

# **MEDIA LITERACY AS A KEY COMPETENCY FOR THE SAFE AND EFFECTIVE USE OF MEDIA**

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## **Abstract**

Media are part of life. They are no longer just means of information and entertainment, but influence the thoughts, behavior, actions of people, especially among the youth. In the context of the developed society of the 21st century, media literacy has become a life virtue. The conviction is that literate/knowledgeable users have a base for reading media messages in new media products. The rapidly developing technologies and their relationship with new media creates in elders an attitude of a desire for development and qualification. This paper tracks how competence helps in the communication between journalists and readers/users of media services; analyzes the need for a change in the curriculum of higher education and attitudes towards continued education and qualifications, tailored to the challenges of the Internet and new media; comments the degree of media literacy among students in journalism-related subjects and how media literacy carries/adds “added value” to the information, the media product, i.e. broadens viewpoints, adds awareness and draws trends. The tasks of this research are to explain the way new media is adopted and used, and the prospects of improving the quality of the educational process in the higher education and intercultural education. Emphasis is placed on teaching “media literacy” as a characteristics of European education policy, which leads to safe media use, informed choice, and unlimited opportunities for communication. Modern issues are also interpreted by the experience if established scientists and leading figures in society to motivate young researchers and students towards “media literacy” to integrate media into education and improve the e-learning environment. This research sheds light on a current issue of contemporary education and training, demonstrates the need and encourages activities and initiatives to improve the quality of media education in the university environment. It imposes new virtues in the educational process – new educational programs, educational standards, and governing bodies. Thus, the educational paradigm of “education for life” is changing into “learning through the entirety of your life” which defends the position of education as a virtue and element of the culture of relationships in the new millennium.

Keywords: education, higher education, internet, media literacy, media.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

We live in a time where media influences life daily. It is already part of life. It is not only a means of informing and entertaining, but it dictates the thoughts, behavior, and action of people, especially among young people. In the context of a developed society of the 21st century, media literacy has become a vital asset. Imposed is the conviction that literate/informed consumers have a basis for decoding the media messages in new media products. Emerging technologies and their relationship with new media create an attitude in older people to develop and increase qualifications. The need to foster a culture of media communication for the purpose of education, critical thinking, and a reasoned position is increasingly urgent. I believe that elderly Bulgarians are in dire need of media literacy, and it is absolutely imperative for children to start this process before they grab their phones and dive into new social media and online challenges. I am convinced that media education, knowledge of the specifics of media content, media communication builds civic awareness and are a step towards safer and more effective media content.

## **2 MEDIA LITERACY AT THE CONTEMPORARY MEDIA ECOSYSTEM – A SHORT OVERVIEW**

Media literacy is defined in Art. 48 of Directive 2010/13 / EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 March 2010 on the coordination of certain provisions laid down in the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States relating to the provision of audiovisual media services [1]. According to the European normative document, media literacy means the skills, knowledge and understanding that enable consumers to use the media effectively and safely. People with media literacy are able to make informed choices, understand the nature of content and services, and take

advantage of the full range of opportunities offered by new communication technologies. They are better able to protect themselves and their families from harmful or offensive materials. Therefore, the development of media literacy in all sectors of society should be encouraged and its progress closely monitored.

Media constructs reality. One lives in real life and in the life that media offers. In our desire to gain experience and knowledge, to inform ourselves and to entertain ourselves, we inevitably find ourselves in the media reality, because it is not possible to reach everything that interests us. That is why media are a phenomenon that facilitates trespassing in other attempts, connects us to other worlds. But media offer a different reality. In the messages they broadcast, they construct reality and present us with an idea of it. Every representation of the world is an attempt to define or describe it, and in this sense, it is a construct, because a choice is made, a selection of facts, the view of the producer is transferred. In media messages, certain attitudes, ideas, interpretations, and evaluations, rather specific to the media discourse, are encoded. In this sense, they greatly influence the way we perceive and understand reality. [2]

The media system is logically integrated into the globally expanding information network of money and power. With all the contradictory assessments of globalization as a process and the media as a power, it is undeniable that the media is part of a huge, fast-growing, value-added industry, job creation, creativity for individuals and nations, tradition and identity are preserved. Media management is a challenge because it is precisely in the management of the media organization that the thirst for profit clashes violently with the public interest in quality journalism.[3]

According to authoritative European researcher Ulrich Saxer, "the media are complex institutionalized systems covering communication channels with different potential for action (with public influence)". [4]

Mass media are also economic institutions engaged in the production and distribution of consumer-oriented content.

In the age of modern information and communication technologies, we live in a society defined as a media society where the coexistence of people is influenced by media. Media convey values, attitudes, feelings and ideas about the world. They are one-to-many mediators in their classic version and are interactive, stimulating dialogue in the "new media" version. At the same time, the media is at the heart of a sensitive and dynamic industry that needs to adapt to the constantly changing economic and political environment.

In a democratic society, the function of the media is to inform, to form public opinion, to criticize, and to control. As Fileva writes, "structured, stored and influenced by the media is aggregated to social knowledge within space and time and performs economic, social and cultural functions." [3] Media are an extremely complex and interdependent network of texts, institutions, circumstances, relationships. " [5]

In recent years, the European Commission's flagship goal of harmonizing regulations in all Member States so that there are no barriers to consumers and business is the Digital Single Market. Rules are being prepared to respond to the growth rate of digital development. Bold steps are being taken to create the conditions for the European economy, industry and employment to fully reap the benefits of digitalization. But implementing the Digital Single Market Strategy is a long and difficult process. Legislative changes are needed in many areas of these rules.

### **3 THE MEDIA INDUSTRY – ABSTRACTION OR REALITY?**

The media industry is undoubtedly one of the fastest growing. [6], [9] Newspapers and the press, in the battle to retain their readership, are beginning to unite into whole new media complexes of a new type, which today carry out all media activity, and soon they are about to become the main market of the future. We are witnessing a new type of organization and management of society through information knowledge and products, by consuming the services of today's information systems controlled by the media Internet giants. The new Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on copyright in the digital single market outlines a long-term vision for the modernization of European Union (EU) rules and their harmonious application for the benefit of consumers. The document legalized the contribution of the press industry during the transition to the digital age. The new directive is one of the decisive steps of the European Commission and the Council to update the rules in the digital single market, reduce the differences between national copyright regimes, to ensure that the applicable rules go

beyond borders and to allow for more broader online access to content in the EU, to achieve a well-functioning copyright market and fair sharing of online content, access to more originals.

Media is changing as a result of social change, communication revolution, technological novelties. New communication services are emerging that promote both global integration and local connections. In the digital age, new regulations and policies are needed to create an Internet democracy that reconciles the global with the local.

Genre forms in traditional media are transforming at a rapid pace. The audience is becoming more demanding and the classical media - press, radio, television, have to compete with online media. For this to happen, they adapt the structure style, language, even layout of the journalistic product.

Newspapers, print media are clearly reducing the volume of texts even in genres such as commentary, interview, which is "torn" by internal headings and subheadings, illustrations. This trend of brevity of content, because of the reader scrolling / scanning information, is already a daily occurrence.

A characteristic feature of the print media in recent years is to amplify the effects of tragic and dramatic events with the use of strong phrases, aggressive rhetoric, jargon, even cynicism. That is, the barriers in the media are being erected for the language of the street, which moves away from the literary form. The convergent media environment is affecting genres in the media - dialogue and conversation are increasingly present in radio and television, in the form of conversation, discussion, interview, including via social networks such as Skype, WhatsApp. Visualization is enhanced, 3D graphics and animation are used, which enables the presentation of a large amount of information in a compressed form and facilitates its perception and understanding by the audience.

Hybrid products have emerged in media - a mix of genres in forums, blogs, social networking sites, etc. that are part of today's communication environment - commercial media messages are intertwined with those of the public, everyday topics are discussed in both popular and in specialized forms, blurs the line between fiction and reality.

In the time we live in, for most consumers, digital space is a lawless area where anyone can take and use for free.

It is considered that information should be circulated freely and used free of charge because it belongs to the whole of society. The work of artists is downplayed - songs on the Internet are free of charge by default, as are all copyrighted texts

Users distribute copyright because they are uneducated and unintentionally cause harm.

In a time of intense social, economic and technological transformation, media have become a convergent phenomenon, shifting the boundaries between journalism, public relations, and advertising. In this situation, the preservation of freedom of expression, diversity of content, professional standards and journalistic ethics, cooperation between regulation, self-regulation and correlation, in other words, literacy of expression, communication, behavior, are of increasing importance.

Communication, as a conscious symbolic social interaction, defines all the important roles of the media in the modern world. In addition to an information channel, the media educates and informs; compares and analyzes; forms public opinion; shapes the worldview and expectations of the outside world.

#### **4 THE JOURNALIST AS AN AUTHOR AND COPYRIGHT HOLDER**

As copyright holders and related rights, journalists will generate income from their own work, from new business models based on the use of proprietary content.

Creating an information campaign to effectively inform copyright protection of authors and users in the local media will help to adapt to new realities more quickly and dynamically. The dynamics of the processes that occur in the environment divide the media not only by their advantages and benefits for consumers, but also by established attitudes and consumption habits.

The media industry needs to find its place in the new environment in order to create rules to determine the amount of remuneration and reach expanding markets through media content.

The main role in this situation falls to the journalist - the person who earns his living through journalistic activity. [7] His social responsibility directly influences the general behavior of the professional personality. The Russian journalist theorist Evgeny Prokhorov points out that in his work the journalist is obliged to take into account five factors simultaneously. These are the information policy of the media,

the interests or needs of the audience, the nature of the phenomena reflected in reality, the peculiarities of the media in which he works, as well as the personal qualities of the journalist.

The journalist, like any citizen, is responsible for the wrongful act he has committed. It is the ground for criminal, civil or administrative liability.

Criminal liability for a crime is realized in the criminal process. Crimes that can be committed through the media are: insult, slander, disclosure of the secret of adoption, etc. The liability of the journalist is exercised on a general basis - everyone is obliged to repair the damage they have caused to one another. Administrative and criminal liability of the journalist is realized on a general basis. It is personal and can only be worn by a certain individual who is able to understand the nature and significance of the offense and to govern their actions. The journalistic profession is perceived differently. Journalists feel different, separate from the rest, because they have diverse skills and access to vast amounts of information and character-specific information. This confronts them with social and moral challenges and forms a certain self-awareness that cannot be understood by the rest of society, but only by individuals similar in behavior, that is, by establishing the so-called "journalistic brotherhood". The public is ambiguous towards journalists.[8] At some stages in the development of society, journalism is seen as a serving profession, and journalists are treated equally with low social classes. In others, it is an important social activity, and journalists are prominent and respected members of the public, part of the intellectuals and even of the ruling circles.

It is not the journalists who make the fateful decisions that exercise real power, but simply present to the public the views of someone else.

The behavior of the contemporary journalists is burdened by a lot of expectations. They are required to have adequate education, technological and social skills, without which it is inconceivable to fully pursue their professional activity. At the same time, every journalist must abide by and obey the many rules that are part of the media ethics or editorial policies of the media they work for, as well as general and specialized media legislation. There are great social hopes for the journalist's activity - to reflect objectively the reality, to inform correctly, to balance between individual personal and social positions, to be an impartial observer, and when necessary - to judge the weaknesses and conflicts in society. [10] After all, it turns out that a journalist must be part of the public in order to be able to present society's particularities in their writings. But at the same time, it is necessary to stand outside of society in order to be able to understand the context of the different situations and the completeness of the analyzed characters.

„Poynter“ Institute, a global leader in media and journalism research and training, identifies 37 basic skills that outline the future of journalism, including: curiosity, accuracy, dealing with stress and deadlines, criticism, a rich general culture, good social skills, teamwork, journalistic ethics, knowledge of foreign cultures, knowledge of management, understanding of the media, copyright, knowledge of journalistic laws, knowledge of media organization and business, good judgment on news, current events, information gathering based on reliability, leadership, the ability to accept change and innovation, analyze and synthesize huge amounts of data, create contacts and sources, search for high-level online information, mastery of interviewing technology, search for news and check sources without the Internet, looking at the news from a historical point of view, interpreting statistics and charts, storytelling, writing in understandable language, high literacy, various types of journalistic writing, understanding audience expectations and needs, speaking skills, HTML and other computer skills, capturing and processing video, capturing and processing images, recording and processing audio, and storytelling skills for design and visualization. [8] Among those listed are those that have been imperative to journalism throughout all stages of its development, as well as completely new ones, imposed entirely by the evolution of technology and the Internet. As noted by the skills listed above, there are also those related to the legal competence of journalists, namely knowledge of media laws and copyright laws, which is an integral part of their daily lives.

## **5 THE MEDIA SYSTEM – KNOWLEDGE, CREATIVENESS AND BUSSINESS SUMMARY**

Medias are a medium of communication. They form public opinion and on the one hand, by facilitating the process of public life, facilitate the control of public affairs. On the other, they increase transparency and accountability. Media have educational and entertaining functions as well as play an important role in economies as they create jobs and generate income. In a democratic society, people are involved in

governing the community. In this context, the power of media is enhanced in terms of individual rights and the use of the public interest resource by safe and effective media. [11], [12]

New ways of distributing large-scale media content at low cost and with minimal technical and professional requirements extend the levels of interaction between authors, owners, and users. The change in the media has created new entrants - these are the consumers who, with their activity and participation, are leading new paths to information. New technologies are easily changing the roles of each participant, and this process is becoming easier and more seamless.

All participants in the media system, new and traditional, must be held accountable and in line with Council of Europe norms. There is a need to regulate the relations between the various actors in media. It is necessary to examine the existing concepts and legal framework for the media in view of their ever-increasing development in terms of form, applications, communication to ensure and enhance good governance in a democratic society. [13] Establish codes of conduct for authors and users, pluralistic media content and environmental control strategies, rights management actions based on existing media and journalistic standards. It is important for professional media organizations to promote the implementation of codes of conduct and good practices, and to engage in other forms of self-regulation, for example by acting as collective rights management organizations.

New business models in the media must retain editorial freedom and independence as a mandatory requirement and a direct consequence of freedom of expression, the right of opinion and the right to receive and disseminate information. In other words, editorial politics is a matter for media itself. Old media publishes it openly and usually consists of checking the content. In the new communication environment, different types of editorial policy can be embedded in statements about the mission undertaken or expressed informally as a commitment to certain principles (for example, "non-ticketing" or motto). Media environment has evolved to attract more and more consumers, and partners whose content is modeled by professional journalists.

Medias earn credibility with the professionalism and competence of the journalists who work for them. They maintain a professional ethic and their duty is to respect the journalistic standards of truthfulness, responsibility, freedom of expression and freedom of independence of journalists. Media ethics is also important in public communication, aimed at a wide audience and open to all.

In the most general sense, people recognize and rely heavily on the media for information and other content. They expect the content to be created to the appropriate professional standards. In a democratic society, they rely on the existence of multiple sources of information and expect the content to be diverse and in line with the interests of different segments of society.

Depending on the purpose and nature of the special media, audience expectations may change. Expectations regarding public media are higher than for some other media. It is natural to expect news media to be regularly updated and distributed periodically.

In order to fulfil their role and reach their goal, medias must gain the public's trust. The development of professional and ethical standards largely reflects societal expectations. There are also expectations about transparency and accountability. [14], [15] Higher levels of expected trust, standards, transparency and accountability do not necessarily have a wider audience, wider distribution or greater impact. In a global society where the media knows no boundaries, there is an expectation that there will be some harmonization of understanding of the media.

Media and journalists are governed by the same laws - civil, commercial, corporate, tax or criminal law. Media freedom must be understood broadly. It represents freedom of expression and the right to distribute content. As art. 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), this right must be guaranteed across borders. In this model, the central place is occupied by the public media, next to the commercial and community media. Their aim should be to ensure the universal provision of quality, reliable and diverse content, with true editorial autonomy and institutional independence. They need to deliver quality and innovative content and services in the digital environment.

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

It is a fact that competence helps in communication between journalists and readers / users of media services. Media literacy brings "added value" to information, the media product, broadens perspectives, complements awareness, and sets trends. Therefore, there is a need for a change in the curriculum content of higher education programs and attitudes towards continuing education and qualifications, tailored to the challenges of the Internet and new media, to increase the level of media knowledge of

students studying in journalism majors. Media literacy education as a feature of European education policy leads to safe media use, informed choice and unlimited communication opportunities. The issue is modern and its interpretation in society is important in order to integrate the media in education and improve the electronic learning environment. Addressing this current problem of contemporary education and training will encourage activities and initiatives to improve the quality of media education in the university environment, which in turn will create new values in the educational process, new educational standards and governing bodies. Thus, the educational paradigm of education for a lifetime is changing into lifelong learning, taking on the position: education as a value and element of the culture of relationships in the new millennium.

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