains among the lowest in Europe, at approximately 9 euros per month.

However, there is a notable discrepancy between infrastructure availability and actual adoption rates. Despite world-class network coverage, the penetration rate of 63.5% suggests that over one third of the population — approximately 1.23 million people — remained offline at the start of 2024. This gap reflects socioeconomic barriers, digital literacy deficits, and demographic factors rather than a lack of physical infrastructure.

The Annual National Survey conducted by the Electronic Government Agency of Moldova (AGE, 2023), conducted on a sample of 3,040 persons in August–September 2023, confirms that most respondents (91.2%) access the internet daily, while 88.1% of surveyed households are connected to the internet (figure 1).

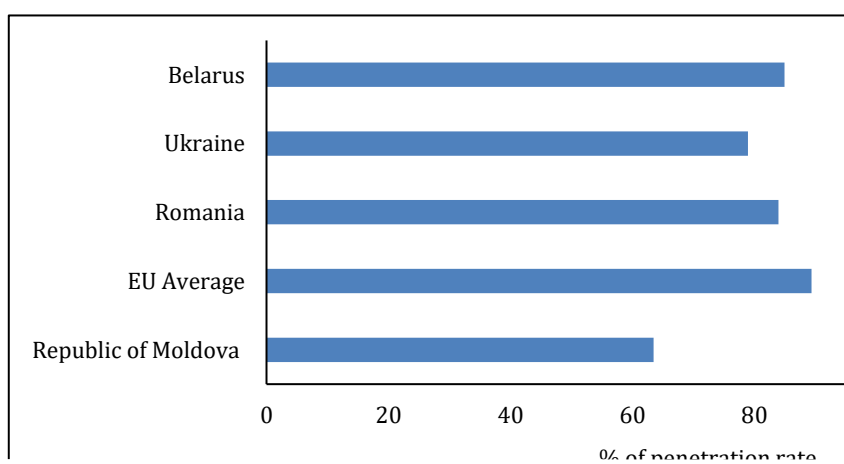


Figure 1. Internet penetration rate in Moldova compared to selected European countries (% , 2024)

Source: Authors' compilation based on DataReportal (2024)

These figures, drawn from an urban-biased survey methodology, likely overstate connectivity levels relative to the national average.

4.2 Internet Access by Geographic Area

Geographic disparities in internet access represent one of the most persistent structural challenges in Moldova's digital landscape. Urban centers — particularly Chişinău and Bălţi — benefit from dense broadband and mobile infrastructure, while rural areas, which account for approximately 55% of the population, face significantly lower connectivity rates.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics indicate that internet access in rural households lags urban households by approximately 15–20 percentage points, a gap consistent with patterns observed across Eastern Europe (figure 2).

The digital divide between urban and rural Moldova is compounded by lower average incomes in rural areas, reduced availability of digitally literate workers, and a younger urban population more likely to adopt new technologies.

Regional variation is also shaped by the unique geopolitical context of Moldova. Transnistria, a breakaway territory in the east of the country, operates under a separate administrative and telecommunications regime, and its population is excluded from most national statistics. The Gagauzia Autonomous Territorial Unit in the south of the country, while legally part of Moldova, also shows lower-than-average digital penetration due to its predominantly agricultural economy and older demographic profile.

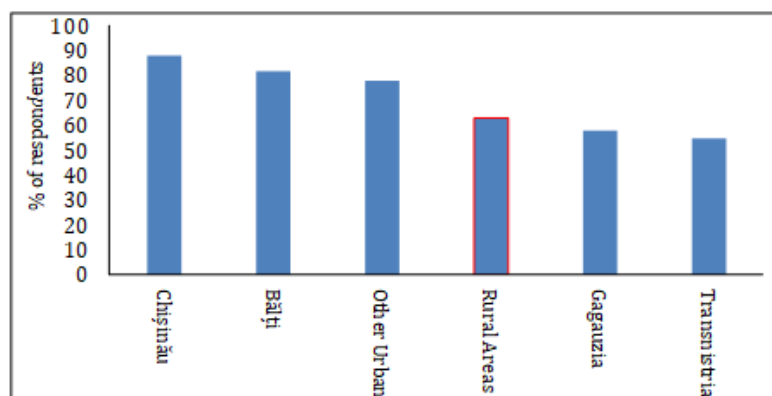


Figure 2. Estimated internet access rates by geographic area, Republic of Moldova (% , 2023)

*Source: BNS; AGE Annual Survey (2023); *Transnistria estimate based on limited available data*

4.3 Internet Access by Age Group

Age remains the strongest predictor of internet usage in Moldova. The AGE Annual Survey (2023) found that young people aged 18–29 accessed electronic services six times more frequently than persons aged 60–74. This generational divide is consistent with international trends and reflects both cohort effects — younger people having grown up with digital technology — and income effects, as younger urban workers have greater disposable income for devices and data plans.

Among users aged 18–29, social media platforms such as Instagram (94%), TikTok (87%), and Telegram (92%) are used almost universally, according to the Internews Moldova study (2023). In contrast, Facebook maintains broader cross-generational usage, with significant penetration among users aged 30–60 (figure 3).

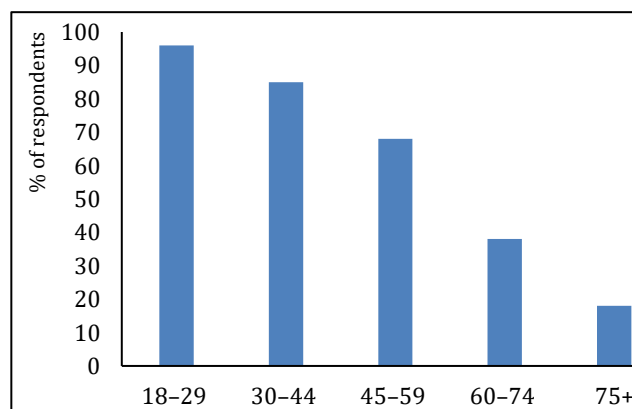


Figure 3. Internet usage by age group, Republic of Moldova 2023 (% of each age cohort)

Source: AGE Annual National Survey (2023); Internews Moldova (2023)

This demographic segmentation is critical for advertisers, as it determines which platforms can effectively reach different consumer cohorts. Mobile devices have become the dominant access point across all age groups. The AGE survey found that 81.2% of respondents accessed public e-services via mobile phone in 2023, an increase of 3 percentage points from 2022. This shift from desktop to mobile consumption has important implications for content design, advertising formats, and user experience in digital commerce.

5. Sources of News and Information in the Republic of Moldova

5.1 The Overall Information Landscape

The Moldovan information ecosystem is characterised by a high degree of pluralism alongside deep fragmentation and contested credibility. As of 2023, the country had 84 registered newspapers with a combined single-copy circulation of approximately one million copies, representing a continuous decline over the preceding fifteen years. Meanwhile, 57 television channels and 61 radio stations were active, operating within a regulatory framework overseen by the Audiovisual Council. Online media has emerged as the dominant segment of the media market, occupying approximately 28% of total media market share by 2022, according to the Independent Journalism Center (CJI, 2022). The exact number of online news portals is unknown, as Moldova has no official register for online media; a 2017 census identified 181 active news websites, but the current figure is likely considerably higher. The Public Opinion Barometer conducted in August 2023 found that 76.3% of respondents used the internet daily, and for 53.6% of respondents, the internet had become the most important source of information, surpassing television (30.1%) (figure 4).

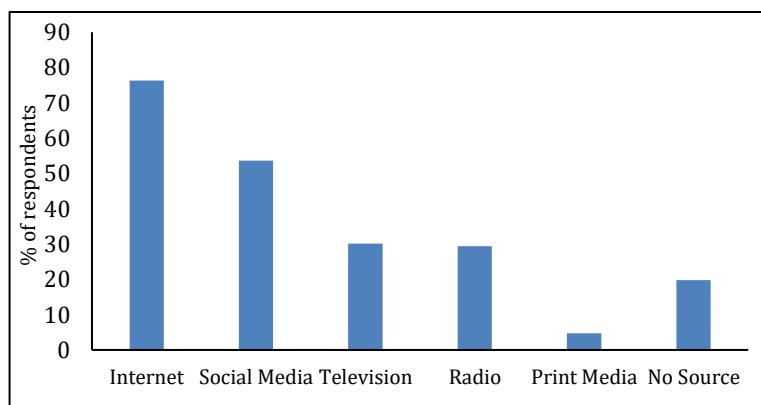


Figure 4. Primary sources of information among Moldovan respondents (% citing as main source, 2023)

Source: Public Opinion Barometer August (2023); AGE Annual Survey (2023)

This information's represents a structural shift from patterns observed as recently as five years ago, when television dominated as the primary information channel.

5.2 Television and Traditional Media

Despite the rise of online sources, television retains significant reach and credibility in Moldova, particularly among older and rural populations. A May–June 2024 poll conducted by the International Republican Institute found that 71% of respondents obtained their political news from television. For the population segment aged 40 and above, television remains the most trusted medium.

Trust in television is, however, unevenly distributed. The highly concentrated ownership of Moldovan television — with a small number of oligarchic groups controlling most national channels — has been extensively documented by the Media Ownership Monitor (RSF, 2023). This concentration has led to systematic concerns about editorial bias and political instrumentalization of broadcast media.

Radio consumption, while less dominant, remains non-trivial: approximately 29.4% of Barometer respondents reported listening to the radio daily, though nearly half (46.7%) had not listened to radio at all in the preceding three months. Print media continues its secular decline, with 68.5% of respondents reporting that they had not read any newspaper in the preceding three months, and only 4.7% reading newspapers daily.

5.3 Social Media as an Information Source

Social media has become a central pillar of the Moldovan information diet. According to Statcounter Global Stats data for February 2026, Facebook dominates the social media landscape with a 77.86% market share, followed by YouTube (7.62%), Pinterest (6.12%), Instagram (4.06%), and Twitter/X (3.33%). LinkedIn accounted for only 0.27% of social media traffic (figure 5).

The Internews Moldova national study (2023) found that internet users access Facebook (70%), Instagram (35%), and TikTok (29%) multiple times daily. A May–June 2024 survey by the International Republican Institute corroborates these figures, reporting that 65% of respondents obtained information from Facebook, 50% from YouTube, 28% from TikTok, and 27% from Instagram. Additionally, 46% of respondents identified social networks as their first or second source of political information.

Telegram has emerged as a significant platform, particularly among younger and politically engaged users, with 28% of weekly internet users accessing it daily (Internews Moldova, 2023). The platform's relatively unmoderated environment makes it both a venue for independent journalism and a conduit for disinformation.

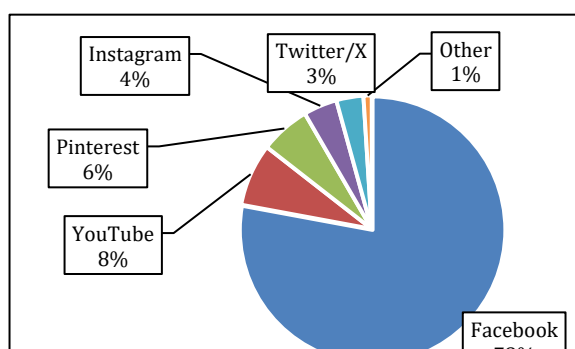


Figure 5. Social media market share in the Republic of Moldova (February 2026).

Source: Statcounter Global Stats (2026)

The AGE Annual Survey (2023) specifically notes that news websites and social networks (52% of internet users) have surpassed dedicated government web portals (21.6%) as primary sources of information, illustrating the commercial and civic power of platform-based media (figure 6).

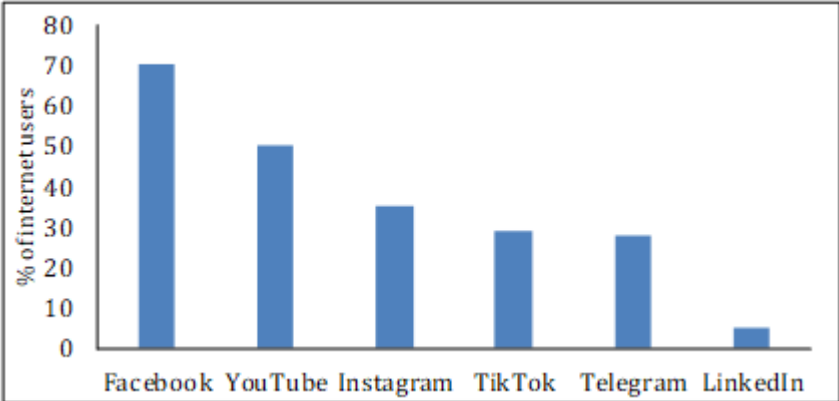


Figure 6. Daily social media platform usage among Moldovan internet users (% , 2023–2024)
 Source: Internews Moldova (2023); IRI Survey (May–June 2024)

5.4 Trust in Information Sources

Trust in information sources in Moldova is low and fragmented, reflecting a broader crisis of institutional credibility in post-Soviet societies. The August 2023 Public Opinion Barometer found that 38.5% of respondents considered the internet their most trusted source of information, compared to television (20.3%) and a striking 19.8% expressed no trust in any source of information. This environment of low institutional trust creates challenges for public communication and commercial advertising. Consumers who distrust traditional media may be more receptive to peer-to-peer recommendations via social networks, user-generated content, and influencer marketing — trends that are already reshaping digital advertising strategies globally (Reuters Institute, 2024).

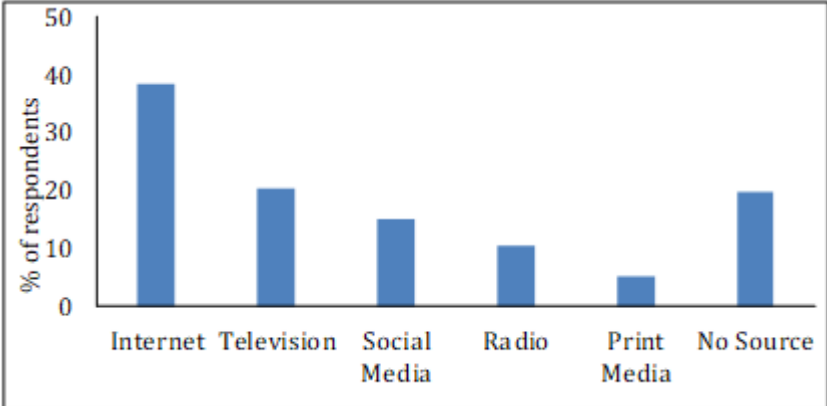


Figure 7. Trust in information sources among Moldovan respondents (% most trusted, August 2023)
 Source: Public Opinion Barometer (2023)

6. E-Commerce and Digital Advertising: Implications for the Food Sector

6.1 The E-Commerce Market in Moldova

The e-commerce sector in the Republic of Moldova has experienced rapid growth in recent years. According to data reported by BizLaw.md (2024), the market has reached an estimated value of 320 million euros annually, with projections suggesting growth exceeding 500% over the next three years. This trajectory is driven by increasing smartphone penetration, improved digital payment infrastructure, and the normalization of online shopping following the COVID-19 pandemic (figure 8).

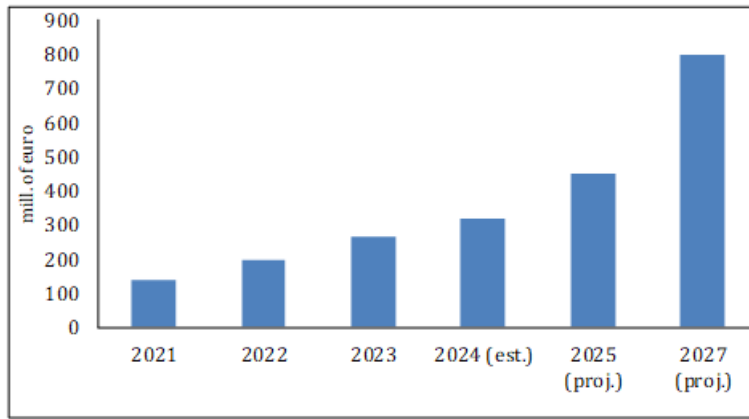


Figure 8. Moldova e-commerce market growth trajectory, 2021–2027 (Million EUR, with projections)

Source: Authors' projections based on BizLaw.md (2024); DataReportal (2024)

DataReportal (2024) confirms that there were 1.58 million social media users in Moldova in January 2024, equivalent to 46.8% of the total population and 73.6% of the total internet user base. Facebook's advertising reach extended to 38.5% of the total population, or approximately 46.4% of the eligible audience aged 13 and above. Instagram reached approximately 1.03 million users.

These figures establish a substantial and growing digital audience for commercial communications. For food retailers and advertisers, the implication is clear: digital channels — particularly Facebook and Instagram — offer the broadest reach within the connected population, while YouTube provides access to video-format advertising across multiple age groups.

6.2 Primary Channels for Food Advertising

Based on the media consumption data reviewed, the following hierarchy of advertising channels emerges for the food sector in Moldova:

- ◆ Social networks (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok): These platforms offer the highest daily reach among internet users and the most sophisticated targeting capabilities. Facebook's dominance (77.86% of social media traffic) makes it the indispensable primary channel for food advertising. Instagram's visual format is particularly suited to food and lifestyle content, while TikTok's penetration among users under 25 represents the most effective channel for reaching younger consumers.
- ◆ Search engines and news aggregators: Search advertising and sponsored content on news portals represent cost-effective complementary channels, particularly for reaching users actively seeking product information or comparing prices.
- ◆ Television: Despite the relative decline of television among younger demographics, broadcast media retains dominant reach among the 40+ population and rural consumers — segments that remain significant in the Moldovan food market. Television advertising remains essential for mass-market food brands.
- ◆ Messenger applications (Telegram, Viber): These platforms, while not conventional advertising channels, are increasingly used for direct marketing, community building, and promotional campaigns, particularly through branded channels and chatbots (figure 9).

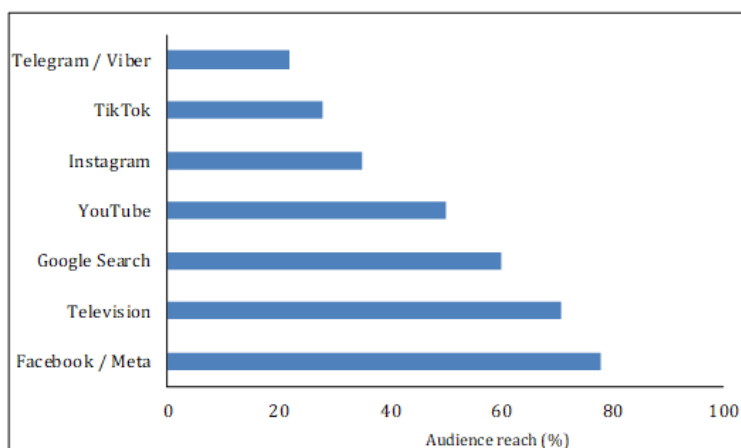


Figure 9. Estimated reach of key advertising channels for the food sector in Moldova (% of respondents, 2024)

Source: Authors' compilation based on IRI Survey (2024); Statcounter (2026)

The shift toward mobile consumption — with 81.2% of users accessing digital services primarily via smartphone — necessitates that food advertising campaigns be designed with a mobile-first approach, prioritising vertical video formats, fast-loading visual content, and frictionless call-to-action mechanisms.

6.3 Regulatory Framework for Digital Advertising

The regulatory framework governing advertising in Moldova, including digital food advertising, is established by Law No. 1227/1997 on Advertising and subsequent amendments. The Electronic Communications Law and the relevant provisions of the Code on Audiovisual Media Services apply to broadcast and online media respectively. The Audiovisual Council (CCA) exercises regulatory oversight over television and radio advertising, including restrictions on the advertising of certain food categories during children's programming.

Digital advertising on social media platforms operates in a partially regulated environment, with national legislation not yet fully adapted to the specificities of algorithmic targeting, influencer marketing, or programmatic advertising. This regulatory gap represents both a risk — in terms of potential consumer protection issues — and an opportunity for early-mover advertisers able to deploy sophisticated digital strategies before stricter frameworks are implemented.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

This research has examined the media information landscape of the Republic of Moldova through the lens of internet penetration, media consumption patterns, social media usage, and e-commerce development. The key findings can be summarised as follows.

First, Moldova's digital infrastructure is of high technical quality, with among the fastest and most affordable broadband connections globally. Yet actual internet penetration stands at 63.5% of the total population, indicating that significant structural barriers — particularly in rural areas and among older demographics — limit the full realization of connectivity benefits. The mobile phone has become the primary access device, accounting for over 81% of digital service usage.

Second, the information landscape has undergone a structural transition from traditional media dominance toward internet-first consumption. Social networks and news websites now constitute the primary source of information for over half of internet users, with Facebook accounting for nearly 78% of social media traffic. Television retains significant reach among older and rural populations and remains the dominant channel for political news consumption.

Third, trust in information sources is low across all channels, creating a fragmented media environment in which peer recommendations, social media communities, and independent digital sources exercise disproportionate influence. For advertisers, this underscores the importance of authentic content, influencer partnerships, and community engagement strategies.

Fourth, the e-commerce market, valued at 320 million euros and projected for exponential growth, represents a significant and expanding opportunity. Facebook and Instagram are the primary platforms for digital advertising, while TikTok is gaining rapidly among younger demographics. A mobile-first, multi-platform advertising strategy is essential for reaching the full spectrum of Moldovan digital consumers.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are offered:

- ◆ Invest in digital literacy programs targeting rural populations and users aged 50 and above, to bridge the digital divide and expand the addressable market for digital services and e-commerce.
- ◆ Develop and enforce a modernised regulatory framework for digital advertising that addresses algorithmic targeting, data protection, and food advertising standards in online environments.
- ◆ Prioritise mobile-optimised, platform-native content in food advertising campaigns, with particular attention to video formats suited to Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok.
- ◆ Support independent journalism and media literacy initiatives to address the low trust environment, which ultimately impairs the effectiveness of both public communication and commercial advertising.
- ◆ Expand statistical data collection on online media consumption, including disaggregated data by region, age group, and language community, to provide stronger evidence base for policy and commercial decision-making.

This research is part of a doctoral program and represents a contribution to the growing body of literature on digital media and commerce in small, transitional economies. Future research should incorporate primary data collection — including representative national surveys and in-depth interviews with media professionals and advertising practitioners — to complement and validate the secondary data analysis presented on the research.

References

- Bajomi-Lajár, P. (2014). *Party colonisation of the media in Central and Eastern Europe*. CEU Press.
- BizLaw.md. (2024). *The e-commerce market in the Republic of Moldova reached 320 million euros per year*. <https://www.bizlaw.md>
- Chaffey, D., & Ellis-Chadwick, F. (2022). *Digital marketing: Strategy, implementation and practice* (8th ed.). Pearson.

- Independent Journalism Center (CJI). (2022). *Media market in the Republic of Moldova: Realities and trends*. CJI.
- DataReportal. (2024). *Digital 2024: Moldova*. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-moldova>
- Electronic Government Agency (eGov Moldova). (2023). *Annual national survey 2023*. <https://egov.md/ro/node/40191>
- Gross, P. (2002). *Entangled evolutions: Media and democratization in Eastern Europe*. Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2017). Ten years after comparing media systems: What have we learned? *Political Communication*, 34(2), 155–171.
- International Republican Institute. (2024). *Survey of public opinion in Moldova: May–June 2024*. IRI.
- Internews Moldova. (2023). *Population perception of mass media and media skills in the Republic of Moldova*. Internews / Magenta Consulting.
- Manolache, S. B., Stanciu, S., Nechita, D., Zamfir, C. G., & Bruma, I. (2025). *Emerging trends in food consumer behavior in Romania: A PLS-SEM approach*. *E&M Economics and Management*, 28(2), 229–241.
- McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuail's mass communication theory* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Media Ownership Monitor Moldova. (2024). *Media consumption*. <https://moldova.mom-gmr.org/en/context/media-consumption/>
- Mickiewicz, E. (2008). *Television, power, and the public in Russia*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mocanu, N., & Stanciu, S. (2025). *Food security in the Republic of Moldova: An analysis based on FAO data*. *Scientific Papers. Series D. Animal Science*, 68(2).
- National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (BNS). (2023). *Statistical indicators on ICT and media*. <https://statistica.gov.md>
- Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. (2024). *Digital news report 2024*. University of Oxford.
- Reporters Without Borders (RSF) & Media Ownership Monitor. (2023). *Moldova: Media ownership and editorial independence*. RSF.
- Stanciu, S. (2026). *Food frauds: Economic and technological challenges*. Editura Academica
- Statcounter Global Stats. (2026). *Social media stats: Republic of Moldova*. <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/moldova>
- Thomson Reuters Foundation & EPIM. (2024). *Republic of Moldova: Research on media consumption and public perceptions*. TRF.
- Voltmer, K. (2013). *The media in transitional democracies*. Polity Press.