

**THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING MEDIA LITERACY IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

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**Abstract.** Without the development of media literacy, social network users will remain trapped in a whirlpool of manipulative information, critical thinking will not develop, and their scope of thinking and worldview will gradually weaken. This article discusses the role and necessity of media literacy in the 21st century.

**Keywords:** manipulation, digital age, social media platforms, critical thinking skills, information culture.

**INTRODUCTION**

The rise of information technologies and the expansion of media platforms have given birth to the era of information. Today, it is not enough to simply read any information; it must be carefully analyzed and observed, because news spreading around the world can negatively influence human thinking and consciousness. In the process of information dissemination on social networks, priority is given not to quality but to speed, and not to socio-political content but to sensational news. This increases the number of viewers but can create internal conflicts or worsen gender-related issues. As the audience consumes information, their thinking and worldview begin to adapt to what they see. In general, mass media play a crucial role in human life. Television, social networks, video games, and even the music we listen to have a strong influence on how we perceive the world.

These processes involve collecting, organizing, analyzing, and publishing information visually. Traditionally, journalism has been practiced through print media, television, and radio. This form of communication is one-directional: the journalist is the main source of information, and the audience receives it. That is, the reader accepts prepared information and can only express their attitude to it. For this reason, traditional journalism today has lost its power of immediacy and is viewed mainly as a reliable means of delivering information.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODS

With the emergence of the Internet and new media platforms, information dissemination has become interactive. Now, users not only read ready-made material, but also express their opinions about it, share it on social networks, leave comments, and in some cases, directly communicate with journalists. This interactive environment strengthens cooperation between journalists and the audience and helps journalists assess public opinion on any topic. Thus, in the digital age, social networks have become a space not only for information consumption but also for social dialogue.

However, one of the main principles—credibility and accuracy—has gained even greater significance. The media audience is large and includes all age groups. Therefore, information must be filtered within the modern information space. During this process, users must develop media literacy and critical thinking skills. The media literacy competence of online users—meaning the ability to recognize, analyze, and evaluate media content—becomes a key factor.

The concept of ‘information literacy’ was first introduced in the USA in 1977 within the national program for reforming higher education. A.P. Ershov defined computer literacy as the ability to solve problems using computers, plan actions, predict their consequences, understand the basic concepts of informatics, and recognize its role.

**When analyzing the role of media and information literacy in society, its key components include:**

1. Understanding the essence of reforms carried out as active citizens of a democratic society;
2. Developing skills to filter daily information transmitted and received through media;
3. Preventing manipulation of human consciousness through information and making correct decisions;
4. Analyzing positive or negative changes in individuals under the influence of visual images and being able to “read” hidden messages within visual content;
5. Analyzing the nature of textual communication delivered through mass media.

Just as life without the Internet has become unimaginable, living without media literacy is also becoming almost impossible. Due to the rapid development of information technologies, the Internet has become an integral part of daily life: education, work, communication, and even leisure activities rely on it. However, as digital opportunities expand, misinformation, manipulative content, and fake news increase. This requires not just consumption of information, but its critical evaluation, verification, and analysis.

Media literacy is not merely a skill—it is a key protective tool in the digital world. A media-literate person does not blindly trust information. They verify sources, compare multiple perspectives, and try to determine whether the content is real or fake.

Globally, the concept first appeared in the 1930s and was used by British scholars. Media literacy has been introduced as a separate course within humanities in the UK and Australia. Starting from the 1970s, Finland—recognized as the country with the highest capability to resist fake news and disinformation (2021)—has introduced media and information literacy into both school and higher education systems.

Sweden continued this trend. Media education has been taught as a separate subject since the 1980s, aimed at developing critical perception of media content, understanding information from various sources, and expressing opinions about films and television programs. Since autumn 2000, media education has been officially included in the Swedish national curriculum.

In Eastern countries, media literacy in China focuses mainly on the younger generation. The government even limits the use of the entertainment platform “TikTok” to one hour per day. This helps prevent narrowing of worldview, improves concentration, develops critical thinking, increases time spent on learning and research, and even reduces risks of eye and physical health issues.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Today, critical thinking and media literacy skills are extremely important for young people, who are the most active consumers of online content. Proper understanding and interpretation of information determine a person’s consciousness, worldview, and social engagement. A person lacking media literacy may quickly fall victim to manipulation, spread misinformation, or make wrong decisions. Many news

items are driven by certain interests, goals, or ideologies. Therefore, reading information carefully, paying attention to its source, and verifying facts have become integral parts of modern information culture.

In the digital age, due to interactivity, instant dissemination, and the ability to share information rapidly, the likelihood of manipulation increases. Consequently, media literacy becomes even more important.

Competence means not only “knowledge” but also its practical application. The key competences required from media users include:

1. **Analytical approach:** questioning information such as “Who produced this?”, “For what purpose?”, “Is the source reliable?”, “Is the information complete?”
2. **Reflective thinking:** recognizing how media shapes one’s own thoughts and opinions, and analyzing that process.
3. **Technical and platform literacy:** modern journalism now includes videos, infographics, and diagrams, which provide faster and easier understanding. Therefore, it is crucial to avoid traditional thinking and use reliable, improved platforms to understand and evaluate information.
4. **Ethical and social aspects:** responsibility in information dissemination, avoiding and preventing manipulation, and promoting honesty are essential ethical requirements for media literacy development.

To develop these competences, they must be promoted widely. In Uzbekistan, several effective initiatives are being implemented. For example, the Law “On the Foundations of State Youth Policy in the Republic of Uzbekistan” prohibits actions aimed at promoting immorality, violence, and cruelty among youth. The Convention “On Guarantees of the Rights of the Child” bans the use and distribution of media depicting pornography, cruelty, or content harmful to children. Schools and universities introduce subjects such as “Information Security” and “Media Literacy Skills,” raising awareness, teaching responsible media use, and promoting digital culture.

## CONCLUSION

The lack of a regulated information culture in today’s social environment leads to the following issues:

- uploading, storing, publishing, and distributing content that threatens peace, is destructive, or violates the privacy of others;
- violation of minors’ rights;
- sharing obscene texts, pornographic images, or content depicting sexual violence involving minors;
- uploading images of animal abuse or content encouraging violence;
- promoting racial, religious, or ethnic hatred, fascism, or ideas of racial superiority;
- posting extremist materials;
- promoting criminal activity or providing instructions for committing crimes;
- sharing restricted information or personal data of third parties;
- distributing advertisements for narcotics, including “digital drugs,” instructions for their preparation and distribution;
- posting fraudulent content;
- irresponsible behavior on social media.

Therefore, the updated Constitution assigns the regulation of these matters and the provision of safe Internet access to the state.

The findings show that the formation of media literacy competence has become both a requirement and a necessity of the modern era. As consumers of media products, we are expected not only to receive information but also to analyze it, verify sources, and detect manipulation. Media literacy is essential not only for journalists or media specialists but for every citizen.

In conclusion, while the Internet has made our lives faster, more convenient, and richer in opportunities, media literacy makes it safer, more conscious, and more meaningful. Therefore, in today’s digital age, developing media literacy is the personal responsibility of every user.

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