

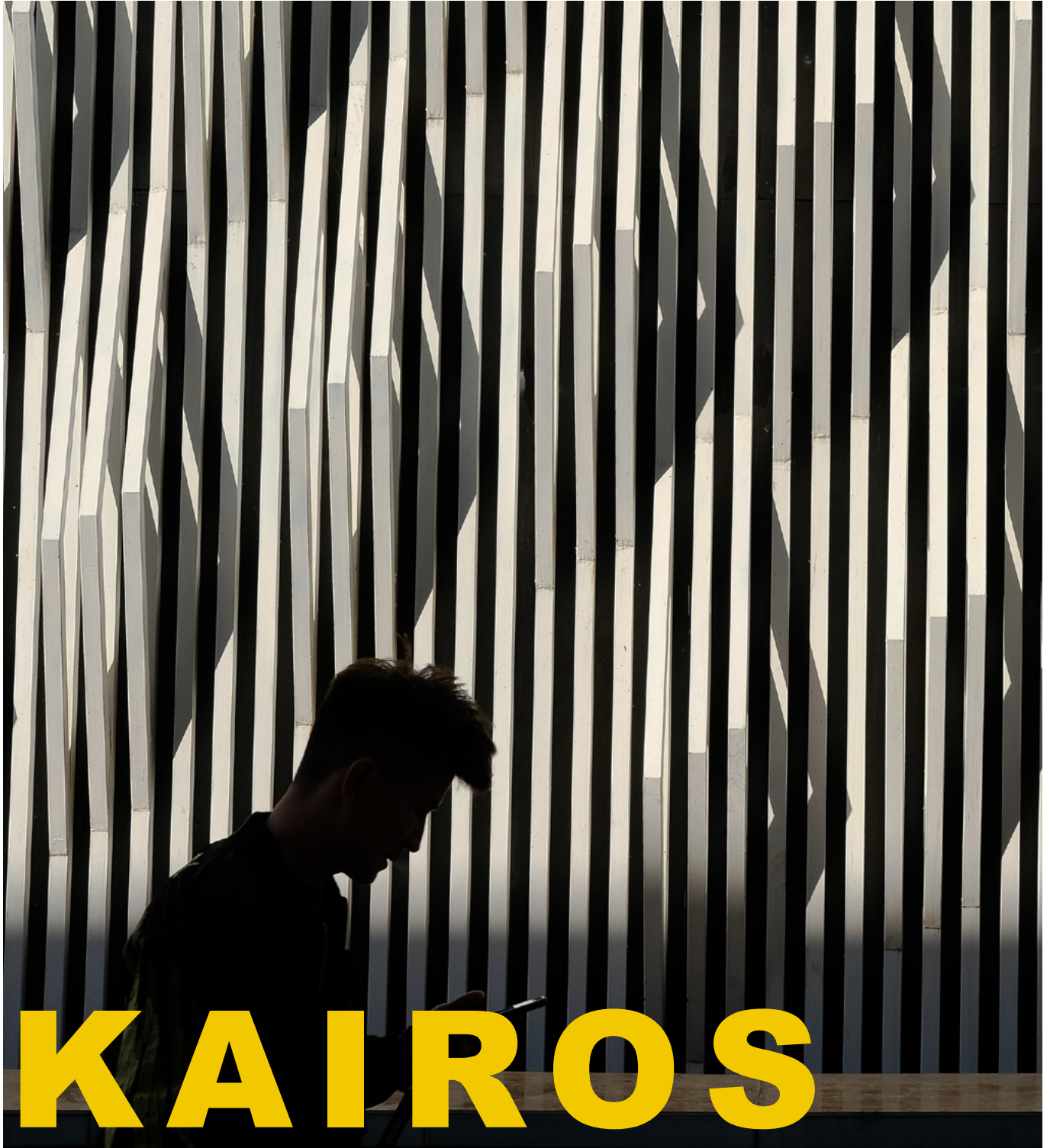


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About the journal

Kairos – Journal of Media and Communications Review is launched in 2022 by the Institute of Communication Studies from Skopje, Macedonia. Kairos is an open-access journal and a platform for the exchange of knowledge and ideas between teachers, academics, researchers, students, and other professionals in the field of media and communications. The journal is intended for the academic and professional public that wants to discuss innovative ideas and practices, as well as case studies in the field.

The journal will be devoted to addressing contemporary issues and future developments related to the interdisciplinary academic discussion, the results of empirical research, and the mutual interaction of expertise in media and information studies, media education as well as their sociological, psychological, political, linguistic, and technological aspects.

Apart from these areas, other interesting articles and contributions offering new perspectives and solutions relevant to media, communications, education, strategic management, and business, are welcome and will be considered for publication in the journal.

All articles are double-blind reviewed. Internationally renowned experts from the academic and research community are involved in the process of anonymous double-blind reviews. Thus, the journal offers authors an opportunity to improve their texts using anonymous reviews in accordance with the best academic and research standards.

The journal is launched as part of USAID's Media Literacy Project YouThink. It is a five-year USAID-funded program that works with youth to help them navigate and shape an information ecosystem that informs and engages rather than divides and polarizes. The project is implemented by IREX, Macedonian Institute for Media, the Institute of Communication Studies, and the Youth Educational Forum.

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Eva Londo

Children and diversity in the media: What are we missing out?

Abstract

Shrek, the frightening ogre of the swamp, yet dearly famous for children, falls in love with the pretty princess Fiona, who transforms into an ugly monster at night. Fiona, obsessed with her appearance, awaits anxiously to be saved and loved by Prince Charming and retain her daytime beauty, or else she will remain an ugly and unloved monster. There are some more children's movies that project the social reaction and rejection towards something or someone that is considered to be different than the norm. These images are mediated in various forms: be it films, cartoons, news, etc, thus creating citizens who are prone to exclude anything atypical, diverse, unusual. In any way, the selected information offered by the media affects people's familiarity with human diversity (Naficy & Gabriel 1993, O'Barr 1994 cited by Cortes 2000) as well as intensifies the social and cultural issues. Children receive their social construct mainly from information they receive from mass media, which helps them create models and define their understanding of the world. This information can be as simple as a cartoon or multi-layered as these movies, but it can have semantic and stereotypical nuances that are packed in an attractive way, presented as news or as entertainment, and offered as fact or fabrication. In a specific context, children tend to be prejudiced towards a different ethnic group (Teichman & Zafirir 2003, Cortes 2000) and this starts to demonstrate between the ages of 5-7 by socialising mostly with their similar peers and by rejecting all others who are different (Nesdale & Lambert 2007). Similarly, they react against those peers who show features that are deemed to be "abnormal" or atypical by the societal norms, such as colour, physical appearance or other differences such as speech disorders. Different studies have investigated the factors that affect this stereotypical behavior, but most stress the role of the media. This paper will take an interdisciplinary approach on literature in order to understand the volatility of children on media content and will try to identify some instances of Albanian media's contribution on creating biased perception on different social and cultural groups and explore the possible ways of educating children on diversity issues.

Keywords:

Mediated images, cognitive knowledge, othering, gatekeepers

Introduction

It should come as no surprise that children of today are more vulnerable to becoming prey to discrimination or stereotyping, because of features like size, shape, color, or any disability. One factor that could play into this increasing phenomenon of the othering of peers is the media content to which they are exposed.

This paper is going to explore the literature, by bringing an interdisciplinary approach, in order to give an overview and understanding of the processes that render humans to such behavior. Since the first attempt made to introduce media literacy in high schools, the process is still pending 10 years later, and children and youth are still vulnerable to every media production and with little understanding of its effects. However, the most disconcerting issue is that commercial media interests play a paramount role in determining media content and productions. Therefore, we will elaborate on some exemplary case studies of this last decade attesting to the role of the media in the way Albanian children form their attitudes and behave and we will also try and give some recommendations that can improve the situation in media.

Literature review

Cognitive studies show that media content contributes highly to views and beliefs people hold, on issues like identity, attitudes towards racial and ethnic minorities and our attitudes about sexuality” (Berger, 2012, p. 14). It is this information selected and offered by the media, on which people base their knowledge on human diversity (Naficy & Gabriel 1993, O’Barr 1994 cited by Cortes 2000), and this happens subconsciously “even where we don’t expect it, even where we don’t want it, or even where we don’t realize it, (Cortes 2000, p 17). When this information is violent or fearful towards a specific category of persons, it is going to exert the same attitude in the real life. In line with this, researchers support that new movies and TV programmes containing violence can either push the envelope of violent content or attract attention because of their presumed “copy -cat” effects on some member of the audience (Sparks, Sparks & Sparks, 2009) where kids are included. Cortes (2000) suggests that subconscious learning from media, entertainment in particular, is stored until it is provoked by external stimuli, which, when perceived as dangerous, should, by definition, evoke fear. A related set of stimuli that typically evoke fear might be referred to as deformities and distortions, or familiar organisms in unfamiliar and unnatural forms (Cantor 2009, p 291). Organisms that have been mutilated as a result of injury could be considered to fall into this category and they are encountered in the form of realistic characters like dwarves, hunchbacks, and mutants (ibid). They are similar to real-life characters, but deviant from social norms in size, shape, skin colour, facial features, etc. In most cases, they are constructed as sources of fear for children and depicted as evil or are locked away. For the entertainment industry, “the depiction of events that either cause or threaten to cause great harm is the stock-in-trade” (Cantor 2009, p. 292), for which they are so successful. Experimental studies have proven that the perceived harm can lead children to avoid engaging with these persons who have these deformities, and in specific circumstances, when provoked by external stimuli, demonstrate an aggressive attitude towards them. Psychologist have proven that around the age of 5–7, many children demonstrate biased and prejudiced behaviours towards alien groups,

including those of ethnic and cultural identity (Teichman & Zafir, 2003, Cortes 2000) and they manifest it by showing preference and socializing with those close to their ethnical background and by refusing those who are different (Nesdale & Lambert 2007). The same behavior is manifested towards those people who have features or characteristics, be it physical or pathological, which are considered as 'abnormal' or 'atypical' by societal norms and depicted as such in the movies or shows. As such, violence, expulsion, disguise or fear towards the "different other" in physical appearance or difficulties in speech or else, activates limbic and neo-cortical system that prepare the organism for motor plans associated with either fight or flight (Murray et al., 2006). This is a neurophysiological reaction of the "old brain system", that may be essentially "preconscious" and have long term implications that extent well beyond the viewing period (ibid). This tendency, considered as the 'othering' of a human - which is to view or treat "other" groups or individuals as being inherently different from themselves, almost to the extent of foreign or alien beings - further divides groups of people and solidifies an individual's own behaviours and cultural characteristics (Canales, 2000).

The way in which children are exposed to any form of media content - depicting, however vaguely, deformations or deficiencies of characters - affect the subconscious mind of the child, creating perceptions that persist. Consistent and persistent exposure to a set of messages influence real-world social perception in such a way that the more the viewer watches the more they create a perception (Gerbner et.al, 2002, cited in Mastro, 2009, p 334) which, with repetition, make the viewer reflect those views. In this sense, watching response consequences delivered to deformed characters create schemas about the specific media model. These schemas or cognitive structures represent the knowledge about a concept or type of stimulus (Fiske & Taylor, 1991, cited by Smith & Granados, 2009, p 349). Therefore, punishing characters with deformation or disabilities by locking them up in the castle or casting them away in the wild, much like Fiona, Shrek, or even Quasimodo, portrays a media model of exclusion or rejection, more likely to affect perception and behavior. As schemas form, information is judged as appropriate and subsequently as fitting (Huston 1993, cited in Smith and Granados, 2009, p 349). In this way, children learn about how the in-group members look, othering the rest who are different. As such, the beloved princess Fiona desperately waiting for Prince Charming to love and transform her to a beautiful princess, not the ugly ogre, is epic for conveying the message of beauty versus ugliness, or even fear from what is not the standard norm due to physical appearance, portraying it as the 'monster', 'ogre', 'beast', etc.

In line with this, come the perceived capabilities that we assigned these characters into. Because of this physical appearance, Quasimodo was punished to live up in the church bell tower and ring the bell, portraying also the capabilities linked to abnormality or deformity. This phenomenon is so strongly rooted to our collective memory that we are stunned and amazed when we encounter an achievement that, to the rest, might sound as normal. The invoked perception of incapacity with incapability affects the way we perceive the exclusion from the norm, reason for which the ability to do more than what we are used to believe is considered as be as exemplary. The tendency of media to report such examples within the frame of incapability, although explained as an attempt for acceptance and inclusion, in fact, creates peripheral cues that reinforce the pre-existing perception.

Matching characteristics of people with message content and/or frames creates a bewilderment of the audience, which might affect attitude. In the news environment, many have randomly heard or watched news articles stressing on mere achievements of individuals with limited capabilities as successes. Working as a students' mentor, I recall a case of a young journalist, who approached me suggesting to produce a podcast about a young paralyzed boy who is employed in one of the biggest telecommunications companies in Albania and simultaneously giving his expertise privately on IT matters. This is the same scenario we've seen in the movies, where the distorted character turns

out to be friendly, sensitive and gentle. Despite the fact that most children's movies, including the aforementioned ones, end up with the distorted character befriending the main character for whom the viewers are affectionate, still, cognitive studies report the persistent presence of fear towards the former due to the anticipation of empathy with the distress responses of the well-liked character (Cantor 2009, p 292). This points to the fact that people experience fear as a direct response to the fear expressed by others (ibid), reason for which the reaction towards these characters remains the same despite the 'happy ending'. On the other hand, for as long as cinematography depicts these characteristics as different from the norm, while understanding the way the human brain process and retains information, these portrayals would not feed the culture of diversity.

On the other hand, the mediated images of the 'different' and the tendency of naming them as such, encourages the disturbing phenomenon of 'bullying', against which campaigns are taking place.

Moreover, due to the invoked fear that these characters induce, the phenomenon of isolation or grouping takes place, which might be dangerous, for e.g., when individuals of the same identity group together.

References to exemplary media cases

Psychologists support that children at a very early age consume media in large quantities. In Albania, a research conducted by Unicef and the Albanian Media Institute in 2011 showed that 50 % of adolescents consume 1-3 hours of TV per day, 19% of which reach beyond that number¹. These data have doubled with the increased use (and coverage) of the internet. We do not have data specifically for the younger children, but we can assume that lifestyle tendencies and economic pressures render parents easily subjected to this phenomenon, where children are placed in front of a screen to perform even the more essential tasks and meet basic needs, like eating.

Parents consciously allow more screen time into their children's lives, like eating while watching a show on a mobile phone, playing unlimited hours of video games, most with violent imagery, spending time on a computer searching for information without having control of the content, possessing a phone at an early age, etc., which make children susceptible to unlimited sources of information and content, that can affect their view of the world.

In this sense, children construct their views and perception of the world through the lenses of cinematography, news, shows, in all media formats available. However, Berger (2012) supports that children watch television more than movies, because movie watching is often controlled by parents, whereas television watching often isn't. Therefore, they can come across any kind of information during this process, making them more susceptible to media content, including news.

Experimental studies attest that children living in environments with political conflict are highly stereotypical to other cultural or ethnical groups, but few investigate the way in which negative portrayals of other groups affects children's behaviour. A study conducted on children from the Middle East and children from Kosovo attest that positive portrayals of other social groups has had different effects, where in the case of Kosovo a positive attitude towards the other ethnic group was evidenced, although not to a considerable degree. On the other hand, the same conflict environment appears for different minorities, most of which are broadcasted in the electronic or online media.

1 The study has no specific report on what kind of programme they watch on TV, leaving space for any kind of assumption on content.

Because, children's productions are absent in Albanian media, many cases that can illustrate its effects on behaviour are coming from the news section. Due to an environment overloaded with political conflict and issues, political news, political talk shows, and harsh language occupy the prime time in almost all media². So, it has been a random occurrence that any political debate among neighbouring countries has been extended and commented on online, where children are present.

An extreme example is the case of young Aristotelis, member of the Greek minority, who was attacked and beaten to death by a group of young people at around 20³ years of age, only because he spoke Greek. As cruel as it may sound, it is clear that in countries with increased conflict around identity or ethnic issues, media may affect attitude and behaviour. Despite these occurrences, the ongoing portrayals in news media of images of Albanian immigrants living in Greece using terrestrial borders to visit their relatives in Albania during holiday seasons, creating long queues, which comes with some frustration, affects perception. These news media depict images of frustrated elderly or irritated children which creates an emotional load against the other country and the large Greek minority in Albania, which can later manifest when external stimuli are presented. And the same goes on. Media portrayals towards Roma community as uneducated, beggars, grimy, help create a negative perception about them. This also counteracts any attempt they make when they attend schools, where they are unfriended and snubbed by the rest, reason for which they either fall into the societal moral trap by having low grades or in the worst-case scenario by dropping out of school. According to a study by Faktoje.al, most of the illiterate population in Albania are members of the Roma community, most of which drop out of school between age 11-14⁴, which is also confirmed by a study by Unicef. The same study reports that other categories that are prone to school abandonment are kids with limited capabilities.

Although legislation supports the education of these children, the reasons that prevent them from attending schools is mentality and societal norms, pedagogical approach, inclusion, etc.

In the worst cases, media can push kids to harmful behaviour towards themselves. In 2014, media news focus on suicide for religious purposes, (depicted as a way to connect with God) incited many cases of suicide⁵, some of which were young people. But the most recent case of unlimited and uncontrolled access to online content is that of a 13-year-old kid who hanged himself in order to be part of the challenge of the game he was playing, until November 2021 when he lost his life.

In the same way, media portrayals of love, friendship, sex roles or sexual orientation, power disbalances, can affect our attitude and behaviour towards them. Perhaps where our knowledge is lacking the most pertains to the effects of gender socialization and sexual orientation. This is especially important in restricted societies with very strong patriarchal culture. This is the reason why a debate about the LGBTIQ community erupted few years ago and ended up in fiery declarations and social uproar. Starting as a social contribution to mitigate skeletonization with sexual context it ended up creating more confusion, unclarity, exclusion of the other different. Moreover, the more emphasis media put on the declarations that the issue generated, the more the divisions deepened, proving to the isolation and strict mentality of the Albanian society towards sexual diversity. On the other hand, the sensitivity of this topic as an invisible, yet present element of the social identity, creates more social and psychological limitations for its individuals.

2 Londo, E (2017) "Media shqiptare në kohët e politikës së mediatizuar" (Albanian media in the times of mediated politics), Journal on Communication and Media Studies, Sept 2017, AAB College, Prishtinë

3 The youngest of perpetrators of the group was 18 and the oldest 22. The coup consisted of 7 youngsters

4 Faktoje.al. June 10th 2021 " U premtua arsimi 100 % i fëmijëve të komunitetit rom-egjiptian, por shumicën e gjen në 'shkollën e rrugës'

5 Londo, Eva (2012) "Efektet e media ne konstruktimin e shoqerise" (Media effects on reality construction), Panorama Newspaer 30 oct 2012.

Discussion and conclusion

Media literacy as a way to target diversity

Frankly speaking, no one can create knowledge on the cultural, ethnic, and identity groups in the world through personal experience or school, placing great importance on the role of the media. Most people collect information about the world around them through mediated messages of the media, what Daniel Boorstin (1961) has named as “pseudo-environment”.

Although many studies support the cumulative effect of media content in shaping our perception of others, few of these have investigated the way in which the media contribute to this (Graves, 2008; Mastro, 2009; Persson & Musher-Eizenman, 2003). However, Perloff (2009) admits with certainty that media have influences that can engender a series of actions that would have been unthinkable in the absence of mediated communication (Perloff, p. 252). This could also explain the role of the media in leveraging major issues affecting societies. But for this to happen, an amount of information on media is required.

Assessing the increased role of information in obtaining knowledge and shaping our views of the world, where media plays a major role, recent discussions have focused on media literacy from an early age. On the other hand, the more information people get from the unlimited sources of information “the more central the receptor becomes” (Wolton, 2012). According to Walton, this receptor (public) can select, distribute, hierarchize, accept, and refuse.... And the more information he has, the more critical he becomes to it and its producers. Media studies assess the public of modern times far more different than the model of the passive receptor, considering him more of a negotiator of the meaning of the information. Therefore, the more cultivated the public is, the more efficient the use of the media becomes and there are two main actors that may play a paramount role in this: schools and family/parents.

Authors assert that media literacy is grounded in politics (Pombo 2003) and in the broader cultural-information field (McQuail 2000). Consequently, media literacy cannot be successfully acquired without intercultural literacy, intercultural literacy cannot be fully understood without using the knowledge and skills of media literacy (Belousa & Stakle, 2010). This might sound somehow challenging considering the current situation of media and society, explained by Pombo (2003) that media meaning is constructed and interpreted within unequal relations in society (Pombo 2003, p 100).

This fact prioritizes intercultural literacy to media literacy, whose aim is to explore the borders of their cultural identity, learn about their race, ethnicity, class, and other keystones of identity and to understand other cultural identities (McLaren 1995, 1997). This means that interpretation of media messages is always done with reference to culturally created images obtained by media exposure and explained in the education curricula.

In 2009, the European Commission published a report with recommendations and advice on the creation of media curriculums for early childhood audiences, which was intended to support the creation of a critical audience. Understanding the role of the media in creating and affecting perceptions, in 2013, the department of Journalism and Communication at the University of Tirana published the first book on media literacy, called “Mediology”, which was proposed to the Ministry of Education as a curricular subject. Still today, there is no media education until university level, rendering kids unprepared to media content.

Parents as gatekeepers

Present circumstances of information overload with images, content, and skewed depictions around diversity issues may have serious consequences for children's information processing and schema development. Now, the main burden on the way children develop their media watching habits fall to the parents, considered as the 'gatekeeper'. They face grand challenges not only by selecting what media or content they expose their children to, but also helping their children process and interpret and internalize the information they receive from the media. Can it be helpful to apply any mode of monitoring to children's activities on any type of media to affect the way its content affects their behaviour?

The increasing economic pressures of modern times make parents easily fall into the trap of handing the remote controls or smartphones to their children, with less supervision. Parental mediation theory, initially developed in response to concerns about children's exposure to television (Clark, 2011) has nowadays evolved, capturing the various ways in which parents mediate their children's use of the new technology.

With the extended body of research relating media and cognitive psychology, parents are becoming more aware of the suite of risks and dangers framed by the media as threatening children's wellbeing. The fact that many parents render to this pact of handing over their smartphones to children as a way to help them entertain themselves has instead put more stress on the role of parents for creating monitoring tool of choice, in order to maintain their children's safety intact.

The expectations placed on parents today, however, are particularly onerous, as parents are expected to understand, assess, guide, monitor and regulate their children's activities (Willett, 2015) and constructs a set of norms about what it means to be a good parent in the digital age (Livingstone & Bober, 2006), which might require actively restricting and monitoring children's technology use (Mazmanian & Lanette, 2017). These include, for example, the expectation that parents monitor and control children's experiences with media (Mazmanian & Lanette, 2017); and that parents engage in what Lim (2018) calls transcendent parenting, (Lim, 2018, p. 32–33), whereby parents must "transcend every media consumption environment their children enter," and "harness these multiple modes of communication to keep watch over and keep in touch with their children wherever they may be" (ibid). However, this is a collaborative work that shall be harnessed starting from an early age at home and continuing later at the school level with practices and curricula to help kids use media and process its content.

Media curriculum as a system of messages for reference

Media literacy includes not only the ability to use the media but also the ability to communicate in different context and environments. Therefore, the introduction of multicultural curriculum of mass media comes to play, which, includes not just simply the creation of images, but also their distribution. Therefore, every element of information is important to modelling behaviour from media content. Cognitive scientists support that media consumers learn more from background details and images than the kind of information that attracts their attention in the conscious level (Krugman, 1971, cited by Cortes 2000). This makes it important for media producers and audiences to understand how every element of information is constructed, focusing mainly to those images or information

that may seem trivial but have the greatest effect on the subconscious level. Therefore, media editors and journalists should come into terms between storytelling on an event and the perception that it may create, because ‘reality is nothing else than storytelling’⁶. On the other hand, media producers should consider the public interest when producing media content, especially for the vulnerable groups who are unable to properly process media content or understand its effects.

This may seem difficult for commercial media, but the need for negotiation between media’s economic interests and media content is necessary.

Regarding media models that are presented to the young audience, very few tackle diversity. Even new technologies and the advantages of digital media offer not a single production for this matter. This is also true for public television, which is legally obliged to produce content that targets all categories of audience. Producing content, movies or kids’ shows, that address sensitive issues that are of paramount value for the Albanian audience would be a starting step to help model a more open attitude and behaviour towards diversity issues, such as identity, limited capabilities, power balance and leadership among sexes, sexual orientation, and more. However, Albanian Public Television lacks the principle of tackling diversity not only regarding audience targeting, but also programming. According to an editor of public TV, Edlira Birko, schools Public TV shall be considered the ideal ally for schools concerning media education - but this is, still, not happening.

Understanding the role of the media in society and using it as a channel for knowledge collection would help alter existing beliefs and attitude about diversity. Attributing this duty to the media enables the formation of that knowledge that is media-based, which - if properly created and processed, with constant exposure and repetition of the correct messages, even those that address subconscious levels of understanding - would help start a new belief that would persist. However, admitting the media function within the commercial context, the main contributor to media education are schools and family. In a situation when media importance on societal constructs is becoming prevalent, the initial strategies shall be applied in the family environment.

The different strategies suggested by scientists includes practices such as talking about children’s online activities, and sitting nearby while the child is online or the use of technical surveillance tools, or checking up on children’s online practices after use (Livingstone, Mascheroni, Dreier, Chaudron, & Lagae, 2015). Also, school curricula offer little to no info on media literacy, rendering audiences totally exposed to the practices of media sources and without any tool for critical thinking. This raises the value of parents who shall now deliver guidance and support to their children and learn about how to navigate the challenges of mediation, especially important today, in the digital age. This becomes even more important considering that parents do not have yet the proper information and neither the ways nor methods to help their children and fill this gap, which opens up a new area for future research.

Children, who are the most innocent receptors of media content, are also the easiest prey. The inability to filter and process information in a critical way contributes to the creation of wrong societal norms and models, that at a later stage of life become prone to imitation. The creation of an open society to diversity of any kind makes it easier for co-existence of ‘the majority’ with ‘the minority’ and “the different”. These issues are overcome in developed countries, but much work is needed to be done in the other underdeveloped ones, engaging all elements of the society; family / parents, schools and even media.

6 Gerbner, G., *The construction of reality and the media*, p 425, Aleksandria, Athens 1998

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Unicef, July 2019, Monitoring guideline for children outside of education system



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Importance of critical literacy for teachers and students when using business model canvas tools

Abstract

The purpose of the study is to analyze canvas tools (business modeling canvases) through the critical literacy method. The main goal of the study is to enlighten the existence of the implicit assumptions and contexts of these models and to point out the importance of such conceptual and contextual analysis of canvas tools in educational processes. Critical literacy is a special attitude toward the text, and in this study, a business model canvas tool is taken as a text. The method of critical literacy education is used here as a method of analyzing the material of the research, and also as the method suggested to teachers and coaches to use it in their work when using canvas tools. So, the study itself is a sort of a demonstration of the didactical approach that is suggested to teachers. The study concludes, if teachers will teach the students the skill of critical reading of business modeling tools, they will empower students with the skill of re-creating the world, to be able to develop new business models that will lead to transforming societies in which they live.

Keywords:

Critical literacy, business model canvas, communication, critical pedagogy

Introduction

The Business Model Canvas or shortly “canvas” as a tool or template for planning new businesses or products or documenting existing ones is generally accepted as a tool used in business teaching and training for more than fifteen years now. It is regarded as a one-side-sheet with prearranged building blocks and with instructed working steps to use it. It is a tool that has successfully replaced or at least well supplemented the old-times business planning with linear chapter-based narrative type of business plans. And it is of much help to teachers, coaches, entrepreneurs and other organizational workers around the world. But it is mostly (with many versions of it) used uncritically and without deeper explanation and understanding of its social, economic, political and ideological background. So, in this paper, we welcome the widespread use of “canvas” as a business modelling tool, but we try to reconsider it in the light of ideological and historical contextualization.

Canvas is a blank sheet of paper that can be compared to *tabula rasa* as an empty white paper, and so it is regarded as a perfect tool for students to be creative and to work on creating new projects and reshaping the world according to their beliefs. But using business model canvas as such an open and unbiased objective tool is at least misleading if not even pedagogically irresponsible, since a canvas sheet actually speaks a thousand words, it has prearranged building blocks and it has instructions on how to use the tool. So, this white paper is not as objective and open for creative spirits as it looks. And this goes for all types and variations of canvas tools.

The purpose and the goal of the study

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to raise the questions of terminology and structure of canvas tools and to look at them through the critical literacy method. The main goal of the study is to enlighten the implicit assumptions and silent background of these tools and to present the problems of uncritical use of canvas business modeling in teaching, and further, to give suggestions and support for teachers who use these tools in teaching processes to use them with critical approach. We see a long-term impact of such critical use of the canvas tools in empowered and critically-creative students who will be aware that their use of words and concepts and their use of systemic design of project can be rooted in implicit ideologies and will have a direct impact and material consequences in the world. Through the critical pedagogy approach, students can realize that interpretation of the world is a flipped side of re-creation of the world, and that the use of given knowledge and information through interpretation and application of it places on a student the responsibility for the re-creation of the world.

We are inspired to look at canvas business modeling through such an approach, of course, by the father of critical pedagogy Paulo Freire. “A revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice co-intentional education. Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators.” (Freire, 2005, p. 69)

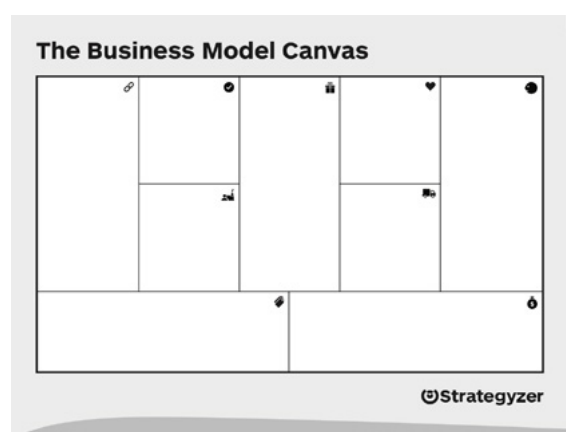
Before going deeper into our topics, let us make a quick overview of contemporary research of this topic. Since canvas modeling is really widespread, the practical use of it is widely researched and also

new types or variations of canvases are regularly developed. Also, comparison of different types of canvases is partly researched. One such comparative analysis of several canvases is a conference paper *Making Sense of Canvas Tools: Analysis and Comparison of Popular Canvases* (Tranquillo, Kline and Hixson, 2016). The authors of this study suggest a framework for teachers and coaches for selecting among existing canvases, and they also give guidelines for creating new canvases. The study is a good overview of types of canvases, but doesn't touch the topic of background or ideological context of types of canvases. But this study did give us some starting direction to narrow our research to "canvas business models" only and not to all possible canvases that are used for decomposing the systems and for planning, like the innovations canvases that also include precise product design themes that are not part of the original business model canvas and its variations. (Ibid., p. 9) Or, like application of canvas approach to other fields outside business and engineering, for instance the applicative study *Canvas Model as a Tool for Research Projects: A Theoretical Approach* that takes the approach of a canvas modelling to scientific research methodologies field. (Socorro Márquez and Reyes-Ortiz, 2022)

But this type of research of canvas modelling is not covering the questions of our study, meaning the contextual and ideological background of the structure and concepts in canvas models.

Of course, we can't omit to mention Alexander Osterwalder who developed the classical or standard business model canvas in his 2004 PhD dissertation and elaborated it later in many of his works, like in *Business Model Generation: A Handbook for Visionaries, Game Changers, and Challengers* (Osterwalder and Pigneur, 2010). This represents the outline for most of the so-called classic or standard canvas business modelling tools like those provided by Canvanizer (Canvanizer, n.d.) or by Strategyzer (Business Model Canvas Explained, n.d.).

Picture 1: A standard structure of business model canvas is a canvas tool under a creative commons licence by Strategyzer. (Business Model Canvas Explained, n.d.)



But most of the research in the field of canvas modelling are applicative, meaning that there's been a lot of additional applicative research done with the purpose to widen or extend the classical or standard canvas by Osterwalder with new building blocks or new aspects or new layers to it. A good example of such application is a study *The Triple Layered Business Model Canvas* where the authors are developing a canvas tool for sustainability-oriented business model innovation: "It extends the original business model canvas by adding two layers: an environmental layer based on a lifecycle perspective and a social layer based on a stakeholder perspective. When taken together, the three layers of the business model make more explicit how an organization generates multiple types of value - economic, environmental and social." (Joyce and Paquin, 2016, p. 1) This is the direction that brought about many new types of canvas models, also the types of the three models that we will be analysing in our study.

Research approach

The methodology of the study will include analytical and critical decomposition of a canvas business modelling tool (of three different versions of canvas tools, including a standard start-up model, a social business model and a cooperative model) using the methods of critical literacy and critical thinking, with emphasis on conceptual and contextual analysis of the model. We will also present a small case study analysing the use of canvas modelling in a group of students in the study course *Social entrepreneurship and cooperativism*. In conclusion we will present some suggestions for teachers and coaches on how to apply critical literacy education in using canvas tools to their teaching work and how to transfer the skill of critical reading of canvas models to their students.

With critical literacy method here we mean, according to Luke (2019), the questioning about the real and material consequences of texts and discourses, and how can we reshape them, and according to Freire (2005), the capacity to analyse, critique and transform social, cultural and political texts and contexts. Critical literacy is a special attitude toward the text, including understanding the role of people (writers and readers, speakers and listeners) of the text in co-creating the meaning of the text, and therefore the reality. The Business Model Canvas is a text that needs to be used in teaching with critical literacy approach.

The world of teaching always faces the devil of relativism and the devil of dogmatism at the same time, and the teachers need to find a way to swim between the two devils. As Allen Luke says, “The risk always has been that bloggers and journalists, teachers and students alike are left unmoored to social or material reality, to work in a relativist universe of competing significations with no fixed epistemological grounds – with education reduced to a hall of intertextual mirrors.” (Luke, 2012, p. 210)

Therefore, in this study we will take a canvas tool as a text, we will read it as a text, a text that is constructed of a basic outline (building blocks) and of concepts (words with theoretical and practical meaning) used in description of the blocks and in instructions for using the tool. The tool that has its own architecture and interior design and furniture. With the use of methodology of critical literacy and with specific methods of critical thinking we are set out to read the canvas models like we would be reading the texts.

The method of critical literacy education will be used here as a method of analysing the material of this research, and also as a method suggested to teachers and coaches to be used in their work when using canvas modelling tools. So, the study itself is a sort of a demonstration of the approach we are suggesting to teachers and coaches.

Findings of the research

For the purpose of this study, we have chosen three different canvas models: start-up business model, social business model, and cooperative model. Fully intentionally we have chosen such three models that differ strongly and, in some way, radically. We did this to be able to show clear contextual and conceptual differences in them, but we are aware that, in practice, most canvas models can be somewhere in between these different models and some of their characteristic can overlap. Just for the purpose of display and clearer elaboration of results of our study we are using such radical black-white presentation of different business models.

Comparison of three types of canvas models: start-up business model, social business model, cooperative model

Table 1: Differential concepts used in models in comparison to “basic canvas”

Section of the model	Model no.1 This is “Basic canvas” to which we compare the no.2 and no. 3 models: Start-up business model (Business Model Canvas Explained, n.d.)	Model no.2 Social business model (Social Innovation Canvas Toolbox, n.d.)	Model no.3 Cooperative model (Združimo se CoopTool: Cooperative Canvas Business Modelling Tool, 2017)
Value section: middle of the model	Value proposition	Social innovation Value proposition Mission Social change Social impact Social and environmental problems	Social value (for today and for future generations) Value proposition Mission
Market section: right side of the model	Customer segments Customer relationships Channels	Customer relationships Channels Customer benefits (social goal behind the direct benefits of customers) Impacted environment, animals etc. Vulnerable groups	Users and (public) subscribers Users and/or subscribers being final payers or not Participation of users and subscribers in governance. Users also as members of cooperative. Relations with users/subscribers/ customers. Delivery channels Impacted (invisible) users (maybe even future generations). Vulnerable groups
Implementation section: left side of the model	Key partners Key activities Key resources Team	Key allies Key resources Key activities (mission-critical activities) Team	Members (democratic governance), employees as members of cooperative. Community (also schools, NGOs, municipalities) Resources (also communal sources) Cooperative alliances Key activities (also membership management)
Finance section: bottom section of the model	Cost structure Revenue streams Business results (breaking point, profits, worth of company)	Cost of delivery Community reinvestment (what % of profits will be reinvested to community and in what ways?) Revenue streams (sales income, grants, donations) Measuring results (not only finance results but also social impact measuring)	Cost structure Profits: Who decides about division of profits? How profits are used? Indivisible reserves (commons) Revenue streams (sales income, grants, donations) Measuring results (not only finance results, but also social impact measuring)
Grammatical aspect of the model	The model is addressing the user: “you” as a “singular you” or a “plural you”	The model is addressing the user: sometimes plural, sometimes singular (social entrepreneur as one person)	The model is using first-person plural “we” (cooperative as a membership organisation) Equality in grammatical gender (he / she) is used

Interpretation of the differences in the three types of business model canvases explained on the basis of proposed instructions for business modelling for each separate type could be developed in many directions and with many details. We will expose a couple of them to demonstrate how to use conceptual analysis when reading canvas tool as a text.

Value section:

In the value section, we can recognize different understandings of the main purpose of an endeavour, whether it is a personal success, a wish to make profits or to reach a feeling of adrenalin, or it is following a social change perspective or answering the needs of people and societies or the wish to empower people. Also important, the word “value” here is used in different meanings in different contexts, we`ll explain this in conclusion. There is also implicit assumption present, that a product (a service or a good) that is developed to answer the needs of the customers, must also present the “money value” and no other scenario is possible. Even though we know in practice that many goods that people necessary need have no monetary value (like the light of the sun or a genuine social contact etc.)

Market section:

The most interesting conceptual specialities in the three models in the field of market section can be recognized in the implicit assumptions about the “needs” of customers being understood as objective facts present before the “products” that address those needs. The theory and practice of marketing teaches that needs are in many aspects produced by the offer of products, but none of the canvas models explicitly addresses this problem. Also, in the market section there is an uncritical use of word “customer” in most models, only a cooperative model tries partly to address this topic, that a customer is a notion composed of a user, a subscriber, a payer, and they can all be the same person or many of them. Some models use this difference, but in many cases with the prejudice that there is some humanitarian aspect in the case when the user is not the same as the payer.

Implementation section:

The least problematic is the implementation section, since more or less all initiatives that try to create a product and to run an organization are pretty much alike in the inner part, but there are some important concepts that are used and speak of ideological background of the models: in social business, they speak of allies and mission which are the concepts more often used in humanitarian context, but the start-up model speaks of partners which is a more formal business notion. On the other hand, cooperatives here speak of members, which is a notion known in communitarian or socialists or collaborative social contexts. Also interesting in the implementation section is that in the building block about key resources, we find in a cooperative model a notion of “communal sources”, this concept is not understandable for the standard start-up model since it is related to a concept of communal property or commons which is ideologically completely ignored in the contemporary educational and business world.

Finance section:

In the finance section too, we come to these different types of property, three types of property are known in most modern societies (public property, private property and communal property or commons) but since contemporary educational systems only present the first two, it is difficult for the users of the canvas tools to apply the notion of the third type of property (the concepts of commons or indivisible reserves) to the finance structure of the model. In the finance section we can also recognize implicit assumptions about the profits: in the start-up model, profits are not mentioned, even though the profits are often the main driver of start-ups, and we can see an implicit assumption that the owner gets all the profits, since this question is not even addressed. Also, in this section we can meet many implicit assumptions that manifest in different understanding of public procurements and subsidies etc.

Grammatical and text style:

A very important ideological background is recognizable from grammatical use of language in all models. The first two models are more connected to a liberal tradition of a self-fulfilling individual who is seeking personal fulfilment through a business endeavour, so they are mostly using the “singular you” addressing or a team “plural you” addressing, but the third model is more connected to socialist tradition and uses “we” as plural form of membership organization that is not understood as a team but as a community. Also, the use of grammatical gender can be a subject of analysing the canvas models.

Architecture of the models:

All three models have the same architecture of the nine building blocks. Models no. 2 and no.3 are splitting two of the blocks into two half-parts, but still keeping the same architecture: value in the middle, market part (outer part) on the right, implementation part (inner part) on the left, finance part on the bottom. There is one important difference in architecture, the cooperative model is planned to wrap in a cylinder when fulfilled, so the left and the right side meet up. We could, of course, imagine some new building blocks in all three models, like the additional layers mentioned in The Triple Layered Business Model Canvas above. And we could imagine additional blocks, of course, for instance a block that is set on the edge of the right side and it's called “uncontrolled impact on future generations.” And there could be another building block on far left called “Things we must never do no matter what”, there could be an additional block in the finance level called “the hidden cost of pollution and hidden costs of social exclusion” or “calculation of using the communal goods for production, like roads, knowledge, public administration etc. We are just brainstorming a bit to show possible directions for critical reading of the canvas modelling tools.

An example of a contextual analysis of the three models

Further on, we made a contextual analysis of the three models. We examined the three models through the questions of a contextual check-up, as proposed by Fischer (2011). We could, of course, use some other authority on critical thinking, but we chose Fisher for providing a very systematic analytical method to scrutinize the contexts of texts. For Fischer, “the context contains all sorts of assumptions, presumptions, background beliefs, facts relevant to interpret what is meant, rules of conduct and so on. /.../ In general, the context includes the people involved, with their purposes, beliefs, emotions and interests, and also includes physical, social and historical context.” (Fischer, 2011, p. 54)

Table 2: Contextual analysis of the three models

	Model no.1 Start-up business model	Model no.2 Social business model	Model no.3 Cooperative model
People (speaker, listener)	A business teacher or a business adviser or a coach. A student in a business school or a young entrepreneur or a start-up initiative.	A teacher of social or business studies, or adviser for companies or non-for-profit organizations. A student of social or business studies or a member of some association or foundation or a start-up initiative.	A teacher in social, business, art etc. studies, or adviser for local development projects or for non-for-profits etc. A student in all sort of studies, a member of some nongovernmental organization, a member of an initiative to become a cooperative etc.
Purpose, beliefs, emotions, interests	To be a successful and independent person. To live a good life. To work with the team of the best, to learn from the best. To have an interesting work and exciting life. Success driven.	Motives of humanitarianism. To be a social change-maker. To help people, to be a good person. Mission driven.	Motive of empowerment and social transformation. Believe in democracy and participation. To reach just society. To include all people, not only those who are the best to do the work. Beliefs driven.
Material and physical background	To work with private assets and create more private assets. To sell the company someday. To have better income than if employed in a corporation.	To redistribute benefits to the weak. To make a good business so (part of) the profits can go to the community.	To work with private and public assets and to (at least partly) transform them to communal assets (commons). To reduce the needs of people who uncritically consume material goods.
Social, theoretical, ideological and historical context	Trickle-down theory (unequal distribution is good for society since the benefits trickle down to the poorest). Permanent growth assumption. The speed of growth is a value.	Re-distribution theory (unequal distribution is a fact that needs to be corrected with re-distribution). Permanent growth assumption. Slow growth can be a model.	Social-justice theory (equal distribution of goods and equal access to goods is the only just social model). Growth is not a value. Can even be that de-growth is a value.

This is just an example how teachers can make a contextual analysis of a business model tool they are using and find a way to present this context to the students, not to show them such a table of possible contextual backgrounds but to set the right questions to raise the students' awareness about the context of the business model they are developing. With the purpose of students being able to understand concepts and their specific meaning(s) and to understand that through the use of the concepts in a specific meaning, they do not only interpret the world, but, if we use Freire, they re-create the world. It is not the teachers' job to assess a student for the direction they take with interpretation of a canvas tool and further with re-creation of reality, but to direct the students to develop critical apparatus to understand what they are reading, what they are saying and what kind of a world they are (re)creating. And to take responsibility for that.

A case study: a group of students in a course *Social entrepreneurship and cooperativism*

A group of 46 students taking a *Social entrepreneurship and cooperativism* course had to do a team assignment to simulate establishment of a cooperative. There were 10 teams. They were given two different canvas models as tools to help them create a full model of their cooperative: the classical start-up canvas and the cooperative canvas (no.1 model and no.3 model in our study). They were encouraged by a teacher, one of the authors of this article, to use the cooperative model as a basis, but also to use the start-up standard canvas to help themselves in understanding the building blocks. A teacher paid special attention to some questions regarding the students' understanding of the canvas modelling and how it resulted in simulated cooperatives they've developed.

For instance, none of the 10 teams understood or used correctly the concept of "communal sources", meaning, in the building block "key resources" they didn't mention the "communal sources" (8 teams) or they mentioned them (2 teams) but with wrong application of the concept. Even though they were using the cooperative model with precise instructions under this building block about what the communal sources are.

An important issue with the students in this case was also their problem with understanding consumers (or users) as also being members of a cooperative (meaning co-owning and co-governing the cooperative enterprise). None of the teams created the business model with users being also the members of a cooperative, until the teacher gave them suggestions in this direction in weekly consultations. After that, 2 teams included users as members.

We could, though, recognize a good understanding of possible hybrid financing of their cooperative products, for instance the possibilities of combining public financing of services with market revenue streams. The students started out with general understanding of public financing as "help" (help of municipality, help of ministries), but after reading the cooperative canvas instructions and listening to lectures about the hybrid finance strategies that combine public, private and third (social economy) sector approaches they gave up implicit assumptions about public finance as being connected to the notions of "help", "social subsidies", "laziness" or similar.

Interesting in the case of the group of students was their inability to decide about the notion of "free services" or "free goods". In one of the webinars in the course they were asked a poll-question: "Which of the following goods is/are free of charge for the user?" There were pre-given answers: a.) primary school, b.) public health services, c.) nice feeling of the sunshine on the skin, d.) enjoyment

of the street theatre show, e.) none of these is free of charge for the user. 25 present students had 20 second to answer the poll, and we (seeing the backend of the answers) could see that they changed their minds several times, not being able to decide between the answers from a to d. At the end, most of them (17) chose the c answer and many also the d answer (5). The poll wanted to be provocative, and in the discussion after the poll the assumption of a teacher was asserted that students are not familiar with these types of questions that expect from students deeper understanding of the background of such notions as “price”, “public subsidy”, “consuming a good vs. paying for the good”.

The purpose of this short poll and discussion with student was didactical, to point out to students their implicit assumptions they are having when meeting such topics like “public financing of something”, or “free-of-charge services” etc.

Also, interesting, most of the teams in a simulating establishment of a cooperative (8 teams) created a finance part of the canvas completely similar as a start-up initiative, meaning, having a fast growth of incomes, even though the instructions for cooperative canvas give explicit argumen-tation that the growth in cooperatives is expected to be much slower than in start-ups. Also, none of the teams elaborated correctly on the question of common property of cooperatives, it turned out that their understanding of property types is stuck to dichotomy of public-private and give no conceptual room for common property or commons, even though cooperative canvas explains the notion of commons. Here, again, our presumption was confirmed, that educational systems are teaching children and students only about two types of property so they lack conceptual capacity to recognize other options but the two, even if the tool they are using is alerting them about the third option.

Conclusion remarks and didactical recommendations for teachers and students

Since business modelling canvas tools are used in teaching mostly without critical exposition of its contextual background and that this is inclosing students in obsolete approaches to their future endeavours, we want to propose communicational and didactical clues to empower teachers in critical pedagogy, with the final purpose to empower students for critical use of canvas modelling tools in their businesses and social projects.

As said in the methodological entry, critical literacy is a special attitude toward the text, and we said that business model canvas is a text that needs to be used in education with a critical literacy approach. With this research we tried to read the three canvas models as texts that use specific concepts (that can mean different things in different contexts) and have a specific structure. We have also shown that there are many implicit assumptions when reading the canvas model as a text and that we can use some analytic approaches to enlighten those implicit assumptions. And we also tried to show one example of contextual analysis of the three canvas models to show how a specific model can be, as a text, fully enclosed in one economic theory or in one ideology or in one specific social and historical context.

We are well aware that our research has a structure of a bundle of partial analysis and that such a research approach has good sides and bad sides. The good side is, as we will see, an applicability of

the topic to the practice of teaching and coaching with the use of canvas modelling tools. But there are some limitations that follow the methodological approach of conceptual and contextual analysis as being mostly philosophical methods (without any quantitative aspect), and also using a small case study that cannot be generalized to any wider population, but, on the other hand, this leaves this topic open for further research through proper quantitative methods. At this point, we find our study sufficient enough for the application to didactical matters.

Therefore, we want to make some recommendation for teachers, coaches and students, on how to use critical literacy method for reading canvas models. Luke is asking a very practical question that is addressing teachers as well as others, the question “What are the real and material consequences of texts and discourses? And how can we reshape them?” (Luke, 2012, p. 216) Therefore, if we take a business canvas as a text and we take Luke’s questions as a starting point (Luke, 2012, p. 224), then the critical literacy approach to analysis of business modelling teaching proposes a set of questions for discussions in a class:

- How words (concepts) and grammar in canvas modelling attempt to establish relations of power between authors and readers, speaker and addressees?
- Where the business canvas modelling is used?
- What is social or theoretical or ideological context of the situation in which the canvas tool is used? Can we set it into some “order of discourse” as Foucault would state it? (Foucault, 1981)
- By whom is the tool used? In whose interests and with what goals?

In addition to asking those questions when using canvas tool, to actually read it as a text and read it critically, a teacher can support students with further questions as stated by Luke: “How does language, text, discourse and information make a difference? For whom? In what material, social and consequential ways? In whose interests? According to what patterns, rules and in what institutional and cultural sites?” (Luke, 2012, p. 214)

Another suggestion for teachers to use critical literacy approach to the business modelling canvas tools is a role-playing exercise. Role-playing and switching roles is a standard method in critical literacy education. Meaning, how would you read the text (the canvas instructions) if you were another person? In training workshops or in faculty courses a teacher can prepare a couple of different user scenarios and give students an assignment to develop a business model with the use of canvas tool, but under the condition of playing a selected role. Prepared roles must be radically different so the students will have to make some effort to empathise with the role character. Roles can be like: a student of art coming from a provincial town, a computer gig with a well-paid but boring job, an ambitious business student from a poor background, an activist from an environmental organization etc. Taking on a role in re-reading and re-writing their business model canvas can give them a critical overview of their past work and empower them in decision making in their future endeavours.

In addition, a very useful approach in teaching students to critically read texts and critically use tools is to present them with methods on how to recognize fallacies in argumentation, since many fallacies (logical formal fallacies or informal fallacies) are a kind of an uncritical use of concepts or misleading use of concepts. One such author that displays methods to recognize fallacies is Van Cleave, who presents and supports with examples all major fallacies in a full chapter of his textbook on logic. (Van Cleave, 2016, pp. 187-208) Let us look at one such fallacy that we can recognize in critically reading the canvas tool as a text. A fallacy of “equivocation”, when the same word is used in two or more different senses and this is being ignored in making conclusions. (Ibid., pp. 195-196) An example of such a fallacy in most of canvas models is, as already mentioned above, the word “value”.

When this word is used in a guiding question “What is the value of your product for your costumers?”, the word “value” doesn’t mean the same thing as in a question “How will you create value from your product?” In the first case the word “value” refers to satisfaction of needs of customers but in second case it refers to “money value”. So, combining these two meanings of the word “value” in a building block “value proposition” is, on the one hand, a good trick, since it teaches entrepreneurs that they can only make money from customer satisfaction, but if the two different meanings of the word are not recognized and explained, then users of a canvas model can make a false conclusion, for instance that customers measure the value of satisfaction with a money criterium or that value of satisfaction of many people can be summed up in a number like a pile of stones, and that you could design prices on such notions. Such conclusions based on logical fallacy of equivocation would lead to bad entrepreneurial decisions or to harmful social choices.

For Freire, “reading the word entails reading the world”, therefore, the transformation of the world lies in renaming phenomena. The responsibility of teachers, when using business model canvas, is to critically inspect on the proposed canvases and rename the building blocks and rewrite the instructions for the purposes of teaching business modelling in their own context and in accordance to the goals of their courses. Since, if we paraphrase Freire, writing the word entails writing the world. Therefore, it is not important only for teachers to understand the full background of the concepts used in canvas modelling, but most of all, to teach students how to critically read not just canvas instructions but all the texts and be themselves able to see the contextual side of their study materials and of the tools their teacher are using. This is where we come to support the thesis of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière in his controversial essays about intellectual emancipation *Ignorant Schoolmaster - Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* from 1987, saying that the student who uses his intellectual abilities can be taught by an ignorant master/teacher or, in other words, the teacher can teach a student whose mind is emancipated also the things the teacher does not know: “The master is he who encloses an intelligence in the arbitrary circle from which it can only break out by becoming necessary to itself. To emancipate an ignorant person, one must be, and one need only be, emancipated oneself, that is to say, conscious of the true power of the human mind. The ignorant person will learn by himself what the master doesn’t know if the master believes he can and obliges him to realize his capacity.” (Rancière, 1991, p. 15)

Therefore, if teachers will teach the students the skill of critical reading of canvas models, they will empower them with the skill of re-creating the world, to be able to develop new business models that will lead to transforming societies in which they live and not to just blindly copy the existing business model that often show their insufficiency in many aspects.

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Journalism in the digital age And the role of media self - regulation

Abstract

The general public has a genuine interest in the quality of news reporting. However, journalism does not meet these expectations quite often. Media self-regulation has an important role to play in monitoring news media professional performance and in reaction to breaches of professional standards, by simultaneously protecting freedom of expression and press freedom, even more so in the digital age. Massive flow of journalistic content is produced and shared digitally, including the use of social networks, which raises the question of accountability and objectivity of information in this new era. The aim of this paper is to explain the potential impact of media self-regulation in the digital age, especially in the context of the frequent use of social networks by news media in reaching out to different audiences. One of the potential influences of solving information disorder is to build audiences' skills of critical analysis and approach to information. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to both study the practical implementation of media self-regulation in the digital age and the methods of use of media literacy in the critical understanding of information online.

Keywords:

Self-regulation, disinformation, digital era, ethics, media literacy

Introduction

New technologies and platforms are continuously changing journalism landscape today. Technological advances have fostered fragmentation among media publics and created information habits based on algorithms, micro - segmenting, and viral content sharing, usually among peers and closed groups (McNair, 2018).

As a result, new ethical issues started to appear, redefining the relationship between the media and the public. With the advent of the digital age and the social media systems, the sharing and collection of information have become faster and easier than ever, but have also led to the spread of fake information or fake news. Social media have become a platform for people and entities to breed false information and spread their propaganda. However, the institutions that are truly vulnerable in this situation are media organizations. They are increasingly dependent on the same platforms that spread digital disinformation (Horowitz, 2019).

While media freedom needs to be guaranteed, independent journalism is of utmost importance in providing reliable and balanced news of public interest. With new technologies radically reshaping the media landscape, traditional regulatory assumptions have been called into question and, in many cases, existing rules have become counterproductive (Haraszti, 2008).

This reality has confirmed that a system of safeguards is needed, especially in relation to fake news, disinformation and misinformation online. In this context, media self-regulation has an important role to play in fostering public trust in journalism. As Haraszti (2008) explains, it is joint endeavor by media professionals to set up voluntary editorial guidelines and abide by them in a process open to the public.

By doing so, the independent media accept their shared responsibility for the quality of the public discourse in the nation, while fully preserving their editorial autonomy in shaping it.

To ensure that citizens trust the information from the media, ethics and accountability are important. Self-regulation is considered a media accountability instrument, which is aimed at exposing malpractice in journalism by monitoring whether journalists act in compliance with professional standards. Instruments of this kind have been developed in many countries across the world and their role is to define standards of the profession and supervise news media abidance to these standards. One of the strongest advantages of media self-regulation is that it is used as a mechanism to prevent state regulation, thus preserving media freedom and freedom of expression. The Director for Freedom of Expression and Media Development at UNESCO, Guy Berger (2020) claims that press councils are crucial in raising standards in the profession, defending it, and convincing the public that it has the ability to respond.

People also have the responsibility to protect themselves from disinformation, fake news and manipulative content. To this end, it is essential that they become critical consumers of news. In this direction, another concept of importance is media literacy. It is considered an important tool in combatting misinformation and disinformation, as outlined in the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (EU) 2018/1808. Media literacy should not be limited to learning about tools and technologies, but should aim to equip citizens with the critical thinking skills required to exercise judgment, analyze complex realities and recognize the difference between opinion and fact.

Journalists' engagement with audiences and information sources via social media channels can also be seen as a noteworthy new feature of accountability frameworks that aid self-regulation. These interactions, according to Posetti (2013), allow journalists to publicly and swiftly respond to valid critiques of their work, to instantly correct errors, and to increase the transparency of their practice.

This article will try to explain the ways media self-regulation can contribute in addressing disinformation and unprofessionalism in the media reporting in the digital era and the potential role it can have by building networks with different stakeholders in the society. We specifically analyze the role of the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia (CMEM), as a self-regulatory body in the country, whose mission also includes addressing the problem of disinformation and misinformation in the media by promoting a code of ethics, professional standards and disseminating media literacy. Its efforts are in line with the commitments by international press councils, which are increasingly discussing their potential role in addressing disinformation and propaganda, especially in relation to the fact that media are increasingly using social media as a way to promote their products.

Methodology and research questions

Literature research will be performed to gather information relevant from previous studies, books and publications, as well as scholarly articles of relevance to our area of study. In addition to this, a secondary data analysis will be performed by using findings from past analyses and research, documents and different publications to elaborate the research problem.

Amongst other, findings from the CMEM's analysis "Journalism, social media and self-regulation: opportunities and challenges" will be used in the context of our research, by analyzing the answers from the in-depth interviews conducted with 20 online media in the period September – October 2021. Experiences and challenges of online media encountered on social media, including the problem of disinformation were discussed at these interviews. We have also analyzed the findings from the statistical overview of the adjudications by the CMEM in 2021 and 2020.

The research methods were used to answer three key questions:

1. What role does media self-regulation play in addressing the problem with disinformation, misinformation and fake news in the digital era?
2. How can press councils partner with other stakeholders to address the problem with disinformation, misinformation and fake news in the media?
3. What kind of initiatives are needed to enhance the role of media self-regulation in encouraging a culture of critical understanding of media contents?

Results

Disinformation and fake news on social media - a serious threat for professional journalism

The growing use of the Internet has increasingly changed the way public gains access to information. Internet users have access to a wider range of information coming from different sources and platforms with a varying degree of observance of the standards for professional reporting. Disinformation, misinformation and incitement to hatred spread in a very short time interval. Social networks are increasingly gaining a greater role in informing the public.

Fact checking, validation, attribution of sources and placing information in the right context are fundamental requirements in journalism. It is important that journalistic work be done, as a starting point, under standards that ensure the quality and rigor of its contents (Cañizález, Hernández, Torrealba: 2020). However, fact-checking becomes difficult given the dynamics of consumption of news on social media and the large volume of content that can be accessed there.

The demand for immediate information also hinders the process of verification, which explains why some journalists and media outlets publish information that is false or misleading (Lelonek, 2020).

Media encounter numerous challenges when publishing content on social media platforms where other news creators operate, and these platforms often serve as venues for spreading false narratives, disinformation, hate speech, etc. According to Dimitrovska (2021), the spread of disinformation is considered a very harmful aspect of the use of social media. Hate speech, disinformation and fake news frequently appear on social networks when media publish articles related to crime, corruption, politics and political affairs, particularly in periods of elections. It is quite often a case when media publish information tackling the LGBT population, gender identity, somebody's ethnicity (ibid).

When people consume disinformation and fake news on social media, professional journalism is impacted in various ways. Fake news creates a false reality that not just one or two people buy into, but thousands, and it creates a reality that those creating the fake news can manipulate to whatever they want it to be. Those lies, if perpetrated, can turn deadly or threaten societal stability (Van der Lans, 2021).

False information about major events, including political events, wars and conflicts, health crises, such as Covid-19, can jeopardize public health and safety. Disinformation as warfare in the digital age may not be so different than any other type of warfare; wars are fought for power, and some benefit economically while the vulnerable suffer the most (Horowitz, 2019).

When journalism becomes a vector for disinformation, this further reduces public trust and promotes the cynical view that there is no distinction between different narratives within journalism on the one hand, and narratives of disinformation on the other (Nery, 2019). Mainstream media can easily become a significant amplifier and disseminator of false stories – even if they, for the most part, cover fake news with an intent to set the record straight and correct the fabricated information.

In Humprecht's opinion (2018) the content of fake news stories differs across national contexts in ways that matches and reflects national journalistic styles and news agendas. This implies that those who create fake news intuitively or deliberately write their stories in ways that match mainstream journalists' news values.

Findings from the 2021 statistical data analysis by the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia confirm that the problem of disinformation persists in the news media reporting. One of the most violated articles of the Code of Journalists is Article 1, which refers to inaccurate and unverified information and absence of at least two sources of information. 91,3 percent of the press complaints filed to the media self-regulatory body refer to online media reporting.

In many cases, the complainants react to the fact that information from social media is insufficiently verified and it spills over into the journalistic content. Therefore, one-sided reporting, disinformation and misinformation online continues to be a problem. Data from the statistical analysis confirm that this was also the most reported problem to the Council of Media Ethics in 2020. Again, the percentage of complaints about online media reporting is the biggest – 90,7 (CMEM, 2020).

Media self-regulation is important in the era of disinformation

Establishing the truth and correction of false information in journalism has increased in recent years as a response to the information disorder. Providing citizens with the information they need to make political decisions is among the most highly ranked professional values in surveys of journalists across political contexts (Hanitzsch et al, 2012: 483-504). Journalists and credible media globally perceive that an essential part of their professional duty is to correct manipulation and disinformation. As Rosenstiel and Kovach claim (2001), verification and correction are portrayed in literature as the essence of journalists' professionalism.

The prominence of truth and facts in the professional culture of journalists is reflected in journalists' self-criticism on the role of the news media in the disinformation order (Tsfati et al, 2020). The fact that journalists complain that reporting has become 'increasingly sloppy' and that 'bottom-line pressure is hurting journalism' highlights the professional aspiration for un-sloppy, truthful and accurate reporting (ibid).

Press councils or media self-regulatory bodies have an important role in safeguarding professional integrity, quality, and credibility of media. Their main role is supervision of the application of codes of ethics in the media and safeguarding public against unprofessional, manipulative and abusive journalistic reporting. Increased levels of media professionalism and strong defense of media freedom, which are shared goals of media self-regulatory bodies across the world, can serve as a remedy. Many self-regulatory bodies deal with cases related to media outlets outside their membership and, thus, on one hand exert an indirect pressure on non-members, and on the other hand contribute to the general familiarity with journalistic professional standards (UNESCO, 2019).

According to Puddephatt (2011), self-regulation preserves independence of the media and protects it from partisan government interference. It could be more efficient as a system of regulation as the media understand their own environment better than government (though they may use that knowledge to further their own commercial interests rather than the public interest). Another advantage of the media self-regulation is that it may encourage greater compliance because of peer pressure and it can also drive-up professional standards by requiring media to think about or even develop their own standards of behavior.

In the Republic of North Macedonia, a self-regulatory body in the media, the Council of Media Ethics, has been functioning since 2014. Its main mission is to protect the right of the public to receive objective and complete information, which will be in accordance with ethical norms.

It also takes care of regular implementation of standards in the profession by the media themselves, but also through mediation as a process that raises trust between the public and the media. The mission of this body is to raise public awareness of professional and ethical standards that should be respected by the media. It responds to press complaints about contents published in different types of news media (broadcast media, newspapers, magazines, and associated digital outlets, as well as online media), and engages in public policy debates on freedom of speech.

By providing an independent, efficient and equitable process for resolving press complaints, it works on promoting quality in media content. Spreading media literacy is also part of the organization's commitments. CMEM issues standards of good media practice, which its members must apply. A recent study commissioned by the Council of Media Ethics (Dimitrovska, 2021) highlights the role of professional media in combatting disinformation, propaganda and hate speech in social media, as well as the role of media and journalistic associations. Journalists and editors interviewed as part of this study believe that if media accept media self-regulation and adhere to the professional reporting standards, they would be protected once they publish their contents on social media.

Developing new ethical guidelines to address information disorder

As online disinformation is increasingly becoming the central problem in the public discourse, it calls for a clear understanding about the role of professional journalism in maintaining high ethical standards in terms of truthful and impartial reporting. Furthermore, there is a need for designing a set of principles that can mitigate the effects of disinformation and address the underlying factors that are responsible for its amplification. Across Europe, different press councils, media or journalistic organizations adopt codes of conduct that they commit to follow. All of them have some common points and they generally cover similar categories of ethical conduct. Some of them are necessary for the avoidance of misinformation and others exist for guiding the journalists into better working methods. Commitments related to truthfulness, integrity, respecting the source as well as serving the interest of the society are common to most of the ethical guidelines or codes adopted. Accuracy of information, including truthfulness and integrity, has always been a cornerstone of ethical conduct and a determinant characteristic of trusted news media (Salas, 2018).

To respond to the challenges for professional journalists, the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia initiated the development of Guidelines for Ethical Reporting for Online Media. The need to develop these Guidelines arose from the fact that the rise of new information and communication technologies and online media changed the way of creating and disseminating information and posed new challenges to professional journalists. These Guidelines are aimed to be used by editors, journalists and all other content creators working in online media. They are intended to help in the development of a strong and credible online media self-regulation system and in strengthening independent, professional and accountable journalistic reporting in the online sphere. The Guidelines also apply to all information and content that online media publish on social networks or other Internet platforms. One of the provisions in these Guidelines is that online media need to carefully check reliability and credibility of information obtained from social networks, websites, blogs or other Internet sources. In addition to this, online media need to be responsible for regularly reviewing and promptly removing user comments that are published under journalistic content on websites or social networks containing elements of hate speech and having the potential to cause harmful consequences in the society.

Addressing disinformation is also included in another document recently developed by the Council of Media Ethics relating to ethical reporting on children and youth. One of the provisions in the Recommendations concerning ethical reporting about children and youth (CMEM, 2021) highlights the need to establish mechanisms in media pertaining to children and youths' protection against media reporting based on disinformation, political propaganda and agitation, economic manipulation, pornographic contents, religious fanaticism, creating and inciting stereotypes and discrimination on any ground. Another document including a provision for addressing disinformation in social media is the Guidelines for safe and professional reporting on coronavirus (Covid-19). The Guidelines emphasize that journalists and hosts of live programs in the media play an important role in following audience's statements in order to prevent spreading of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech on air. As outlined in the Guidelines, journalists should be especially careful when people involved in live programs share unverified information from social networks. Journalists are also advised to check information on social media before they produce news articles.

To contribute to the efforts for inclusive reporting in the media, the Council of Media Ethics published Guidelines on inclusive media reporting during Covid-19. Journalists are advised to be aware and react to disinformation and hate speech and to review and remove user comments on media websites or social networks that contain hate speech and potentially harmful content.

Failure to comply with ethical codes of conduct and the increased spread of disinformation as a result of it, especially in the online unregulated environment, troubles citizens and affects their trust in the media.

Providing publicity to the ethical adjudications

Ensuring transparency is important with a view to enable citizens to understand how violation of ethical standards happens and how disinformation affects credibility of media reporting. It will give the readers or the audience the maximum and possible attention to the problematic journalistic content. One of the basic duties of any media self-regulatory bodies is securing transparency and publicity of all adjudications taken, as representatives of the public play an important role in their work.

Keeping track of the results of the adjudications provides statistical data about the performance of the medial self-regulatory body and the main ethical breaches and ethical challenges for the journalists. CMEM has a transparent database of the adjudications made by the Press Complaints Commission and it is treated as a good way to build trust and credibility of the self-regulatory body.

In addition to this, the Council has a social media presence on Facebook and Twitter, where it publishes its adjudications, alerts and reactions to cases of unprofessional reporting.

Cross-sector partnerships, networks and coalitions

Networking among press and media councils in the region of Western Balkans and in Europe continues to evolve in addressing the problem with disinformation in the digital era.

Troubled by the increasing number of complaints received by press and media councils regarding the proliferation, amplification, and promotion of potentially harmful online content, including disinformation and hate speech, the press and media councils from Southeast Europe and Turkey adopted a joint declaration on strengthening media ethics in the digital era in November 2021 (UNESCO, 2021). The Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia is also a signatory of this Declaration.

The adoption of the document is considered as a strong call for increased adherence of online media actors to ethical and professional media standards and a call to various stakeholders to strengthen the sustainability and effectiveness of media self-regulation.

At the national level, CMEM keeps a strategic dialogue with different stakeholders and works together with policy-makers, regulatory authorities, judiciary, political leaders, journalists, civil society, academics, and educators, to help them understand the role of media self-regulation and identify further possibilities to combat harmful practices in media, such as disinformation and incitement to hatred.

Cooperation between the media regulator and the self-regulatory body is one of the key relations that needs to be developed, especially in several areas, such as promotion of media pluralism, prevention of hate speech and discriminatory speech, as well as and promotion of media literacy. An additional area in which the activities of the self-regulatory body and the regulator intersect is media literacy (Stojcevski, 2017).

To effectively address the problem of proliferation of hate speech, disinformation and discrimination in the media, CMEM committed to establishing partnerships with high education institutions, the media regulator, the Ombudsman and civil society organizations in discussing these problems. The Economic Chamber of Macedonia also committed to supporting media-self regulation by joining the initiative for establishment of the Registry of Professional Online Media, which urged its members to advertise only in online media that are part of the Registry. The main purpose of the Registry is to contribute to the process of professionalization in the work of online media, thereby enhancing their credibility as well as recognizing those who uphold to standards in comparison to unethical media that cause damage to the reputation of professional online media.

Promoting strong collaboration among media councils, media self-regulatory bodies, independent media regulators and networks of journalists is one of the recommended actions aimed at fostering journalistic standards contained in the European Democracy Action Plan (EU, 2020).

Media literacy is important

The competencies of digital and media literacy include the ability to make responsible choices and access information by locating and sharing materials and comprehending information and ideas; analyze messages in a variety of forms by identifying the author, purpose and point of view, and evaluating the quality and credibility of the content; create content in a variety of forms, making use of language, images, sound and new digital tools and technologies; reflect on one's own conduct and communication behavior by applying social responsibility and ethical principles; and take social action by working individually and collaboratively to share knowledge and solve problems in the family, workplace and nation and by participating as a member of a community (Hobbs, 2010).

Media literate individuals are not only consumers of information and media content, but they are able to critically assess information and media content, to ethically and effectively use information, and engage with all forms of media. Press councils have recognized that education of strategic audiences and stakeholders is an important pillar of effective media self-regulation. With this in mind, they have all developed media and information literacy activities to develop the critical thinking of media users (UNESCO, 2019). Press councils in the region of South East Europe organize lectures and seminars, invest in research and some have set online libraries with media ethics related subjects.

The Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia joined the Media Literacy Network in the country in 2017. It was established by the media regulator, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services. This Network is created in order to facilitate the communication and consultations between different entities in the country working on raising the level of media literacy of all citizens. The spreading of media literacy is one of the more important goals in the work of CMEM. Respondents in the research commissioned by Association of Journalists of Macedonia (Stojcevski, 2017) suggest that CMEM should intensify its efforts through campaigns, workshops and greater media presence and that coordinated cooperation and activities with the regulator is necessary. It is considered that it is also necessary to develop cooperation between CMEM and institutions working in the field of higher and secondary education, civil society, informal working groups, as well as with public institutions, such as the Ministry of Education. The Media Literacy Network opens up opportunities for a collaboration of this kind.

Discussion of the results

Media self-regulation plays an important role in combatting disinformation, fake news, hate speech and discrimination, both in traditional and online media. It is considered the most efficient concept in regulating journalistic conduct, without interference of centers of power of any kind.

The Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia is increasingly getting involved in debates with relevant stakeholders to address new digital issues, such as misinformation and disinformation. Together with other press councils across the region and EU, it strongly advocates for using self-regulation as a way to address these phenomena instead of introduction of new laws or legislation that would give the power to politicians and governments to intervene or evaluate what is being published online.

In order to achieve satisfying results in combatting disinformation, it proves that the press council should continuously improve its collaboration and partnership with organizations like other press councils, education organizations, academies, journalistic associations, drawing upon their experience and expertise in order to reach the greatest possible part of the population. It should also be part of the initiatives to cooperate with governments, regulatory authorities and relevant state institutions that deal with media literacy in an attempt to create systemic approach to addressing disinformation.

The media self-regulatory body could be also involved in initiatives aimed at raising awareness among digital media users about the role and importance of media ethics. To increase the impact of its work, the media self-regulatory body should continuously use its infrastructure and tools to display the relevant information to the users and inform them about the ways to distinguish a false content from a real one.

Conclusions

Misinformation and disinformation in the digital era have become a serious problem because of the ease with which material can be conveyed, especially in the era of a rapid digital infrastructure development. Ensuring freedom of speech and the press also implies that there is a proper appreciation of the responsibilities involved—ideally that what is published is true and published with good motives. However, regulating and controlling such responsibilities is increasingly becoming more difficult.

Stronger media self-regulation is a significant part of the solution, but is by no means sufficient, especially if there is no commitment and collaboration by different stakeholders in the society, such as the civil sector, education, media, journalistic associations, the regulator, regulatory bodies for prevention of discrimination, etc.

The responsibility to critically assess, fact-check and seek balance remains vital and a greater challenge in the current media environment. Different methods can be used to avoid misinformation and disinformation in the digital era. Strengthening and supporting media self-regulation is considered to be one of the most efficient mechanisms, which can help to avoid excessive regulation and the introduction of new regulatory restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of the media. This includes collaboration among several stakeholders in the society for the purpose of transforming their various interests into active mobilization and engagement, which would enable the utilization of the capacities of each individual actor. Self-regulation can then yield a responsive, acceptable and systematic solution to current concerns (Price, Verhulst, 2020).

Media self-regulation helps convince the public that the free media are not irresponsible. By promoting standards, self-regulation helps maintain the media's credibility with the public. This, according to Haraszti (2008) is particularly welcome in new democracies, most of which are also new to an independent press. Self-regulation also protects independency in journalists' work, without interference by those in power. Whether passed in good will or not, any attempt to impose standards on journalists by law will result in arbitrary limitation of their legitimate freedoms, and restriction of the free flow of information in society (ibid). Press councils should, therefore, stand against any efforts for legislation of this nature, even if it is result of substantial concerns that citizens might be disinformed or misinformed. This highlights the important role that press councils can play in addressing the problem of disinformation and misinformation, thus preventing governments to take this responsibility.

On the other hand, without user involvement, the self-regulatory mechanism will not accurately reflect user needs, and it cannot be effective in delivering the standards it promotes, which will in turn fail to create confidence among the public. One of the ways to directly involve citizens in combatting the problem of disinformation and misinformation is by spreading the media literacy efforts. This will help in building critical skills which will enable citizens to assess content appearing on online media and social media. Eventually, media should also make responsible and reasonable use of social media.

Common standards are needed to build confidence in the quality of the media products. The standards and operating principles in the self-regulatory system also need to be continuously updated to reflect the challenges that the digitalization brings.

Limitations

The paper attempted to identify the methods to address challenges in journalism as result of the fast spreading of disinformation and misinformation in the digital era and measures to deal with them. However, practical application and assurance of success are beyond the control of this paper. Disinformation and fake news never cease to exist and it is not always easy to track them. Media literacy and media self-regulation can help the audience gain the critical skills needed to assess media contents, but they do not produce immediate results. Moreover, citizens can only be advised not to trust all the information available in media and social platforms, but they cannot be obliged to research the authenticity of it before spreading it.

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Media and media model as factor for media culture in the Republic of North Macedonia

Abstract

The media and the media model are factors that influence the level of mass culture and media literacy in communities. One of the sub-segments of mass culture is media culture. The media culture reflects attitudes, expectations, and values of the citizens regarding the media and the consumption of media content. The focus of this paper will be given to several questions: 1. analysis of the setup of the media model in the Republic of North Macedonia and 2. evaluation and grading of the media in The Republic of North Macedonia. In this context, all relevant reports on the situation with the media in the Republic of North Macedonia by relevant international institutions for a certain period will be presented. The paper is based on official reports on the situation with the media and the results of conducted research. The research shows that the degree of mistrust among the citizens in the media is a result of the politicization and deep division in the media sector into “pro-governmental” and “opposition” media, which is a kind of reflection of the deep political polarization in the Macedonian society. Media and journalists are generally considered to have a dominantly active control-critical role i.e., journalistic research contributes towards discovering numerous scandals, corruption, and various forms of nepotism. For example, even 80.3 percent of respondents think that the media and journalists have the power and contribute to the detection of irregularities in the system (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). This percentage can be and should be interpreted by the media, journalists, and their associations as an opportunity that should be used for building confidence in the public towards journalists and the media. The public service has extremely low ratings and trust among the citizens. If we take into consideration that the majority of citizens are informed about the most important social topics by the news on television, then the data about the low rating of the program services of the Macedonian Television should be taken very seriously, because it indicates there is no influential public medium that will impartially inform the citizens about the official state policy.

Keywords:

Media, media culture, communications, journalism

Introduction

Two media systems are defined at a global level: American and European. These two systems have different socio-political grounds and legal characteristics. Looking from the perspective of political tradition and political culture, the Republic of North Macedonia belongs to the European media system or organization of the media. In the European system there is a specific kind of political socialization of the media, whereas political public is being cherished and respected. This public is not to be considered as a market and traditionally it has never been compared to the treatment of the political public in the USA, which are to be considered leaders of the American type of media system. Series of analysis, including this one, have shown that the media model in the Republic of North Macedonia is not likely to be characterized as a typical European media system.

Most typical for the European media system is the existence of a strong public broadcaster center, then multi political pluralism of the media and the journalists, guaranties for independence of the media, as well as standards in the journalistic profession, with an accent to professionalization and intellectualization of the journalist.

In this paper, data from a research study from 2017¹ will be used (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). The research had two segments: 1. Citizens' perception of the media system and journalism (general public) in the Republic of North Macedonia or to be precise - what the citizen believes is the role of the media in political communications. Then, if the media and the information for politics influence citizens' political decisions and if citizens are aware for possible misuses and special media techniques and methods for creating „desired public opinion“; and 2. Journalistic attitudes (expert public) for conditions that the media system of the Republic of North Macedonia is offering in terms of professional standards, ethical frames and investigative journalism.

We also analyzed the reports on the democratic progress (in terms of media) of the Republic of North Macedonia of important institutions such as the European Commission and renowned international organizations such as Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House.

Media Model in The Republic of North Macedonia

In the Republic of North Macedonia, the audience numbers of the public broadcaster are plummeting, because only 3,9 percent of the citizens have said that they are following the public broadcaster compared to 81.7 percent of citizens which follow private national televisions. Low levels of ratings are registered for the online TV stations. For example, TV Nova 2.7 percent, local televisions like TV Kiss 0,9 percent, televisions of the communities 0,7 percent, regional televisions (HRT, TV PINK, RTS etc.) 1.2%, foreign televisions (CNN, AL JAZEERA, BBC...) 5.7.

1 Jasna Bacovska Nedikj, Goce Pacemski, Citizens and journalists for professionalism in the media <http://www.cup.org.mk/> - this research and analysis is perception of the citizens and journalists in the Republic of Macedonia for the media system and the level of media culture in the Macedonian society.

Almost one third of the citizens i.e., 32,8 percent have said they follow the foreign TV stations (CNN, AL JAZEERA, BBC), and 38,8 percent have pointed out the public broadcaster as another media they follow. Exactly 29.6 percent of the citizens (Albanian, Roma) have said that they follow the media of the communities, while 41.1 percent do not follow these media (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

With the introduction of cable and satellite television, a question for diasporic or so-called transnational audiences has arisen. Transnational audience consists of the members of national minorities or communities that live in one state². A study from the 90-s of the 20-th century has shown that the minorities (now communities) in the Republic of North Macedonia primarily follow satellite programs of their own national countries, and then the private TV stations based on national grounds, afterward Macedonian commercial televisions, and at the end Macedonian television (Dona Kolar Panova, 2000). The same is happening in the countries of Western Europe. For example, the Turkish minority in Germany. Naturally, this fact should be taken into account when we consider for political behavior of the members of the communities of the Republic of North Macedonia and the structure of their behavior.

The influence over the media in the European media system varies from country to country and that control depends from the type of political system. The control over the state media is being done by the ones who control the state and the media follow the official state politics, not the one of the party.

While at the global level, empirical surveys show that, with the growth of the internet and online journalism, the distrust in television of the viewers, especially youngsters, is growing. A high percentage of 46.7% of the respondents in the Republic of North Macedonia have declared that they get the information about the most important social areas (politics, economy) from television (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). The theorist Fidler speaks about the phenomenon of technomyopia when we give too much meaning to the influence of new technologies, considering that the main development goes in direction of the new media or to be exact - multimedia. His opinion seems to be typical for the Republic of North Macedonia.

Indicators: Media Culture and Macedonian Citizens

In regards to how citizens rank quality and the degree of objectivity about the information on politics and political events, the research showed that the news, whether they are presented on television, radio, newspaper or informative portals, has the highest credibility or 39.2 percent i.e., the respondents believe that the most objective information come from the news. Then, the debate shows have been ranked high (for example: “Top Tema on Telma”, “360 Stepeni” on Alsat, “Samo Vistina” on Kanal 5, “Zid” on Alfa etc. Exactly 29.4 percent of the respondents said that these sources provide objective information. Only 10,2 percent of citizens believe that good quality knowledge of certain political happenings can be obtained from documentaries (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

One-fifth of the citizens i.e., 20,1 percent said that they watch the news most often on TV Telma, while 19.4 percent answered that their source was TV Sitel. Only 5.9 percent of the respondents said that they watch the news on the public broadcaster (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017)..

2 So, for example, diasporic public is the Indian community in Great Britain, Turkish community and Albanian minority in North Macedonia, Turkish community in Germany, Macedonian minority in Bulgaira etc.

The most objective television station according to 55.9 percent of the citizens is TV Telma, while the least objective for 54.7 percent is TV Sitel. Exactly 39.7 percent consider the Macedonian radio television1 (MRT1) to be unobjective and 35.2 percent believe this broadcaster is objective. MRT2 - the Macedonian radio television 2 (second channel) is also considered to be unobjective according to 37.5 percent of citizens (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). The opinion about Kanal 5 is divided - 41.4 percent consider this TV station to be unobjective, while 39.1 percent believe it is objective (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). For a large percentage of citizens, ALSAT M is objective, or to be precise for 44.8 percent. In regards to how much citizens believe one TV station, 47.2 percent of the respondents again pointed to TV Telma, and they believe TV Sitel the least, where 59 percent have reflected distrust. High percentage of distrust has been noticed also towards the public broadcaster i.e., 50 percent of respondents said they do not believe the broadcaster or to be precise, saying that they do not believe both channels MTV1 and MTV2 (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

Journalistic Profession in the Republic of North Macedonia - Tendencies

Journalism is an important segment of the media, especially in the sphere of politics. Journalism is generally an unregulated profession in the Republic of North Macedonia, as in most European countries (European journalism). There are no criteria for entering the profession as in other professions (doctors, lawyers, architects), anyone can be a journalist, even without formal criteria about the level and type of education. Whether journalism is a profession or not has been a subject of academic discussion for a long time, but also this issue is the focus of journalistic self-perception. If by applying formal criteria, a conclusion is reached that journalism is not a profession, it remains only the undeniable dramatic importance/influence of the media, and that is the fact that journalists have professional responsibility towards the public. The questions about the standards of professionalization and the conditions in journalism are actualized in a package with the media system. Regarding the conditions for employment, the majority of the journalists who participated in this research (77.9%) reported that they are full-time employees, while 11.7% work on a contractual basis (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).. When asked which is the most important factor in the personnel policy of the media (employment of journalists) in the Republic of North Macedonia, 39.9% of the respondents answered that these are professional qualifications and personal characteristics (skills), while 28.8% think that these are personal connections or lobbying (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). Furthermore, they were asked which is the second most important factor in the personnel policy of the media (employing journalists) in the Republic of North Macedonia, and the same factor again emerges as the most common answer to the previous question.

A particularly interesting fact in the research is that almost half of the journalists (47.2%) stated that the political views of the media where they work are in accordance with their personal political views, while for 31.3% of journalists it is not in accordance with their personal political views (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).. This is a sufficient indicator that self-selection in employment is also a modality of self-censorship. Journalists are inclined to be employed in media outlets whose political orientation corresponds to their attitudes. In the Republic of North Macedonia, after the independence and restructuring of the media system, one can notice the “movement” of the journalists according to their political interests, even without carrying out any research.

But this is a typical feature not only of our system. In critical theories (Noam Chomsky, for example), the concept of ‘extortion’ is conceptualized, when a reporter who is employed in a financially powerful media company must support the position of the main editorial line and the owner of the media outlet³. Asked whether they believe that some criteria should be introduced for entering the profession “journalist” in the Republic of Macedonia, 73% of the respondents answered positively, while only 17.8% answered that criteria for entering this profession should not be introduced (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

This attitude of the journalists in the Republic of Macedonia is in line with the tendency in journalism from the 20th century, but today there is an inevitable need for professionalization in journalism, which will contribute to more journalists entering the profession through journalistic schools with an appropriate diploma⁴. Journalism schools⁵ on a global level has a traditional approach to journalistic education, which includes general journalistic knowledge and training on journalistic skills. Almost half of the journalists who believe that some criteria for entering the profession “journalists” should be introduced (47.1%) answered that this should be a specific diploma, 39.5% as a criterion indicated the diploma of higher education, while a third of them (33.6%) refer to the license as a criterion, namely, according to the statements of the interviewed journalists, the majority of the journalists (76.7%) are not specialized in reporting/writing and research in a particular area, and they work in several areas in parallel, while only less than one-fifth of the journalists (17.2%) work in one area for which they are specialized (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). Almost a third (29.2%) of the low percentage of journalists who specialize in reporting/writing and research in a particular area work in the field of politics, 20.8% work in the field of economics, while (12, 5%) work in the field of the judiciary (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). Only 8.2% of the journalists in Macedonia work on the topics of “corruption” and “organized crime”, which are the focus of investigative journalism in developed democracies and their media systems (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).. Topics in the field of “healthcare” are covered by 4.2% of journalists, which can be interpreted as a disastrous and extremely illogical figure, considering the fact that this area refers to the health and quality of life of all citizens. “During the last decades, in conditions of growing competition, professionalization in journalism has grown, although, when it comes to this profession, it is still impossible to talk about strict rules of professionalization (Glantz/Langenbucher 1993).”

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- 3 Editor-in-chief of the New York newspaper Time, Ray Cave, in 1984, declared openly: “Although in Time, we have employees with a variety of persuasions, they must respect the position of the newspaper in relation to the topic they write. If the author’s position is not identical with the one of Time, that text cannot be published by the newspaper.
 - 4 In order to achieve this global approach to conceptual journalism education, we must emphasize that Mark Deuze writes in his notes about various examples of international collaborative projects in assessing the needs for changes in journalism and journalism education. Namely, calls for attention to the following initiatives: 1) In Europe: various publications and programs for journalistic trainings in the European Journalism Center in Maastricht, The Netherlands, merging graduates and students into the international collaborative program “Eurojournalism” by schools in Wales, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands. 2) In Africa: reviews, notices and programs from the Southern Africa Media Training Trust and the Media Institute of Southern Africa, as well as reviews provided by media professionals. 3) In Asia-Pacific: various collaborations between schools and media institutions and universities in the region, including Europe and the United States as partners. 4) In South America: research and training programs for the entire region began with the Ciespal Institute in Quito, Ecuador. 5) Globally: the UNESCO Journet initiative, a self-proclaimed global network for professional education in the field of journalism and the media: *Global Journalism Education: A conceptual approach*, Mark Deuze, Routledge, *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 7, No 1, 2006, introduction: *Future of Journalism Education, Challenges and Prospects*, *Media Dialogue, Journal for Research of the Media and Society*, 2012, <https://medijskidijalozi.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/md-number-13-14.pdf>
 - 5 The term school is generally accepted as a term meaning a name that indicates an institution or part of that institution (for example faculty, department, college, division).

The modern journalist should have a solid general education and interdisciplinary knowledge from different fields gained at the university level and specialist knowledge that will cover the social fields (politics, sports, medicine, economics, electrical engineering, education, entertainment, science, fashion, etc.).

The specialization in journalism certainly cannot completely follow the social differentiation.

The majority of interviewed journalists (52.8%) reported that they personally did not face pressure or threat from their employer/media or other stakeholders, while 28.8% responded positively to this issue (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). Quite the contrary is the opinion on the pressures and threats on journalists dealing with investigative journalism. Namely, 64.4% of the researched journalists think they are facing pressures and threats, while almost a quarter (24.5%) consider themselves only partly facing pressures and threats. Given the increasing number of publicly presented cases in which journalists were faced with attacks and court proceedings in the last few years, it is less puzzling to see that the largest percentage of researched journalists (42.9%) had no answer to the question of whether they can recall the name of a journalist who was “the victim of his work” in the Republic of Macedonia or the region (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). Only a third of them (32.5%) said they could, while almost a quarter (25.5%) cannot remember a name of a colleague of theirs who, because of their work was the target of attacks and persecution by the institutions (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

However, among the journalists who remembered the name of a journalist who was “the victim of their job” in the Republic of North Macedonia or the region, the majority of them (87.2%) answered that they remembered Tomislav Kezarovski (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017). Such a result is not surprising, since the trial of journalist Kezarovski attracted much public attention, triggered political turbulence and protests by several civil society organizations and was singled out in the EC reports as an example of political pressure on the media and journalists.

We can conclude that in the Republic of North Macedonia both at the general level and at the level of the journalistic profession there is a crisis in trade union organization. In such conditions, the worker’s fight for work is a personal choice. Trade union activism is a guarantee for the exercise of rights and a reduction in pressure on journalists and a prerequisite for freedom of the media. The state must have a responsibility and should demonstrate awareness that outside of the public sector, trade union organization is de facto aggravated and almost impossible.

The results of this research show that 42.9 percent of the interviewed journalists do not feel protected by the trade union organizations of journalists in the Republic of North Macedonia, while 39.3 percent feel only partially protected. Trade unions and professional associations are an extremely important factor for the integrity of a profession and its credibility in society (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

The level of integration in professional associations is a guarantor of higher business ethics, greater credibility, and higher social status in a profession (comparing: a doctor’s chamber, a bar association, etc.). This research showed that there is a very high percentage of journalists who are not members of any professional association. Namely, the distribution of responses from journalists who stated that they are members (50.3%) and those who stated that they are not members (49.7%) of any professional journalistic association in the country, are almost equal (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

The high percentage of journalists who are not members of a journalist association may be the reason why journalists think that these associations do not do their job at all and do not sensitize them about the important problems, questions, information and opportunities in the profession. 44.2 percent of the journalists are not sufficiently sensitized by professional journalistic associations in the Republic of North Macedonia, while 22.7 percent answered that they are sufficiently sensitized by these associations (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

The political crisis also had repercussions in this sphere. The core of professional association has broken down, professional associations have been formed on a political basis, like in other social areas where parallel associations have been formed, which is completely contrary to professionalism. The problem of journalists' distrust of their professional associations remains. 28.8 percent of the journalists think that the professional associations of journalists in the Republic of North Macedonia are politicized, but what can be taken as a certain indicator is that a very high percentage of journalists (58.3%) have no opinion on this issue, while only one-eighth of journalists (12.9%) think that professional associations of journalists are not politicized and they are professional (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

Professional organizations such as the International Federation of Journalists⁶, the International Press Institute and the International Publisher Association have numerous actions and prepare reports on certain issues such as media concentration and transparency in terms of regulations on freedom of information or corruption. They are supported by civil society organizations specialized in the freedom of the press and the media, such as the "Article 19" organization for reporters without borders, as well as non-governmental organizations for human rights such as Amnesty International, International Council on Human Rights Policy, etc.

Apart from the many opportunities for protection and promotion of the profession offered by international organizations of journalists (grants, scholarships, training...), most the domestic journalists are not members of international associations. When asked if they are members of an international journalist association, the majority of journalists (87.7%) answered negatively, while one in eight journalists (12.3%) answered that they were members of an international journalist association (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

As we have previously pointed out, journalism and journalists are one of the most important components of the media system (clarification: the media refers also to movies, advertisements, music and entertainment). In the process of formation of political communication, the journalists are the mediator that enables communication between the social groups. Based on expert perception, it can be concluded that in the period after gaining independence of the Republic of Macedonia and as a result of certain socio-political circumstances, such as the dissolution of the SFRY, the creation of a state, the transition from one socio-political system to another, as well as the developments in the media system etc., a character of a strong journalist with a pronounced socio-political function was imposed. Those journalists had a strong influence on the perceptions of the citizen and politics and also on other social processes like the globalization, economy, culture, and ecology.

In the Republic of North Macedonia, 79.8 percent of the citizens (the respondents in this research) believe that the journalistic work is essential for the political participation of the citizen and the functioning of democracy, and only 12.9 percent claimed the opposite, exactly 80.3 percent of the respondents claimed that the journalists have a very active control-critical role and that the journalist research contributes to revealing irregularities of the system such as scandals, corruption, and nepotism. Only 12.8 percent of the respondents think that the journalists do not reveal certain irregularities. However, a high percentage of the respondents, 60.4 percent think that the journalists with their writings can't influence voter views or voting decisions. On the other hand, a solid percentage of 36.2 of the respondents said that journalists could influence their decision on the elections (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

⁶ ZNM is a member of the International Federation of Journalists.

In this context, it may be interesting to note that 39.5 percent of the citizens are inclined to check the information they receive from the media (through other media, interpersonal communication, later information), 28.5 percent of the citizens reported that sometimes they check the information received from the media, while 30.8 percent reported that they do not verify the information received from the media (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

The citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia, or more precisely the sample of citizens that was interviewed, have a partial or low degree of confidence in journalists and their work because they think they are corrupt. A high 52.4 percent of the respondents believe that there is corruption, influence, threats to the journalists in the media and 28 percent of the citizens believe that only some individual journalists are corrupt (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

It is interesting to point out that the journalists themselves claim that there is corruption in the media and among the journalists. Namely, the majority of journalists (89.6%) believe that there are corrupt journalists in the Republic of North Macedonia. According to 36.9 percent of the interviewed journalists, the corruption among the journalists is the main reason for the low reputation of the journalistic profession in the country. Namely, 71.2 percent of interviewed journalists consider that journalists have a low reputation in society, and only 3.7 percent think that their social reputation is high (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

According to 30.6 percent of the respondents, the organization of the media system (media legislation) in the country is the second important reason for the low social reputation of journalism. Despite such indicators for the level of corruption among journalists, as well as the low reputation of the journalistic profession, 76.7 percent of the interviewed journalists think that the citizens have partial trust in their work, while 18.4 percent of the journalists think that the citizens do not have trust in their work at all (Bacovska Nedikj, Pacemski 2017).

The corruption, the organization of the media system (media legislation), the lack of education of certain journalists are the reasons that reflect on the status and the valuation of this profession in the social sphere. The journalists have a low social status. A negative image of the journalistic profession is dominant. The profession is seen as a pseudo-profession and as unserious. In the theories of journalism and in the empirical research, this is confirmed by the fact that the stereotypes contribute to the fact that many people, besides their profession, also deal with journalism. One of the first to write about the prestige of journalism was Max Weber in his writings “Politics as a Profession”.

Macedonia has not been a “free country“ since 1998

The media system today is one of the criteria for democratic equality and protection of human rights and is no longer a condition for a democratic political system, but, as an absolute channel for political communication, it is a part of the democratic political system. Because of these reasons, the media system in the Republic of North Macedonia has been and still is being monitored by affected institutions, especially the EU for which we have representative reports that have been many times quoted and debated.

North Macedonia ranked 90th out of 180 countries in the newest 2021 World Press Freedom Index⁷ of the “Reporters without borders”. In 2020 the country was two places down, ranking at 92. Still, in the newest report, it is noted that “impunity culture persists”.

7 <https://rsf.org/en/north-macedonia>

“2020 was an extraordinary year for North Macedonia. Parliament was dissolved, a provisional government took over, and then snap parliamentary elections had to be postponed because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting state of emergency. The situation of the media worsened, senior government officials continued to threaten and insult media outlets, while cyber-harassment and verbal attacks against journalists increased on social media. All this served to reinforce the well-entrenched culture of impunity. At the same time, the pandemic complicated reporting. Organizations that represent the media strongly opposed the various proposed amendments to the state and privately-owned broadcast media law that would allow state advertising in the media. They opposed this on the grounds that it could encourage clientelism. The justice ministry is drafting a new penal code that should make journalists and media workers safer”, is stated in the latest report.

The Republic of North Macedonia is defined as “partly free”, being ranked 67 in the newest report of Freedom House “Freedom in the world 2022”⁸. It is noted that “North Macedonia continues to struggle with corruption and clientelism. While media and civil society participate in vigorous public discourse, journalists and activists still face pressure and intimidation”. In the previous report for 2021⁹, North Macedonia has been ranked 66 also being defined as a “partly free country”. In that report it is noted that “North Macedonia continues to struggle with corruption, and while the media and civil society participate in vigorous public discourse, journalists and activists face pressure and intimidation”. It has also been “partly free” in the report for 2020¹⁰.

The reports in previous years were also not satisfactory. The respectable organization “Reporters without Borders” published the newest World Press Freedom Index¹¹ in April 2019, where it was stated that North Macedonia has gone up by 14 places, but is still ranked among the last in the region. In that report, it is stated that it is pitiful that still, high officials have tendencies of habits to intimidate journalists. Improvements in the field of safety of the journalists have also been noted, explaining that the number of attacks in 2018 has reduced threefold compared to the numbers from the previous year. In 2018, the country was ranked two places higher compared to the previous year, when the country was ranked 111¹². According to the report of “Reporters without Borders” for Macedonia, published in 2017, the state has been defined as the “Bad Balkan boy”. Out of 180 countries in the report, Macedonia was ranked 111.

“Freedom of the media decreased in the region, but the erosion in the rule of law is most visible in Macedonia, an EU candidate. Slander has been removed from the Criminal code in 2012, but prosecutions have been replaced with civil court cases, with the possibility of heavy fines and imprisonment for reporters and media owners. There have been lots of reports regarding threats, violence, harassment, and intimidation of journalists during the political demonstrations in 2016, but only a few of the responsible were charged. The political instability influences the work of the journalists and the pressure of the ruling party has forced part of the media to self-censorship”, the report of the “Reporters without Borders” for 2017 states¹³.

Previously in 2016¹⁴, Macedonia was ranked 118 out of 180 states¹⁵. In 2015, the state takes the 117th place and there are no significant replacements in regard to freedom of the media.

8 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/north-macedonia/freedom-world/2022>

9 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/north-macedonia/freedom-world/2021>

10 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/north-macedonia/freedom-world/2020>

11 <https://rsf.org/en/north-macedonia>

12 <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>

13 <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>

14 <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2016>

15 <http://www.radiomof.mk/reporteri-bez-granici-makedonija-padna-na-118-mesto-po-sloboda-na-mediumi/>

Macedonia reaches the highest position in the report for 2009, when it has been ranked 34th, with a continuous fall in the following years.

“Macedonia continues to struggle with corruption and while the media and the civil society are active, journalists and activists face pressures and threats”, the report “Freedom in the world 2019”¹⁶ states.

In the newest report of “Freedom House” titled “Nations in Transit 2021”¹⁷ there have been some improvements in the field of democracy, even though North Macedonia is still defined as a “transitional government or hybrid regime”.

According to the report “Freedom in the World”¹⁸, North Macedonia since 1998 till now has never been defined as “free country”, but as “partly free”.

In the latest EU progress report on North Macedonia 2021¹⁹ it has been noted that there is “limited progress” and the country is moderately prepared in the field of information society and media. “The media regulator continued to be proactive in the promotion of media literacy and in warning against inflammatory or discriminatory language, hate speech, unprofessional journalistic reporting, as well as pressure and threats on journalists and media outlets. Transparency of media ownership is a legal obligation for the audio-visual and print media, however, there are no legal obligations for online media. The fight against disinformation and activities related to media literacy is mostly carried out by civil society. Enhanced efforts and inter-institutional cooperation on the side of the authorities is needed”, is noted in the report. While the EU progress reports from previous years have detected other weaknesses.

The EU progress report on North Macedonia 2018²⁰ stated that “the climate for media freedom and freedom of expression has improved, with more open political debate and critical media reporting. There has been a decrease in pressure on journalists. Reporting on both recent electoral campaigns has been more balanced, as acknowledged by the OSCE/ODIHR and other observers. Government advertising has ended. Further efforts are needed to improve the independence of the public broadcaster. It is essential that the authorities demonstrate zero tolerance towards all incidents of physical and verbal abuse or threats against journalists and that these are effectively followed up by the relevant authorities.

There has been extensive stakeholder consultation on changes to media legislation”. In the EU Progress report for following year, 2019²¹ it is stated that “the country has some level of preparation / is moderately prepared in the area of freedom of expression and made good progress. The climate for media freedom and freedom of expression has improved. Open political debate and critical media reporting continued. Further self-regulation efforts are required to improve professional standards and the quality of journalism. The ban on government advertising was respected. Sustained efforts are needed to improve the independence, professional standards and financial sustainability of the public broadcaster. It is essential that the authorities continue to promote freedom of expression. Amendments to the Law on Audio and Audio-visual Media Services have been adopted and their implementation will require a strong political commitment to guarantee professionalism, respect for the principles of transparency, merit-based appointments, and equitable representation.

16 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/north-macedonia>

17 https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/NIT_2021_final_042321.pdf

18 https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Freedom_in_the_World_2008_complete_book.pdf

19 https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/north-macedonia-report-2021_en

20 <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2019-05/20180417-the-former-yugoslav-republic-of-macedonia-report.pdf>

21 <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2019-05/20190529-north-macedonia-report.pdf>

The financial sustainability of private media and working conditions of journalists remain a challenge. The country has addressed some of the recommendations from the 2018 report, notably by creating a climate that is favourable for expressing pluralistic viewpoints”.

In the EU progress report for 2020²² there is a part that refers to independent media. “The country has some level of preparation / is moderately prepared in the area of freedom of expression and has made limited progress during the reporting period. The overall situation and climate in which media operates remain generally conducive to media freedom and allow for critical media reporting, although there have been some increased tensions during the COVID-19 crisis and in the context of the elections. Self-regulation efforts need to be intensified to support advancement in professional standards and the quality of journalism. It is important to ensure greater transparency of media advertising by state institutions, political parties, and public enterprises. Sustainable solutions to ensure the public service broadcaster’s independence, professional standards and financial sustainability are needed. It is essential to continue supporting media pluralism, promoting professionalism, unbiased reporting and investigative journalism, and building resilience to effectively combat disinformation. The financial sustainability of independent media and working conditions of journalists remains a challenge”.

In the newest Human rights report 2020 of the State department²³ for North Macedonia it is notified that “the media environment continued to improve during the year. According to the Association of Journalists of Macedonia, the authorities’ response to instances of violence toward and intimidation of journalists was slow and inefficient”.

In the previous Human Rights Report 2019 for North Macedonia²⁴, problems have been notified. It stated: “the government made progress in respecting media freedom and freedom of expression, but problems remained, including weak media independence, and violence toward and intimidation of journalists”. Obstacles in regards to freedom of the press were notified also in the Human rights report 2018 for North Macedonia²⁵. “The government made progress respecting media freedom and freedom of expression, but problems remained, including weak media independence, and violence and intimidation of journalists”, the report says. In the same report it is also noted that “while outlets and reporting continued to be largely divided along political lines, the number of independent media voices actively expressing a variety of views without overt restriction increased. Laws that restrict speech inciting national, religious, or ethnic hatred also cover print and broadcast media, publication of books, and online newspapers and journals”.

Conclusion

The level of trust of citizens in our media is low. An analysis of the responses to the questionnaire reveals the main reasons for the low public trust in the media and journalism in the country. Mistrust of the media mainly stems from the negative image of many influential media (with rare exceptions among the media that enjoy the trust of citizens), as well as the bad behavior of certain journalists.

22 https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2020-10/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf

23 <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/north-macedonia/>

24 <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/north-macedonia/>

25 <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/north-macedonia/>

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- <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/north-macedonia/>
- <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/north-macedonia/>
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Media Literacy Education at the University Level: A Case study of the South East European University (SEEU)

Abstract

Media literacy education is the key to creating citizens resilient to fake news and disinformation, especially in countries vulnerable to foreign influence, such as North Macedonia. The impact of disinformation in the country is higher compared to developed democratic countries. Referring to the highly polarized society, with a weak education system, citizens' low trust in institutions and media as well as average or low level of investigative journalism, it is high time that media literacy should be institutionalized in North Macedonia, particularly at the university level. This study argues that the introduction of media literacy programs and/or courses at the university level is indispensable. The sui generis nature and the unique experience of the South East European University in higher education in North Macedonia, as well as its reputation as a western model of higher education, makes it clearly suitable to be a leader in the institutionalization of media literacy education. Furthermore, it aims to justify the need of including media literacy courses at each faculty at the South East European University, while creating new curricula and/or study programs at the Department of Communication Sciences and Faculty of Contemporary Social Sciences. Moreover, the recently established Media Literacy and Disinformation Research Cluster which functions at the Max van der Stoep Research Institute will complement the proposed reform in the curricula of these faculties. The results from the theoretical research and those from empirical research through the online survey with undergraduate and master students further argue that media literacy education is an inevitable need in the digital era that educates university students to critically approach information online, while contributing to creating a resilient society as an ultimate goal.

Keywords:

Media literacy education, South East European University, resilient students

A General Overview

In January 2022, there were 1.75 million internet users in North Macedonia, and the number of social media users was 1.35 million, which is equivalent to 64.8 percent of the total population in the country (Datareportal, 2022) which is 2.08 million.¹

North Macedonia is a new democracy that declared independence in 1991 as one of the successor states of Yugoslavia. In 2001, it went through an armed conflict between the biggest communities - Macedonians and Albanians - that ended with the support of the US and European mediation. The Ohrid Framework Agreement was signed by both parties with the aim of creating a framework for a civic state. Nevertheless, the society is still significantly divided along ethnic lines, a situation that is also reflected into the information space. The information space in the country is further polarized along political lines, which often coincides with their geostrategic orientation. The biggest geostrategic divide is present among the two largest Macedonian parties (SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE). While SDSM is perceived to be pro-western oriented, because it accelerated the process of Euro-Atlantic integration, the conservative VMRO-DPMNE, during the regime of Nikola Gruevski, had shown a pro-Serbian and pro-Russian attitude, while also the cooperation with China was present. The Albanian political parties en bloc have openly expressed negative attitudes towards Russia and its influence in the country. (GLOBSEC Vulnerability Index, 2021) Bilateral disputes with its neighbors (barring Albania and Kosovo), regarding the name of the country with Greece, regarding the Macedonian identity and language with Bulgaria and about the church with Serbia, have contributed to North Macedonia's vulnerability especially to foreign malign influence from various actors.

The quality of the information space is further impacted by the following factors: the lack of professional and investigative journalists, the presence of one-person portals, lack of study programs at the universities that offer media and communication studies, lack of information and media literacy courses at university and high schools, etc.

This kind of landscape is a favorable ground for all kinds of disinformation and misinformation including campaigns conducted deliberately by actors such as Russia and China, whose aim is to challenge the Western order in the Western Balkans.

Nevertheless, the media landscape in North Macedonia has improved compared to the period before 2017, when media outlets were under total control by the governing party (VMRO-DPMNE). Since then, attempts for free information and free media are continuing, but political parties who daily propagate for the democratic values, fail to implement them and especially when it comes to media freedom, by constraining them to pursue day-to-day politics in their favor. This is also true with the government. Different draft-laws are proposed, some are approved, strategies and plans are created, but surprisingly the process of the same is dragged and delayed. (EU Commission Report on North Macedonia, 2020) The discrepancy of the development of the media freedom after 2017, is also shown by the Media Literacy Index (2021), which was created in 2017 as a response to the 'post-truth' phenomenon, where North Macedonia has been added + 5 scores compared to 2017 and remained with the same scores till then. In 2021, North Macedonia has been ranked in the 35th place out of 35 countries analyzed in this report, where Scandinavian states are the first in the ranking.

1 The latest official data from the census of 2002 is 2.02 million. The data from the last census held in September 2021 is not available yet.

North Macedonia is the last one compared to neighboring countries in the ranking (Lessenski, M. (2021). Based on most cited research data where the vulnerability to disinformation is often linked to the educational level of a society, this report calls on the emergency for functional education and especially for education in Media Literacy, which will make society more resilient. To a large extent, the process of media literacy has been left at the forefront of civil society, journalists' societies, media self-regulatory organizations, and educational institutions.

The need for Media Literacy in higher education

In the new digital environment, everyone can be the author of i.e., create public convictions, where the lack of filters without a proper editorial office and not respecting the journalistic code raises the risk of misinformation for each individual. Following this trend, educational institutions find it reasonable to do something about it, including theoretical and practical formal education for a critical approach to information.

The need for Media Literacy has been discussed many times, in various conferences and symposia and it has been concluded that Media Literacy is an indisputable need of the time, especially in vulnerable societies such as that of North Macedonia.

With the transformation of the concept of the traditional school, the need arises to follow new forms of learning, turning the university into a “laboratory” where knowledge is transformed into new work practices, much needed in a society with market and production competition. In this context, media education needs to be included in a university curriculum adding not only the basic overview of the general knowledge but also a more synchronized theoretical-practical education for its impact on society. So this is for the fact that it is necessary to critically evaluate the information. There is no one-size-fits-all formula for evaluating false information ... But what assembles all is critical thinking, including detailed analysis and evaluation of the information. According to Astleitner, critical thinking is a mental activity that includes evaluation, suggestions, and judgments that guide the development of beliefs and actions (Astleitner, 2002).

Media Literacy should be seen as a necessary part of our educational-university system, not only for the fact that we are now living in the digital age, but also for the many implications that are being created in everyday life by the spread of “journalism without an editorial”, where everyone has the opportunity to influence the creation of media realities. This would make it a good practice to approach the news with skepticism. Something very close to Burkard's psychological approach, according to which, information should be treated in two ways - through acceptance and credibility.

The need to include Media Literacy as a compulsory subject within university curricula should go beyond the administrative-legal meaning, and more as part of the cultural formation of contemporary man (academic citizen) who would achieve that through acquired theoretical-practical knowledge, equipped with the necessary mechanisms for building personal attitudes and views, without necessarily being influenced by the media.

As a controversial topic at the international level, Media Literacy has been selectively included in the school systems of different countries. And, as a notion and content, Media Literacy has been defined since the International Conference (National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy, 1992) to mean ‘The ability to access, analyze, evaluate and transmit messages through the media.’

It is worth mentioning the idea was initiated in the 1970s by UNESCO on the need for media education. This had also prompted discussions by many scholars to consider the possibility of including media education within the international education system. Moreover, it had produced a Declaration of Media Education in 1982. The Declaration had rendered great service not only to professionals, but also to citizens for media education (Declaration of Media Education, 1982).

The question arises: Why is it necessary to include media literacy in university curricula?! If we make a free interpretation of the scope that Media Literacy would capture, inevitably there will be topics related to the acquisition of creative and critical skills. The definition of media literacy does not leave out the very important component that the media have as a source of information and entertainment, for which one must have knowledge and skills.

North Macedonia is not immune to these challenges, and the Law on Media Education, which would include university education, would be a means of preventing deviations produced by the use of media without criteria. Especially those commercial contents that want to impose non-existent media realities on us.

The case of South East European University

South East European University (SEEU) is a private, public, not for profit higher education institution, consisting of faculties, centers and institutes as its integral parts, specialized in socio-economic sciences. SEEU Faculties are organizational units within the University and operate through the Faculty Council and University policy framework approved by the University Board or Executive Committee. SEEU has five faculties: Faculty of Contemporary Sciences and Technologies, Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Contemporary Social Sciences, as well as a research Institute “Max van der Stoel”. The Mission of the University is defined in the Statute. It seeks excellence in teaching and research within the higher education system in the Republic of North Macedonia, by offering equal opportunities for all based on impartiality and merit.

One of the key elements of the mission of the University includes active cooperation with universities in the Republic of North Macedonia as well as with the international universities. The main aim under which the university is governed and managed is to contribute to higher education in the Albanian language, through a mutual interethnic understanding and aims to provide a multilingual and multicultural approach to teaching and research by developing study programs according to broad European and international standards. South East European University is ranked third in the national level among 19 universities of the Republic of North Macedonia. This ranking was carried out by the external evaluator, the Shanghai Jiao Tong University (South East European University, 2022). SEEU is the first university in North Macedonia to obtain the EU Commission’s “HR Excellence in Research (HRS4R)” badge (Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R), 2015).

Faculty of Languages, Cultures & Communications

The modern discipline of communications is well represented in the Faculty of Languages, Cultures & Communications, providing extensive course offerings for those interested in media studies, cultural relations, political and social analysis, journalism and public relations. The students are offered the study program of International Communications at the Department of Communications, which includes dynamic, interactive, and interdisciplinary studies. This study program generates professional results adapted to the needs of the global integrative market. Under the structural reform, which is foreseen to take place at the department, a new study program 'Media and the investigative journalism' is expected to be established, while an audio-visual lab has been already set up at the department for the purposes of the new study program.

Max van der Stoel Institute (MVDSI)

The overall research activity at the university is carried out by the Max van der Stoel Institute (MVDSI), which is a scientific institute within South East European University, focusing on interdisciplinary fields of social sciences and information and communication technologies. Established as a scientific-academic unit of the university on March 2012, Max van der Stoel Institute was named after the former OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Max van der Stoel (1924-2011) who used to be very active in the region with his diplomatic efforts on conflict prevention and as one of the main initiators for establishing the South East European University in North Macedonia. The Institute's key activity is research (development and implementation of the research projects). The institute includes the following research groups: Distributed Systems and Data Science Group (DSG), Social Sciences Group (SSG) and Environment and Health Group (EHG) (Max van der Stoel Institute, 2022).

Media Literacy & Disinformation Research Cluster (MeDisInfo)

In 2019, the Media Literacy & Disinformation Research Cluster (MeDisInfo) was created as part of the Social Sciences Research Group at the Max van der Stoel Institute. This cluster consists of SEEU experts in the field of media, communication, journalism, information technology, international relations and diplomacy, and security studies with the aim of addressing the issue of the impact of fake news and disinformation on the security of the Western Balkan. MeDisInfo is also an active member of the Media Literacy Network of North Macedonia, contributing to a stronger collaboration with other members in the country in activities like attending regional conferences and other type of collaboration.

Many research activities, including collaborative projects and activities for our students have taken place so far. For instance, as part of the activities of the UNESCO World Media Literacy Week, marked in North Macedonia as Media Literacy Days, held from 22-29 November 2021, our research cluster organized a debate with students on the topic: "Generation 5.0: Should we believe in everything we read on the internet?". For the same occasion MeDisInfo research team prepared a leaflet for students with glossary and instructions that will help them detect fake news and get acquainted with the basic concepts of media literacy and disinformation. The leaflet was distributed to the high school students in the Tetovo and other high schools throughout the western part of North Macedonia.

One of the major research projects is Fakespotting. It is an Erasmus+ project on digital and information literacy, implemented by a consortium led by Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna, Italy. The project will be implementing brand new tools for innovation in higher education and adult education, allowing the deployment of original digital and information literacy contents, assessments and toolkits tackling skills mismatches, to prepare students and low-skilled adults for jobs where shortages exist or are emerging. Digital Information literacy is directly related to the individual's employability, to get employed and to stay in employment or to move on in the workplace. PIAAC indicates that 20 to 25 % of European adults aged 16 to 65 with low levels of proficiency in digital information literacy face higher risk of unemployment and social exclusion. A cross-cutting need in the digital labor market is to close the digital gender gap. In the EU fewer than one in five ICT professionals are female. The criticalities heavily affect also the democratic participation of European citizens as digital literacy is totally related to the capacity to spot disinformation. Other project partners are: Loyola University of Andalusia and Incoma in Spain, Globsec and Matej Bel University in Slovakia, University of Tirana in Albania, Novi Sad School of Journalism in Serbia and Pagella Politica in Italy. The project will end in 2023 (Fakespotting, 2021). MeDisInfo is actively working in establishing the network with various local, regional and international actors working in this field as well as enhancing the existing ones.

Media Literacy and Disinformation Research Cluster will play a leading role given its expertise in the field, and thus will complement the proposed reform in the curricula of the SEEU faculties.

The methodology

The research strategy employed in this study is a mixed-method –approach which is based on both qualitative and quantitative methods. The theoretical part of the study consists of literature review, including various reports on the field of media freedom and media literacy nationwide. In addition, an overview of the political and media landscape in North Macedonia and the need of introducing media literacy in a higher education institution were examined. After reviewing the literature on the necessity of adding a Media Literacy course at the university level, the attitude and perception of students for including the Media Literacy course as an obligatory and elective course in each Faculty of South East European University (SEEU) were tested.

The quantitative method has been used for testing the research question raised, by developing a self – completion - questionnaire, administering a closed-ended online survey of undergraduate and master students in South East European University from all faculties. The survey was designed with twelve closed questions and one open question which served us to get more accurate feedback about the perception and attitudes of the students regarding the Media Literacy course at the university level.

The questionnaire comprised a total of 13 questions, which were organized within three thematic blocks: A) General information of the participants (gender, level of studies, year of studies, and faculty), B) frequency of the internet use and attitude for fake news in social media, C) Attitude for Media Literacy course in university curricula.

The survey was distributed internally through institutional group email in Albanian and Macedonian language, and the questions were of a structural nature: dichotomous Questions, multiple-choice questions, scaling questions: Likert scale questions, and open questions. Findings and results regarding the principle of transparency, participation, and efficiency were respected.

Findings/results

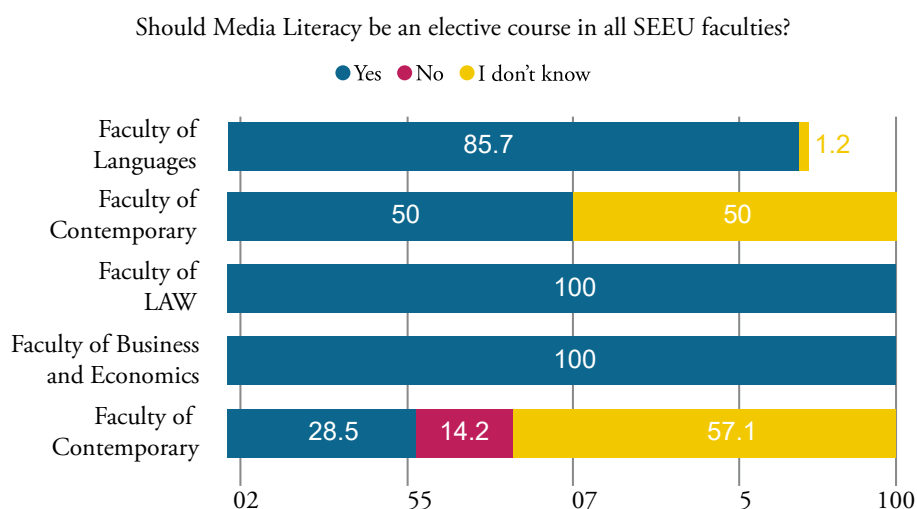
The age target was divided into two age groups 18-23 and 24-35, undergraduate and master students from all faculties of South East European University. The sample generated 68.2 percent, respondents, from the first group, and 31.8 percent of respondents from the second group, respectively the highest number of respondents are the first-year students of undergraduate studies (36.4 percent), followed by the first-year students of master studies with 22.7 percent. This questionnaire had more than a half, male respondents with 59.1 percent, rather than female respondents with 40.9 percent.

Regarding testing the attitude of all students of South East European University, we have employed a question for detecting their affiliation to a certain faculty, since we foresaw that not all the students might see Media Literacy as a necessary course in their faculty, depending on the field of study. We generated the highest responses with the same percent (31.8) from the Faculty of Languages, Cultures, and Communication and the Faculty of Contemporary Sciences and Technologies, followed by the Faculty of Business and Economics with 18.2 percent, and with the same percent (9.1) of respondents from the Faculty of Contemporary Social Sciences and the Faculty of Law.

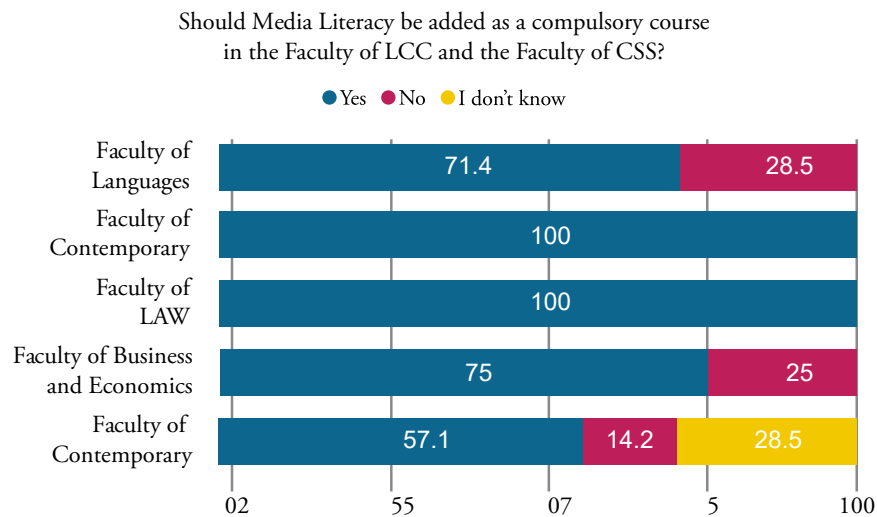
In order to determine the time spent online by students who think media education is necessary in university curricula, was employed a question for the frequency of their time spend online and an option of three answers was possible: Less than 2 hours a day, 2-7 hours per day and more than 7 hours a day. Most of the respondents (54.5 percent) spend 2.7 hours per day online.

The most used online media by the students is Instagram (81.8 percent), followed by Facebook (54.5 percent), Snapchat (40.9 percent), LinkedIn (36.4 percent), Tiktok (18.2 percent) and Twitter (9.1 percent). According to students' perception, more than 89 percent think there is a great deal of fake news circulating on the Internet.

Our research enquiry would get a confirmation through student's response of the question whether they think that a Media Literacy course should be added in university curricula as an elective course. Based on the general responses, most of the students - almost 70 percent think that media literacy course should be added as an elective course in each faculty, whereas 27 percent answered that they don't know, and 4.5 percent answered 'No' to this question. The following chart presents answers form each faculty in percent, where we can assume that almost all faculty students think that a Media literacy course should be added as an elective course in all the faculties.



Unlike the previous question, the following question seeks to understand whether students think that the Media literacy course should be obligatory for the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communications same as for the Faculty of Contemporary Social Sciences. The total of 63.6 percent think that this course should be obligatory, whereas if we analyze the answers in each faculty, results in more than a half of the students of each faculty think that this course should be obligatory in these two faculties (see the graph below for more details in percent).

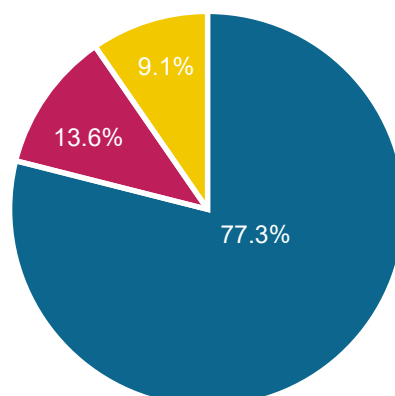


Additionally, students were asked if they would choose Media Literacy as an elective course at the faculty where they study, and 72.2 percent answered that they would choose the course as elective, 18.2 answered they 'don't know' and 9.1 percent answered they wouldn't choose the course as elective. If we analyze the answers from each faculty separately, we would see that three faculties would entirely choose the Media Literacy course as elective during their studies. High percentage of the students that would choose the Media Literacy course as elective are Faculty of Contemporary Social Sciences, Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication, Faculty of Business and Economics, and Faculty of Law. The lowest percentage - if we compare with other faculties, but significantly high of 42.8 percent - are the students from the Faculty of Contemporary Sciences and Technologies that would choose Media Literacy course as elective.

The purpose of the next question is to see the students' readiness to be trained in digital skills for critical approach to the internet. The results showed that most of the students, almost 78 percent, proved that they are willing to be trained for digital skills to critically approach the internet.

During your studies, would you like to have the opportunity to develop digital skills for critical access on the internet?

● Yes ● No ● I don't know



For the comprehensive analysis of this paper, students were asked to give their opinion on Media Literacy as a new subject in the university curriculum. The answers are very intriguing and enable additional analysis for their perception and willingness to consider Media Literacy not only as the most necessary subject in the curriculum, but also as their essential skill in everyday life. In addition, the following students' comments prove this finding:

'Everything we learn and will learn about the media is important'

'I think it would be a very practical subject for our society.'

'Thank you for the opportunity to answer the questions. Media education is more critical for the time in which we are living, because the media today have an unprecedented dynamic compared to previous years. Therefore, universities should be the first to orient and raise the awareness of students about such dynamics, which can often get out of control.'

Discussion

According to Bulger et al. (2018) modern efforts to build media literacy often involve five mainstays: "youth participation, teacher training and curricular resources, parental support, policy initiatives, and evidence base construction." All of the above are at the same time the pillars upon which the higher education stands. Thus, the universities' mission in contributing to societal resilience would be making sure that all of these preconditions are priorly met.

Based on our findings, most of the students of the South East European University are convinced that there are a lot of fake news and disinformation circulating on the Internet. Given their response to the usage of social media, and their time spent on the internet (2 – 7 hours a day – 54.5 percent of the respondents) we can straightforwardly draw a conclusion which speaks about their great awareness about the presence of fake news and disinformation online, and their willingness to expand knowledge and advance skills for detecting fake news and disinformation through the proposed Media Literacy course. This assertion is further supported by students' answers - 72.2 percent of the students answered that they would choose Media Literacy course as an elective during their studies. This high percentage of students' responses confirms our assumption that the cultural and educational space that prepares new generations in the spirit of technological transformations in the media makes it easier to prevent the negative impact of the media.

The new age challenges of information transformation in the last decade have developed the need for the youth to be trained, particularly on how to approach the internet critically, enrich them with necessary skills to adapt to the digital age and become resilient to the huge presence of disinformation in the online sphere. This is especially important for the transition countries such as North Macedonia, where the Media Literacy Index report calls on the emergency for functional education and especially for education in Media Literacy. Most of the students of the South East European University, almost 78 percent, showed that they are willing to be equipped with the digital skill education that would help them to critically access the internet.

The immediate need of intervention, namely, the need for Media Literacy has reached a level that is not seen as a necessity only by students and professionals in the field, but also by other individuals relevant in the field. Hence, most of the students - almost 70 percent - think that a media literacy course should be added as an elective course in each faculty, whereas analyzed in each faculty separately, we can assume that almost all faculty students think that a Media literacy course should be added as an elective course in all the faculties. Remarkably, the majority of students who think that a Media Literacy course should be added as an elective course in each faculty are the students who study at the Law Faculty and at the Faculty of Business and Economics.

The need for the inclusion of Media Literacy as a compulsory subject within university curricula is of a great importance, as it contributes also to the cultural formation of the contemporary academic citizen prepared for the unpredictable future world. The Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication and the Faculty of Contemporary Social Sciences within the South East European University should be first among faculties where Media Literacy courses should be introduced as an obligatory course. The total of 63.6 percent of the students in South East European University think that a Media Literacy course should be obligatory in these two faculties. These figures are encouraging, as they totally coincide with our claim that Media Literacy is of a particular importance for future graduates who will work as journalists, media professionals, political scientists, social workers, language teachers, but not excluding the private and the public sector.

A student with established knowledge of Media Literacy would be equipped with several skills that are directly related to the functioning and objectives of the media: technical (enables access to media), critical (understanding media content, training in their interpretation and critical evaluation), and practical (ability to understand media messages).

According to this basic experience, the student will be able to analyze the media from several aspects: harmful media content (violence, advertising, pornography), media influence and harmful content, regulation, and self-regulation (conventions, legal frameworks, and journalistic codes of ethics, and advertisers), then new technologies and their social role, industrialization of information, culture and entertainment, interactive communication, new media genres, such as blogs, etc.

Given the highly adaptable and transformative nature towards new trends, and the academic and research infrastructure of the university, the students of the South East European University, not accidentally accept and praise an initiative to add a new course for Media Literacy in the South East European University. One of the students of South East European University considers media education as very critical for the time in which we are living, because the media today have an unprecedented dynamic compared to previous years. Therefore, he/she says that 'universities should be the first to orient and raise the awareness of students about such dynamics'.

Conclusions

The sui generis nature and the unique experience of the South East European University in higher education in North Macedonia, as well as its reputation as a western model of higher education, makes it clearly suitable to be a leader in the institutionalization of media literacy education.

The findings from this research justify the need of including media literacy as an elective course at each faculty at the South East European University, while mandatory for the students studying at the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication and Faculty of Contemporary Social Sciences.

The Media Literacy and Disinformation Research Cluster, which functions at the Max van der Stoel Research Institute will complement the proposed reform in the curricula of these faculties.

The results from the theoretical research and those from empirical research through the online survey with undergraduate and master students further argue that media literacy education is an inevitable need in the digital era that educates university students to critically access the information online while contributing to creating a resilient society as an ultimate goal.

Limitations and future research

Future research may also include a qualitative research approach for wide-ranging results, in order to identify clearly the perception and attitudes for a Media Literacy course in support of the survey. Also, a wider group of SEEU professors and Ph.D. students would have made the validation of the research question more reliable. Repetition of the distribution of the survey in different periods and distribution of the survey for a longer time would generate more responses from students. For a better understanding of the role of Media Literacy in creating resilient citizens, future research that involves other focus groups such as high school students will be of major interest for the authors.

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Biljana Temelkova, Julijana Zlatevska,

Saska Delova

Implementing media literacy in the classroom

Abstract

Social networks use a variety of models from the spectrum of web technologies. These tools were designed for entertainment and communication purposes, and the most commonly used among students are the social media tools. Knowing this, teachers have incorporated traditional teaching strategies as part of increasing the ability of students to grasp the objectives. Considering that most students find social media tools interesting, most researchers have supported this strategy as one of the most innovative methods of improving the learning outcomes. Students today can learn almost everything on their own or with their teachers using the Internet, talk to people from all over the world, share experiences with their peers, get acquainted with the world and other people, customs and cultures through their own personal experience. Researching a particular topic to find information, literature by authors from around the world and literary criticism, there are things that can open their view of the world, as well as enable them to think critically and creatively. These are some of the most significant benefits of a global network. This study wants to indicate the level of awareness in teachers and students about the proper use of social media and media literacy as well as to address the necessity to overcome the lack of media literacy knowledge within youth as well as the wider population. It also focuses on pointing out the dangers that social media causes with illiterate youth. Students who daily take in a huge amount of information from a wide array of sources, are going to become better critical thinkers and smart consumers that recognize the point of view and recognize the author's goal. Hopefully in future, teachers will pay more attention to what extent and in what manner their students use social media and pay particular attention to teach them how to be more alert when using social media.

Keywords:

Education, media literacy, awareness

Media literacy – a must-have skill in the 21 century

Advances in information technology have transformed the way that users seek and use information. The exponential growth of the World Wide Web (Web) and its ubiquitous adoption as a vital information retrieval tool “is exerting power over the evolution and development of information-seeking behavior” (Nahl, 1998b: 157). Children are more persistent and motivated in seeking information over the Web than in using traditional and online sources (Bilal, 1998).

But the question is: Are children cognitively and effectively prepared to traverse Web space? Children’s cognitive abilities (Siegler, 1991), developmental levels (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969), and information needs (Walter, 1994) may impact their information-seeking behavior in IR systems. Use of the Web in schools and the increased access to the Web by children at home raise many issues concerning information-seeking and use, the roles of school librarians and teachers in educating and training, and how well designers of Web engines provide user-centered interfaces that facilitate children’s information-seeking.

In 2001, Mark Prensky coined the term “digital natives”, describing the new generations who grew up with computers and the Internet from an early age, distinguishing them from the older generations, or “digital immigrants” (digital immigrants). (Prensky, 2001). This expression marks the beginning of a long debate over Prensky’s claims that generations born in the digital age think and process information differently from the “digital immigrants” and that fundamental changes in the education system are needed to meet the needs of the new generations (Bennet et al., 2008). However, something very important is often missed in this debate - the fact that a person born in the digital age does not automatically make them digitally literate. Digital literacy separates those who “can use technology in a creative, responsible and sophisticated way” (Mavridi & Xerri, 2020) from those who cannot.

Whether today’s children think differently or not, the fact is that they have been active Internet users since the age of eight (Common Sense Media, 2013). The activities they do online are as diverse and almost as common as their offline activities, including socializing, learning and playing. These digital experiences can also be harmful to children (e.g., early exposure to sex, sexual harassment, online bullying, discriminatory behavior, etc.), but can also be useful (e.g., personal development, cooperation, digital citizenship, etc.). Although today’s children are born in the digital age, many of them do not have the necessary skills to avoid risks and take advantage of the Internet (Livingstone, 2011). In that respect, only 2% of the children in the UK have the critical literacy skills to tell if a news story is real or fake. (Clark & Teravainen, 2017).

It is therefore crucial that government, business, schools and parents empower children born in the digital age so that they not only speak the “digital language” but also use it competently and critically.

“Modern, new and digital” means, prevailing on the Internet, are positioned on a fundamentally new type of temporal and spatial immanence - instantaneity, mobility, interactivity and multimedia focus. They complement the picture of multidimensionality and require a new type of literacy. There is an almost total mediation and dependence of many social processes and society as a whole on the new digital tools. This mediation is especially valid for today’s knowledge society, in which the emergence of new mass media is a common phenomenon with complicating and, at the same time, facilitating effects. The processes of formation of new social communities and entities with virtual and extremely mobile character, the parallelization of the virtual and physical environment

and their unification into a common reality, reveal a different type of complication of society and its functioning. This new type of complication is accompanied by the digitalization of many of these processes and, at the same time, the facilitation of the compression of time and space, of accesses of different kinds, new forms of group and community solidarity.

The digital system as a set of old and new online media includes the whole range of media varieties - blogs, websites, etc. social media, including platforms, social networks, chats, forums. Based on the complexity of the issues discussed, the development of media literacy as an understanding, mastery and teaching - at different stages and ages - is a difficult process. Therefore, this paper includes the basic definitions that build the essence of (digital) media competence, and - traced along the path of their natural evolution. This program takes into account the requirements of the European Union in the field of digital education and citizenship, as key factors for upward individual development, and at the same time a guarantee for effective growth of the member states.

In addition to information and communication technologies, media literacy also focuses on the development of critical thinking and participation in public life through the media. To use the media appropriately, people need not just different technical skills (how to handle a variety of media platforms), but rather the ability to evaluate and analyze multiple sources of information simultaneously.

As media literacy is realized more and more through digital technologies, the term *digital media literacy* is also being used. In this sense, we consider digitally literate those who, in addition to being technologically literate, can engage and participate in every level of public life through their skills, from the use of social networks to the use of e-government.

Methods

The study is descriptive in nature and it attempts to indicate the level of awareness among teachers and students about the proper use of social media and media literacy. At the same time, it addresses the necessity to overcome the lack of media literacy within youth as well as the wider population. It also focuses on pointing out the perils that social media causes with the illiterate youth. The authors of this study believe that students who take in a huge amount of information daily from a wide array of sources and convenient amount of media literacy, are likely to become better critical thinkers, smart consumers that recognize the point of view and recognize the author's goal.

A pre-survey and an after-survey were conducted. The pre-survey occurred at the end of February and the beginning of March 2021. It addressed 120 teachers from primary schools in the Republic of North Macedonia working with children from 10 to 15 years of age. It started with the question if they found media literacy a familiar concept. 73.5% of the interviewees stated that they were partially familiar with it, 22% claimed that they were clearly acquainted with the concept and only 3.5% admitted they knew nothing regarding media literacy. The second category had the opportunity to explain what exactly they knew via an open-ended question. Only 13% gave reasonable explanations unlike the rest 87% who claimed media literacy "refers to the personal literacy of the speakers on TV/radio".

These devastating results encouraged the creation of a brochure (a Manual for Media Literacy) and four educational videos, by the second half of March 2021, in order to help teachers implement media literacy in their classroom.

This study presents a combination of qualitative and quantitative study. The focus of qualitative research is to describe real life. The results of qualitative research give explanations for some phenomenon in a specific place and during a specific time. The study is based on primary data collected from two questionnaires as instruments for data collection from teachers, because they allow the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, offer anonymity, and allow respondents to answer the given questions at their own selected time.

The research procedures involved the identification of research problems, which comprises asking questions (i.e., the research questions) to be in line with the objectives of the study. The literature review assists the researcher to clarify the research problems, improve the methodology employed and contextualize the findings. Research designate strategy employed by the researcher in carrying out the study in a systematic manner as well as aiding in the proper planning of the instrument for data gathering. Analysing the data involves several procedures that are linked. The data is processed in parallel with the inspection of data, and finally, the findings and discussion are going to be produced.

The type of questions used are a combination of close- ended questions where the participants are asked to tick the appropriate answers, and open-ended questions where they are given the chance to provide their own answers or justifications. When it comes to the research methods in this paper, in addition to the theoretical analysis method, the analytical-descriptive method is used in processing the results obtained through the questionnaires.

Findings / identifying the needs - students and teachers (surveys and results - empirical)

Digitalization is transforming all aspects of society, everywhere around the world, not just work environments. In terms of educational contexts, this transformation is facing real challenges, regarding different aspects, such as: equipment, students' ability to be actively involved, teachers' skills and competencies, and of course teachers' and parents' will to positively accept and correspond to all the upcoming changes. "Different kinds of experiences lead to different brain structures," says Dr. Bruce D. Perry of Baylor College of Medicine. He believed that "it is very likely that our students' brains have physically changed – and are different from ours – as a result of how they grew up. But whether or not this is literally true, we can say with certainty that their thinking patterns have changed." When Prensky (2001) stated that "today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach", he was mainly addressing the education system in the United States.

However, the education system in the Republic of North Macedonia is not an exception, even more, during the last two decades it has been constantly exposed to different changes and modifications, either influenced by the examples of the Western countries, or, more or less, as an inevitable step in the global process of digitalization. Integration of technology into teaching and learning is not new, but the rapid rate and pace of technological advancement is a novelty, especially to the teachers, who mostly belong to the group of "digital immigrants" regarding the use of ICT and digital technologies, from computers to other more advanced forms of digital technologies. The transformative potential of digitalization in education is exciting and offers many opportunities and challenges. (Prensky, 2001).

Nevertheless, do all the actively involved participants in the education process, including the students, the parents and the teachers, as main "actors", share the same opinion on this topic?

The after-survey that was distributed in June 2021 among 130 teachers in the primary schools in North Macedonia showed a meagre improvement in implementing media literacy in the classroom. The first question gave the teachers the opportunity to state whether they were familiar with the basic principles of media literacy. 22.9% answered it affirmatively, 65.7% said that they were partially familiar with them and 11.4% showed no knowledge of the media literacy concepts. The second question inquired if it was important for each student individually to get acquainted with the principles of media literacy, especially now since they are all using social media. 88.6% of the teachers claimed it was of vital importance for students to be familiar with the media literacy basic concepts. 11.4% partially agreed and there were no negative answers.

The final question of the questionnaire was crucial to check if Macedonia teachers implement the notion of media literacy in the classroom. Thus, they were given a multiple-choice question: To which extend, a Media Literacy Manual would be useful in your classes? The answers offered were given as stated here: never (0%), I would use it once during the school year (5.7%), I would use it from time to time during the CCLs (Class Community Lessons) (34.3%) and I would use it several times a year during my classes, regardless of the school subject. Additionally, 95% claimed that their students were not aware of the importance of critical thinking regarding the use of social media.

Therefore, the authors of this study in collaboration with NGO “Callidus”, Republic of North Macedonia, prepared a brochure for teachers, that was supposed to serve the purpose of a Media Literacy Manual. It consists of several useful parts.

The first part of the brochure for teachers entitled BE MEDIA SMART, provides the definition for MEDIA LITERACY as a sum of qualifications that enable mutual connection and interaction among people through communication and sharing information. These competencies facilitate proper communication, collaboration and active participation, giving and receiving within the social surrounding of communication and content sharing. It further explains that a media literate person creates their personality, worldview and way of social behavior, among other things, through tools for cooperation and information management, found on the Internet. Thus, you find information on your mobile phones and computer screens, in newspapers and magazines, visual messages can be seen on the billboards and heard on the radio. Those are mediated posts, and we are overwhelmed with them every day.

With so many standpoints, it is very difficult to separate fact from fiction. In order to be able to continue the survey of the media everywhere around us, the brochure has elaborated five basic concepts.

Concept 1:

All media messages are constructed. The texts in the media are “built” in the same way buildings and highways are built. The key standing behind this concept is to find out who has constructed the message, what kind of materials they’ve used and what the purpose of its “construction” was.

Concept 2:

Media messages are created by using creative language with its own rules. Each form of communication has its own language: scary music intensifies fear, up close cameras suggest intimacy, big titles signal meaning and significance. Understanding grammar, syntax and metaphor of media language helps us become less susceptible to media manipulation.

Concept 3:

Media has embedded values and standpoints. Since they are created, media messages carry subtext: who they are created for and what is important - at least to the person or people creating the message. The decision about age, sex or person's race, the choice of the ambient and the actions in the plot are just some of the ways for "embedding" the values in a TV show, movie or advertisement.

Concept 4:

Most of the media messages are created and organized for gaining profit and/or power. Great part of the world's media was developed as enterprises that earn money. Newspapers and magazines put their advertising pages first; the rest of the media space is dedicated to news. In a similar way, advertisements are an inevitable part of a TV program. Internet has now become an international platform through which groups or individuals try to convince other people.

Concept 5:

Different people react differently to the same media message. This concept is to show that audience plays a big role in the interpretation of media messages since each member of the audience has a unique life experience. The differences in age, sex, education and cultural education will generate unique interpretations.

Taking into consideration the basic concepts behind every media message, you are "equipping" yourself with the possibility to analyse and interpret the messages, that is to say, one either accepts or rejects its legitimacy.

This brochure further elaborates the ways how media literacy helps children:
In a few words it teaches them to:

- learn to think critically
- become smarter consumers of products and information
- recognize a standpoint
- create content responsibly
- identify the role of the media in our culture
- understand the purpose of the author

It also helps teachers understand that when they teach kids or students something more about media literacy, it is a two-way street, since there will be things that we are also going to learn from the younger generation.

Media literacy teaches us to be able to ask the proper questions and to support our viewpoints with examples. Following the key points for media literacy enables us to learn what and when has been published, why it has been published and most importantly, what is our opinion on that article, video etc.

Also, this brochure will explain that it is better if we incorporate the media literacy lessons into the existing curriculum with examples from the everyday activities, rather than having them in separate classes.

You can further divide the topics and lessons regarding the students' age and involving their interests and power of perception.

There are some crucial questions that need to be asked when teaching students about media literacy:

- Who created this? Is it a company or one person? If it is a person, is he/she a comedian, artist, anonymous source and why do they think like that?
- Why have they created/ published it? What is its purpose? What is it trying to convince them to do?
- Who is the message for? Is it for children, adults, girls, boys, people who have special interests etc.? And why do they think so?
- Which details have been omitted and why? Do they need more information in order to create a complete picture? And why do they think so?
- What feelings does the message evoke in them and whether all the other people are going to feel the same or some would have different standpoints? And why do they think so?

The brochure also suggests an interesting way to introduce media literacy to children through games and quizzes and here you can take a look at some of our interesting suggestions:

1. Become an Information Researcher

Our perceptions of the world are influenced by the music, television, and other media we consume. Children must develop media literacy abilities in order to enlighten consumers. These abilities include study and critical thinking. It suggests that libraries are excellent places to look for trustworthy information. Also, learning how to use the information they have gathered is a very useful skill.

2. Internland - River of Reality

Google's Be Internet Awesome Initiative, which strives to educate youngsters the "basics of digital citizenship," created this game. The top graph directs viewers to a river that is guarded by Fisher. Users are directed to <http://www.vecteezy.com/members/treetypanada20> and should answer questions regarding phishing efforts to cross the river and complete the game.

3. NewsFeed's defenders

In today's chaotic climate, this new media literacy game teaches players how to detect and uncover disinformation.

- Identify signs for verification, transparency, accountability, and independence in the news by playing this game.
- Define and recognize problematic news and other sorts of news-related disinformation.
- Describe various methods for verifying photos and data.
- Check for bias in text using word choice and framing strategies.
- Use information from outside parties to assess the source's credibility.
- Assess the advantages and drawbacks of digital news and social media in the context of a democratic society.

4. e-Reporter

This game was created by the BBC in 2018 to assist children aged 11 to 18 in identifying false material on the internet. The “Choose Your Own Adventure” game puts players in the shoes of a BBC reporter, who must choose which social media posts, political statements and images to believe. There are also some pointers on how to recognize a fraudulent internet post.

5. Fakey

It is similar to the last one, but it is a lot of fun to play. Fakey is a game similar to e-Reporter that was developed by Indiana University’s master. Simulate news on social media, with users debating whether to share, like, or fact-check posts. Users can earn points for sharing content from reputable news and news sources, as well as by checking dubious ones.

The brochure is an overall useful guide across the online labyrinth. Over 60% of the teachers claimed they would use the brochure during their CCL and 35% would include it in other subjects, as well.

Luckily with the recent changes of the English Language Curriculum (2021, 8th grade) in North Macedonia, media literacy has become one of the crucial topics together with critical thinking and IT in teaching foreign languages.

In addition to the informative brochure also in collaboration with “Callidus” four educational videos were prepared, each of them in favour of media literacy eligible for students from both primary and secondary school. In order to make young people more curious and sceptical about what they see and hear, recognizing tactics and approaches used by media makers, we decided to create videos teaching them how to do so. A short scenario and manuscript was created for all four videos by the authors with a slightly comic note.

Our first video was about the role of information i.e., recognizing Fake News. It’s a short comic video starred by children age 10-16. This video addresses the necessity to overcome the lack of media literacy knowledge within youth as well as the wider population. It also focuses on pointing out of the dangers that social media causes with illiterate youth.

The second video - The role of information - recognizing Deep News - short comic video played by children age 10-16 about checking objective reliability of information by pointing the difference between digital natives and digital immigrants.

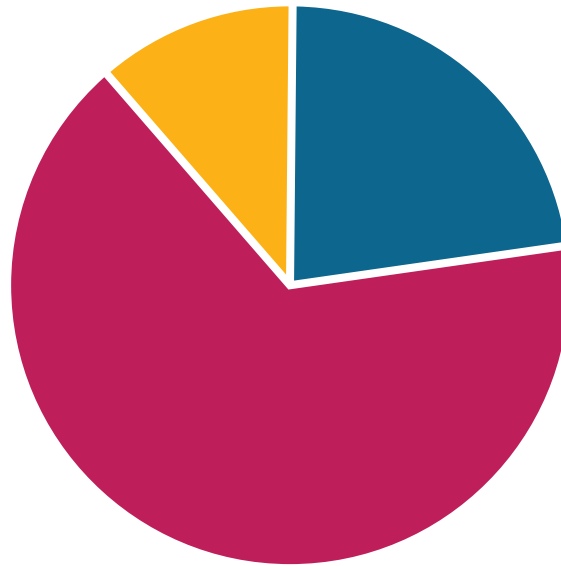
Third video- How to use CRAP test - short comic video played by children age 10-16 pointing out to the dangers of fake news and reliable sources, influencers and alike.

And the final video was created to address the cruel word of internet and what a simple post can do to people especially children.

Currently, all the videos, as well as the brochure, are available online.

After all this effort, the authors, via the after-survey, re-tested teachers to find out whether there was change in the education after providing materials for implementation of media literacy in the classroom especially in the EFL classroom. The first question from the survey “Have you had the opportunity to get acquainted with the principles of Media Literacy on social networks?” (see Chart 1) revealed that 65.7% of the respondent have heard about them, but they are only familiar with them. The percentage of the respondents who haven’t read the principles of Media Literacy on social networks was 11.4%, and almost 30% of the respondents (the teachers) have familiarized themselves completely with the principles of Media Literacy on social networks. This is a great step forward on raising awareness in teachers about the importance of this topic.

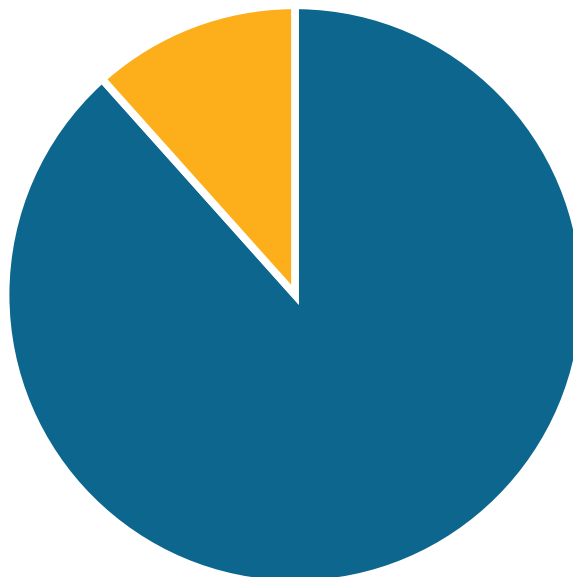
Chart 1



● Yes ● Partially ● No

In this testing we wanted to be sure that teachers are aware that it is not important only for them to be aware about the principles of Media literacy on social media but also to be aware of the importance of the students' awareness. In that order we decided to ask: Do you think that every student or general participant in social networks should know the principles of Media Literacy on social networks? (see Chart 2)

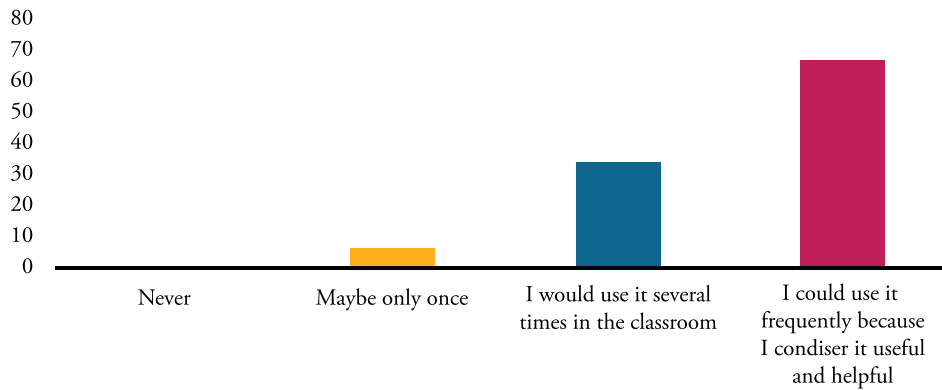
Chart 2



● Yes ● No ● Partially yes

This question showed that the awareness has been lifted to another level and gives us hope that teachers eventually will implement Media Literacy content within their lessons.

Chart 3



Another important question worth mentioning is If you have read the Media Literacy on Social Media Handbook, to what extent do you think it will be a useful guide to one of your classes? (see Chart 3) There were no negative responses considering this question i.e., 0% stated that they can't find a way to use it within their lessons. And the very surprising fact was that 67% of the respondents are eager to try and use the Media Literacy topic frequently during their lessons.

The final survey showed that almost 66.7% of the English language teachers revealed that they started feeling more confident in teaching media literacy and that it is more convenient and easier to implement it when having suitable and ready-made materials to use. Most of these materials were presented to the teachers during the online workshops organised by ELTAM MK, TOEFEL as well as Express Publishing Webinars from March to November 2021.

Discussion

Social media is an indispensable part of the lives of 21st century people, where they spend time mostly focused on entertainment and leisure with the goal of communicating with other people. Gathering the target group of people and the speed of communication provided by social media is conducive to the idea of using social media in education. Therefore, students must be aware of media literacy in order to be completely safe when using social media and teachers should make an effort to present all its aspects, especially the element of critical thinking as the most important part of the chain. Our students must start to think critically and be media literate.

After finalizing the conducted research and synthesizing its results by autumn 2021, it is evident that many students enjoy the use of social media in education. They state that the contents are so colourful and more vividly presented and that there is more interaction between students and teachers. This interaction can be accompanied by various tools such as quizzes, so students can learn from home. There are opinions that this is a good way to promote particular professors who can gain followers on social media due to the educational content they share not only with the group they teach within an educational institution, but also with a wider audience.

Media literacy provides processing skills and its teaching is different from teaching only factual knowledge. Media literacy provides a learning process - the research process - that can be applied to any content or thematic area. The five key concepts are the starting point, but require multiple applications to different media and content in different activities to master the process.

On the other hand, for many, social media is primarily a place of entertainment, so they find it difficult to accept the idea of their implementation in education. This is one of the most frequently mentioned reasons why social media are the divide or distraction rather than educational sources. Distraction could definitely hamper the students' learning skills. One of the other drawbacks mentioned at a global level is the availability of the Internet connection in certain parts of the world and the dependence of participants on this way of learning, so certain technical problems can significantly disrupt the course of teaching.

The modern educational system gives many perspectives for interaction between the classroom and the extracurricular activities. The pedagogical technology of training in a media club presented in the article, combining digital-media literacy and literary competence, is based on this possibility. The proposed technology is a response to the challenge for the modern literature teacher to successfully combine literary skills with digital media in the learning process. The model of work of the students in the media club provides an opportunity for the educational content of literature to be considered in a modern context and the technologies to be used fully, effectively and qualitatively.

Conclusions

The emergence of new media and social networks and their mass use, created a qualitatively new situation in human communication, thus in communication with adolescents, in particular. Society began to accept the world, guided by the models that are the product of the transformed world of the media. This situation has brought to the fore and strengthened the importance of media ecology, media education and media literacy, as the media space and the media involved have changed. Their nature, role and function have changed significantly. The need for media literacy has grown with the transformation of the media into a key factor for a better understanding of the processes in society and full participation in democratic and cultural changes in it. Children inhabit a world in which every aspect of their lives is mediated through technology: from health to education, from socializing to entertainment. Nevertheless, the recognition that children have different needs to those of adults has not yet been fully accepted in the online world.

There is well documented public concern about risks to children from the internet such as easy access to inappropriate content, loss of privacy, commercial exploitation and cyberbullying. The authors' inquiry sought to understand what issues and opportunities children face as they grow up surrounded by, and interacting with, internet technologies.

Becoming a critical user of media is a premise for citizenship in contemporary times. The use of critical thinking skills in mediatized scenarios demands developing the ability to interact with media, not only in being able to use devices, but also for understanding their socio-cultural effects. Our recent pandemic and political circumstances have raised our levels of awareness about fake news and biased media opinions. (Mateus, 2021)

By including media literacy in its English language curriculum (Ministry of Education of North Macedonia) is transparently supporting part of the European Charter for Media Literacy.

Curriculum development has long been a special art in the world of education. Engaging students, providing solid factual and subject information, and using effective teaching strategies that are at the same time aligned with state educational standards and assessments should be combined in lessons that inspire, complement and support learning. Not an easy task!

But today, technology is influencing curriculum development as well as other aspects of classroom practice, in some ways facilitating curriculum development - such as faster access to compelling information, photos or videos over the Internet - and at the same time, it is even more complicated, as the emphasis on the way time is spent in class inevitably changes due to the use of technological means by students and teachers. After all, time is the most valuable asset a teacher has with students, and allocating that time efficiently and effectively is more important than ever.

Since the emphasis is usually on content or subject knowledge, at the expense of information process teaching skills in classrooms, there is no solid and consistent basis for learning skills such as media literacy. However, advances in technology continue to impose new needs and requirements for teaching and learning, and the basics of how to teach media literacy and achieve the goal of educating students who are graduating to be media literate are still waiting for someone to deal with them.

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Martina Gligorova

Media literacy: Need or necessity in the 21 century?

Abstract

The media play a key role in connecting people with other members of the community and society. They enable them to share common experiences and, through the process of mutual communication, to create a sense of belonging to common society. The advent of the Internet in the 1990s and its dynamic development in the first two decades of the XXI century drastically changed the structure of the media system. At the same time, the media in this post-modern world are the primary source of information for citizens about domestic and world developments. Consequently, as much as they are sources of information, on the other hand, they are a suitable ground for the development of “side-effect” phenomena in the media world, namely the spread of fake news, propaganda, and misinformation. Hence, the research question arises from the emerging need to prevent the rapid spread of these phenomena in order to raise the level of awareness of citizens. The main purpose of this paper is to emphasize the need for media education and the development of the skill set of the 21st century in the Republic of North Macedonia, including critical reading and understanding as one of the ways to detect new phenomena. European regulations and recommendations as well as the trend of UNESCO policy development have imposed the need to popularize this issue, which is undoubtedly complemented by the realization of citizens’ rights. The Republic of North Macedonia needs to revise the relevant legislation and perhaps provide a different perspective on media treatment, and formally include media and information literacy as an integral part of education programs from an early age.

Keywords:

Media and information literacy, (online) media, European regulations, media education

Introduction

The media and their purposeful performance of functions is important in the process of building a healthy democratic state with a strong pluralistic media system and educational system. The media as the main source of information for citizens and the public as a whole have a great responsibility for propounding the type of content, its importance, and its potential impact on society. As part of that responsibility, but also the role, is to connect people with other members of the community and society. They enable them to share common experiences and, through the process of mutual communication, create a sense of belonging to a common society.

The advent of the Internet in the 1990s and its dynamic development in the first two decades of the XXI century drastically changed the structure of the media system. Communication has gradually spread to the Internet, as an additional or complementary part of public communication. With the increase of various communication devices for internet access and with the reduction of the costs for internet connection, it started to occupy a central place in daily communication, and thus in the political communication of the citizens. As a result of the increasing use of online media and the development of communication platforms, phenomena or side effects such as fake news, propaganda, and misinformation have increased.

Therefore, the answer to the question is very important: How does the public recognize this news, and how does it deal with it? What tools are there to eradicate these phenomena and how states can help address them? The answer is simple - media literacy. According to the dominant theory, there is no unified definition of media literacy, but as a starting point, we will use the definition of the European Commission, which undoubtedly in accordance with the activities and priority of action plans, gives a central place in media policy. Hence, media literacy is "... the ability to access the media, to understand and critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media content, and to communicate in a variety of contexts"¹.

In addition, media literacy refers to all types of media, including television and film, radio and recorded music, print media, the Internet and other new digital communication technologies. It is important to emphasize that, although online media in many countries occupy a central place for informing the citizens, still in the Republic of North Macedonia according to the analysis of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services most citizens use traditional media (television and radio) as sources of information².

However, regardless of the different sources, the media in general are fertile ground for deviant media phenomena and the "cry" for urgent actualization of media literacy and education.

The European Union and the United Nations i.e., UNESCO, have long dealt with the issue of media education and the integration of media literacy into the curriculum. Germany first encountered theoretical publications on media literacy in the 1970s and 1980s, with a growing interest in media education in and out of the education system in the 1980s and 1990s. In this European country, the content of media literacy education is an important part of the curriculum and standards for different academic subjects and areas of learning³.

1 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, a European approach to media literacy in the digital environment, COM(2007) 833 final, Commission of the European Communities, Brussels, 20.12.2007.

2 Data on radiostations reach, and the audience share of satellite, regional and local TV. Available at: <https://avmu.mk/>.

3 Tulodziecki G. & Grafe S. (2012). Journal of Media Literacy Education pp. 44 – 60.

Critical perception of the news is necessary to build strong and substantiated views and opinions. Media literacy is a basic level of acquisition of general skills in order to recognize visual symbols, computer work and other media resources. The Republic of North Macedonia has not joined the trend of European democracies in the process of integrating media literacy in educational programs. First, it is necessary to harmonize the relevant European directives with the domestic laws and to actualize the problem. Contrary to the ideas and activities undertaken within the European Union, to which the Republic of North Macedonia aspires and which in the function of that strategic goal has the obligation to adopt the European legislation in the Macedonian legislation, until 2014, the relevant political documents and legal acts neither in the field of media, nor in education or culture, do not seriously deal with media literacy.

Only a few strategic documents (national programs, strategies for development of the specific activity) indicate the need and necessity of promotion and development of media literacy as a missing tool for active citizenship. In fact, the first modest steps taken in the field of media were made through the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Services in December 2013. Today, the Republic of North Macedonia is in the initial phase in terms of full and consistent regulation of media literacy, despite all of the recommendations and resolutions that come primarily from the European Union and the Council of Europe⁴. Therefore, the absence of a media literacy nation and the increasing number of propaganda and fake news means an urgent need to introduce media literacy in education and to actualize the problem.

The main purpose of this research is to emphasize the need for media education and development of the skill set of the 21st century in Republic of North Macedonia, including the critical reading and understanding as one of the ways to detect new phenomena. Furthermore, the research should determine the relationship between the development of societies, digitalization and the emergence of new channels of information through which public communication takes place and the level of awareness and development of critical ability to evaluate content in democratic societies. By examining the theoretical and empirical studies, the paper should answer whether North Macedonia in particular has mechanisms for raising public awareness of media literacy as a tool for dealing with fake news and in general the side effects of the media system. How this is being regulated by the existing legal framework and are the strategic determinations and activities aimed at introducing media literacy in educational programs?

Of particular importance is online media, which substantially democratize public and political communication, and largely define the discourse of debate and the formation of public opinion.

Additionally, the purpose of this research is a theoretical and empirical examination of the process of formation and promotion of media literacy within the European Union, that North Macedonia aspires to access, and the specialized agency within the United Nations - UNESCO through diachronic perspective. For this, the research includes the most influential theories and studies in this field, related to communication studies, including the German sociologist Jürgen Habermas.

4 North Macedonia has been a member since the mid-nineties of the last century.

Online media

According to all relevant research and analysis, television is still the most important medium for informing the citizens, while online media are in second place according to their use for information, at least in the Republic of North Macedonia⁵. If we carefully analyze the data, we can see the discrepancy in the habits of informing the citizens according to age i.e., the tendencies of the older citizens to be informed through television, while the younger population groups are almost predominantly informed through the Internet and the new generations of Internet communication devices. The development dynamics of this process clearly indicate that in the foreseeable future the influence of online media will further increase, and the influence of television will stagnate or decline. The German theorist and sociologist Jürgen Habermas states that the media should be a public sphere, defining the public sphere as “a space where people can come together to discuss political issues openly and formulate certain political strategies” (Habermas, 2006). However, Habermas continues, by the end of the 19th century, the media had ceased to be a public sphere. Politicians have become too skilled at instrumentalizing the media in order to convey only their opinion and their interests.

The ownership of the media gradually began to be concentrated in the hands of smaller groups that saw the media only as a business i.e., as a platform for advertising and material gain. The press has lost its role in leading the quality and encouraging political debate, while readers from active citizens are transformed into potential consumers of the products and services advertised by the media. The development of the Internet has profoundly changed the functioning of the media and deepened the need to introduce mechanisms for dealing with media side effects and the need of developing a new set of skills.

The media play an important role in the political life of democratic societies and they should enable the public to be informed about important topics, as well as to provide a forum where different views and opinions can be expressed. However, there are many doubts about how well the media manage to meet these standards and expectations, and often the media are at the center of heated debates about their real responsibilities to the public. It is important to note that there is a conflict of interest and values between freedom of speech and corporate earnings principles. However, in reality, large companies dominate the media market and control the content that is circulating through the media. Manuel Castells perceives the media as a space for communicating ideas and activities that arise from society itself and are addressed to decision makers in the institutions of that society. Global civil society is an organized reflection of the values and interests of society.

According to S. Livingstone (Livingstone 2005: 12-13) The Internet and online media have four key features:

- a. New media shape society, and then, in turn, society influences them, creating the so-called “Hybridization of existing technologies and social processes”.
- b. New media and online platforms have a network structure, i.e. they represent a broad, multiplied connection in which many points (individuals, groups, databases, technological devices, etc.) are intertwined. In them, the communication structure has changed from “one to all” to “all to all”.

5 Data available at: <https://avmu.mk/>.

- c. Ubiquity - New media do not use everyone, but they still affect everyone. The incorporation of the Internet and modern technologies into the economy, banking, education, politics, and many others, directly or indirectly affects all levels of society.
- d. Interactivity i.e., new media enable search and selection of information, which is not possible with traditional media. Interactivity is a key feature that enables personalization as a factor in many other processes, including changes in how the public sphere works.

Promotion of media literacy and education in international organizations

Public institutions have a great role in the process of legitimizing media education, from the moment when their budget provides funds for the promotion of media in education, and international organizations, universal, in the UN-UNESCO system and regional, in the European context - the Council of Europe, each within its own mission - peace in the world by bringing nations together pioneering steps in this area i.e., bringing education programs, through numerous projects for respect for human rights, among others, and for literacy.

The functioning of each ministry, as a body that functions internally, at a national level, within each country separately is completely different from the work of international government organizations due to the position of power, pedagogical logic, more effective logic, but less innovative, generally through completely different rules of the game. All this in a function of necessary, demanded, expected innovations in many fields.

Most different programs (comparatively) recommend starting media education at the age of five. The child as a baby forms the image of the world/environment under the influence of many visual, sound, and tactile experiences. But starting at the age of five, school becomes a place of socialization. Audiovisual discovery and learning techniques seem to be extremely age-appropriate, which is interpreted as a “period of concrete operative action”, and the use of these techniques in children creates the ability to relate different types of views. In this direction, international organizations tend to encourage the introduction of the concept of media education integrated into the countries’ curricula in order to produce young people with an ability to critically observe and use the media information.

United Nations Media Literacy and Media Education Policy

UNESCO⁶, an acronym for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN), enshrined in the constitution signed on November 16, 1945. The constitution, which came into force in 1946, called for the promotion of international co-operation in education, science and culture. In addition to supporting educational and scientific programs, UNESCO is also involved in efforts to protect the common cultural heritage of the natural environment and humanity. For example, in 1972, an international agreement was sponsored to establish a List of World Heritage Sites and Natural Heritage Sites that would enjoy government protection.

6 The agency is headquartered in Paris, France.

UNESCO's initial focus was on rebuilding schools, libraries and museums that were destroyed in Europe during World War II. Since then, its activities have been largely facilitative, in order to assist, support and complement Member States' national efforts to eliminate illiteracy and to continue free education. UNESCO also seeks to encourage the free exchange of ideas and knowledge by organizing conferences and providing clearing and exchange services. As much less developed states joined the UN in the 1950s, UNESCO began devoting more resources to their problems, which included poverty, high illiteracy rates and underdevelopment.

The concept of media education became relevant in the 1960s at the international level in scientific circles, primarily the teams formed within UNESCO that were engaged in research on the problem of education.

This is the period when the power of television comes to the fore, which dramatically changes the social environment. In addition, education plays the primary role in the literacy of the masses to critically monitor the danger of manipulation.

Media education is the acquisition of the ability to critically read the media, all types of media (press, radio, TV, Internet, etc.). The aim is to reduce the distance from the media by understanding their functioning and being acquainted with their content, as well as by placing them in different perspectives in relation to the systems in which they are developed. Emphasizing the right of citizens to media education, UNESCO at the Conference on Media Education organized in Vienna back in 1999, stressed: "Media education is part of the fundamental right of every citizen of every country in the world and freedom of expression and the right to information is a tool for building and maintaining democracy". "We live in a world where media are omnipresent" - more and more people are spending a lot of time watching TV, reading newspapers and magazines, and listening to the radio.

According to a number of studies, in some countries, children spend more time watching television than attending school. All this points to the great influence of the media world on people's perception and understanding of social events. The modern world of advanced technology that is increasingly accessible to people of all ages must also mean increased awareness of all possible propaganda and spins behind every piece of news. Critical perception in the 21st century is a necessary element in the development of personality and correct reasoning.

It was this UN agency that in 1982, with the adoption of the Grünwald Declaration⁷, emphasized the need for media literacy. Media literacy is a human right that improves the quality of life of citizens. Assists in the process of eradicating poverty, population growth, the process of achieving gender equality and the process of ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy.

In this postmodern world in which the Internet and traditional media are increasingly present in people's lives, to a large extent, our beliefs, perceptions and attitudes about the most everyday events, up to the events that play a big role in the future development of the world, depend on what the media places on us. People around the world are witnessing a dramatic increase in access to information and communication. While some people are hungry for information, others are flooded with print, broadcast, and digital content. But what is the quality of that information, how can we handle it, how can we access, search, critically evaluate, use and contribute content wisely, both online and offline, what are our rights online and offline, what are ethical questions about access to and use of information, the answer can be found with good knowledge of media and information literacy. One of the goals that every modern and democratic society strives to achieve is the creation of independent and pluralistic media and information systems.

7 Grünwald declaration on media education, 1982.

Available at: <https://milunesco.unaoc.org/mil-resources/grunwald-declaration-on-media-education/>.

UNESCO's mission is to foster a media and information literacy society through a comprehensive strategy that includes the preparation of a model curriculum for media and information literacy, the facilitation of international cooperation, the development of guidelines for the preparation of national policies and strategies for media and information literacy, the articulation of Global Media Framework for Media and Information Literacy, Establishment of Media and Information University Literacy Network, Articulation and Establishment of an International Media and Information Literacy Clearing House in Cooperation with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and Provision of Useful Guides for media and information literacy.

Citizens want information, but also want the answer on how to properly and critically deal with everyday information. They want to use new resources and new knowledge, want to use their fundamental and internationally guaranteed right to freedom of expression and active participation in management processes. In this regard, UNESCO has developed a Media and Information Literacy: Policy and Strategy Guidelines⁸. This is a very important document in defining the course of media and information literacy for the countries.

UNESCO calls on the states to create their policy and way of national development of media literacy separately, to gain sufficient information and level of development of the society, to collect valid and reliable data on the competencies of media and information literacy. In this direction, states must invest in developing a new set of critical competencies (skills, knowledge, and attitudes) for their citizens. It is the simple answer for the new information developments in the world and building healthy democratic states with educated citizens who can make the right decisions and have developed critical thinking skills.

For stronger emphasis, the UN has actualized the issue of media and information literacy in the 2030 UN Agenda. In meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) on the Agenda, this literacy is not directly observed, but is an essential and integrated part of several goals: SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, SDG 4 on Quality Education for All, and SDG 5 on Gender and Empowerment of Women and Girls.

European Union policy for the development of media literacy

At the very beginning, we defined that, in this research, the starting point / definition that will be used for the concept of media literacy is the definition of the European Commission. Why was this definition chosen? In the European integration i.e., entry into the European Union to which the Republic of North Macedonia aspires, it is important to follow the course of the Union policies. Hence, North Macedonia aims to meet the priorities set by the Union and open clusters in accordance with the new methodology for accession negotiations. The media and information society are part of the Competition and inclusive growth cluster, and the activities of the state are under constant monitoring and evaluation not only by the Commission, but also by other international organizations working in this area. From a legal point of view, what is crucial is the legal framework of the European Union, which also deals with media literacy.

8 Grizzle, Alton, Moore, Penny, Dezuanni, Michael, Wilson, Carolyn, Asthana, Sanjay, Banda, Fackson, Onumah, Chido, & Torras, Maria-Carme (2013), Media and Information Literacy, Policy and Strategy Guidelines. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
Available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002256/225606e.pdf>.

A key step in promoting media literacy is the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (2007)⁹, one of the central instruments of European media policy. It explicitly defines media literacy as “the skill, knowledge and understanding that enables consumers to use the media effectively and safely”, and media literate citizens as individuals who are able to “make informed choices, to understand the nature of the content and services and to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by new communication technologies”. This is followed by the European approach to media literacy in the digital environment, with a detailed elaboration of all its aspects (definition, media literacy for commercial communication, audiovisual work, online). In 2009, the European Commission issued a Recommendation on Media Literacy emphasizing the role of Member States in cooperating with regulatory bodies for audio and audiovisual communication services and the media industry in promoting media literacy in society.

The European Charter for Media Literacy¹⁰ contains a definition that goes beyond the four components and adds other aspects such as the behavior of the public to avoid offensive or harmful content as well as the use of the media to practice citizens’ rights:

- use of media technologies in an effective way to access, store, retrieve and share content to meet their individual needs and interests and the needs and interests of the community;
- gaining access to, and making informed decisions about, a wide range of media forms and content from a variety of cultural and institutional sources;
- understanding how and why media content is produced;
- critical analysis of the techniques, languages, and principles used by the media and the messages they convey;
- creative use of the media to express and convey ideas, communications, and opinions;
- identifying and avoiding or challenging media content and services that may be undesirable, offensive or harmful; and
- effective use of the media in the exercise of their democratic rights and civic responsibilities.

For the next few years, the focus is on striving to link media literacy to education i.e., to make it a mandatory part of the curriculum. Thereby, the academic and scientific public has a very active role in all these activities through a multidisciplinary research approach in the study of the phenomenon of media literacy. Numerous studies have been conducted on the ability of individuals (children, youth, adults, marginalized) to access, analyze and evaluate media content, their general IT skills and digital literacy skills in a social, cultural and political context¹¹. In 2007¹², the European Commission launched a survey of best practices at EU level and, based on the survey, presented its findings and suggestions in the Communication¹³. The research seeks public opinion on media literacy related to digital technologies and information on commercial, film and online initiatives. As Information Society and Media Commissioner Viviane Reding points out, “today, media literacy is as central to

9 Directive 2007/65/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2007 amending Council Directive 89/552/EEC on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the pursuit of television broadcasting activities.
Available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32007L0065&from=HR>.

10 <http://euromedialiteracy.eu/>

11 See more in the overview of media literacy research in Europe. Available at: <http://www.cost.eu>.

12 2006 public consultation on media literacy

13 Communication from the Commission to the European parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions a European approach to media literacy in the digital environment.
Available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52007DC0833&from=EN>.

active and full-fledged citizenship as literacy was in the early 19th century”. Communication on media literacy is an important step towards European media literacy policy in general and will contribute to the solid construction of European audiovisual policy under the overall i2010 initiative. The main goal is to highlight and promote good practices in media literacy at European level and to suggest possible future activities in that field. Communication is also based on the results of the work of the Media Literacy Expert Group.

EU Directive 2010/13 on audiovisual media services¹⁴, adopted on 10.03.2010 by the European Parliament and the Council, was developed in cooperation and coordination with the national legislations of the EU Member States. This Directive regulates audiovisual media services, including television and Internet services. Virtually all services that offer audiovisual content, no matter what technology is used to convey the content. Binding rules apply equally, whether you watch the news or other audiovisual content on TV, the Internet, or on a mobile phone. Basically, Directive 2010/13 / EU replaces Directive 89/552 / EEC and is adopted to harmonize certain provisions laid down by law, regulation, or administrative measure in the EU Member States relating to the regulation of audiovisual media services. However, on 25.05.2016, the European Commission adopted a New Draft Law amending the Audiovisual and Media Services Directive. The reform brings the Directive in line with new realities.

Media literacy and the Republic of North Macedonia

For the first time, special attention in the legislation of North Macedonia is committed to media literacy in the Draft Strategy for Development of the Broadcasting Activity in the Republic of Macedonia for the period 2013-2017¹⁵. The document clearly emphasizes the need to promote media literacy as the greatest interest of the Macedonian society, a process in which educational institutions should be included with mechanisms for checking the effects of media education in the curriculum, media professionals by developing self-regulatory codes related to professional standards for increasing their responsibility in creating media products, regulatory bodies in the field of media and electronic communications by developing special programs with multiple activities related to media literacy, civil society representatives with various initiatives and projects, as well as scientific research institutions in this area.

Even with the entry into force of the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services at the end of 2013 (December 25, 2013), media literacy enters the media policy in the Republic of Macedonia and as a result of the process of harmonization of media laws with the Audiovisual Media Services Directive. It was regulated in the Law by several articles.

14 Directive 2010/13/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 March 2010 on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services (Audiovisual Media Services Directive). Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=celex%3A32010L0013>.

15 See more: http://avmu.mk/files/1_predllog_strategija.pdf. This Draft Strategy was not adopted by the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia, but still exists today as a document on the website of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services.

The Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services from 2013, was amended in 2021¹⁶, where media literacy as a concept can be met in two articles. Article (6) in which the Competencies of the Agency of audio and audiovisual services are described, notes the Agency's duty to encourage media literacy.

In that context, in the section on social inclusion and media literacy (Article 26) "the Agency undertakes activities to encourage media literacy in the Republic of North Macedonia" (paragraph 2), "in undertaking those activities cooperates with NGOs, citizens' associations, educational institutions and other interested parties and publishes them on its website" (paragraph 3). The undertaken activities of this Article are an integral part of the annual work report for the previous year of the Agency. However, nowhere in the Law can one find a definition or explanation of what is meant by media literacy.

However, viewed in a broader context, both the previous (Law on Broadcasting) and the recent media legislation (Law on Audio and Audio-Visual Media Services), harmonized with the Council of Europe Convention on Transfrontier Television, later renamed the Audiovisual Directive media services, as the most important legally binding acts in the audiovisual field, refer (directly or indirectly) to media literacy. Thus, for example, the regulation of the basic principles of child protection (content inappropriate for children, prohibition of broadcasting pornographic content or violence, etc.), the principles related to advertising for the protection of media consumers (prohibition of covert advertising, etc.), the pluralism of audiovisual services, the fight against media concentration, undoubtedly reflect the need for media literacy.

The Agency prepared a Program for encouraging media literacy in the Republic of Macedonia. The main goals of the Program are to raise awareness of the concepts of media literacy, to contribute to the understanding of media literacy by citizens, to improve the conditions for civic and democratic participation. In April 2017, at the initiative of the Agency, the Macedonian Media Literacy Network was established. The purpose of establishing the Network is to promote cooperation between the various actors in Macedonian society that create and implement policies and implement activities and projects in the field of media literacy. Nevertheless, neither the Ministry of education and science, nor other relevant governmental bodies made serious steps in integrating the media literacy education in the system. From the previously conducted analyzes and research on the inclusion of media literacy in the education system, it can be concluded that such a separate subject does not exist. Instead, parts of the media literacy are incorporated into different subjects of the programs¹⁷.

In contrast, Slovenia is the first country in Central and Eastern Europe to introduce the subject of media literacy into the education system. Media education, defined as the "learning process for the media and with the media", officially became part of the curricula of primary, secondary and higher education (with a special subject for teachers) in 1999, and since 2000 - a non-compulsory part of preschool education. for children from 4 to 6 years¹⁸. The concept of media literacy as an important tool for dealing with fake news is very important for the citizens of a country. If children from an early age get to know and learn to use it, then it would contribute to reducing the mass phenomenon – of fake news and facts. Propaganda is also a big problem, especially in transition countries. Doctrinal, fake news is defined as inaccurate/untrue facts or information whose untruth or inaccuracy can be proven. So, it is not a manipulation of real facts (distortion, silencing, or sharpening of facts), but a typical lie, for example, fake news that a certain person is dead or that the person is alive.

16 Law on audio and audio-visual media services ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" no. 184/13, 13/14, 44/14, 101/14, 132/14, 142/16, 132/17, 168/18, 248/18 and 27/19 and ("Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia" no. 42/20 and 77/21). Available at: <https://praksis.mk/>.

17 Sopar V. Temenugova, A. Aksentievskaja, M. (2018), Media literacy in Macedonia: Efforts for Implementation in Elementary Education.

18 Ibid.

It is one of the propaganda techniques, aimed at defocusing and manipulating public opinion. Fake news is not a new phenomenon, but with social networks, it seems to have got its most favorable natural environment. Each individual has at his disposal a tray for spreading lies. Because we have no institutional (media) responsibility behind them, they become a dangerous mass phenomenon.

From the latest European Commission report on the progress of North Macedonia¹⁹, in the subpart freedom of expression there is an overall note that the country has made slight progress i.e., the regulator continued its engagement with civil society organizations and media outlets on promoting media literacy; continued to be proactive in the promotion of the media literacy and in warning against inflammatory or discriminatory language, hate speech, unprofessional journalistic reporting, as well as on pressure and threats on journalists and media outlets; and the fight against disinformation and activities related to media literacy is mostly carried out by civil society.

The Ministry of education and science of the Republic of North Macedonia must consider the great importance of integrating media literacy as part of the education curricula. During the Trump elections, Veles was very popular for spreading fake news which gives an overall not-so-good picture of the education program. Propaganda spread in the media in regards to COVID-19 also gives a bad impression on the level of literacy. People need to look for the sources of the media content and need to double-check the information. The set of skills is developed at an early age, mainly in primary school. This also requires teachers that are competent to share the knowledge and have expertise about this literacy.

Therefore, trainings and programs for educating the teachers are imperative for developing a good program. This requires budget allocations, and experts for conducting the trainings. The impression is that this is not the problem, but the political will of the political representatives and their acquaintance with the concept. The literature is also a problem. Books in Macedonian language about media literacy are scarce. The number is very low and great steps in improving and updating the books and relevant data must be done.

A crucial issue is the debate for regulation and self-regulation of online media. Although the specific laws in North Macedonia do not regulate online media, their regulation is dispersed in other laws. Those are: the Criminal Code, the Law on Civil Liability for Insult and Defamation, the Law on Copyright and Related Rights, the Law on Personal Data Protection, the Law on Free Access to Public Information, the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, the Law on Labour Relations, and the Law on Archive Material, the Law on Electronic Commerce and others. This big area needs to be revised and analyzed separately, but it is undoubtedly in close connection with the concept of media literacy.

It can be concluded that civil society plays a great role in promoting media literacy using domestic and foreign grants, as per se this is a very important area for the international community. This is an integral part of the overall index and factor in the democracy scores. Literate citizens are important for maintaining the independence of the media and financial sustainability; they are a key factor in battling fake news and propaganda. A very low score of 1.00 out of 7.00²⁰ was given for the indicator Independent Media, which examines the current state of press freedom, including libel laws, harassment of journalists, and editorial independence; the operation of a financially viable and independent private press; and the functioning of the public media. The state of competitive authoritarianism, even though not publicly stated, is common for the Western Balkan countries. It means dependent media and a low level of democracy.

19 European Commission North Macedonia Report 2021. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/north-macedonia-report-2021_en.

20 Freedom House, Nations of Transit 2021 Report.

The Republic of North Macedonia faces big challenges not only in promoting and integrating media and information literacy in the action documents and strategic plans of the policy area creators but also with the whole media system. If we make a diachronic analysis of the neighboring countries, we can conclude many similarities. For Bobbio²¹, one of the biggest broken promises of liberal democracy is the failure of the education system to produce rational voters. The media and digital literacy as its component are a very important segment of education in democracies and one of the most useful tools in the hands of voters, or perhaps in the hands of politicians.

The winner is the one who is more educated and knows how political communication actually works in the media world. The Internet and online media enable better exercise of freedom of expression and promote concepts such as digital democracy, voluntary communication, public journalism, and others in this regard. The interconnection of the Internet and politics provides an opportunity to discuss many political topics. These are approach, technological determinism, public sphere, liberalism, communitarianism, deliberative democracy, etc. Does the Internet meet the criteria for the dispersion of democracy? North Macedonia can contribute to raising the level of educated citizens by paying more attention to the educational policies, in order to promote the skills and to separate them in special subjects from the general curriculum. It is important for children from an early age to differentiate concepts, create their own views and judgments, be critical, be able to distinguish a true source of information from an irrelevant source, and make decisions based on strong and proven facts.

One thing is for sure, the challenge of the state apparatus is great. Efforts for major change are crucial, and the political will to produce strong and critical citizens is essential. Media literate citizens build a strong state. Digital transformation, as a part of the MIL concept is an opportunity for the Western Balkans to tackle some of the structural economic, political and social challenges in the region. Insufficient level of education for the media, digital literacy as well as media law are the root of many political problems that have become very crucial. It refers to the ability of the individual to find, evaluate, produce and communicate clear information through writing and other forms of communication on a variety of digital platforms.

They aspire to membership in the European Union, but must first remove barriers to the free flow of information between policy makers and those on whose behalf these decisions are made (the public). In terms of media and transition, these countries have a low culture of word use and a lack of public accountability. Individuals and groups express ideas of superiority over a particular race, religion, or nation with the intent to humiliate those who do not belong to “their” group and to seek persecution, isolation, and even genocide. In such cases, freedom of expression is too widely interpreted and transformed into other forms. This is the main generator of intolerance and prejudice on national, ethnic, religious and other grounds. These appearances actualize the discussion on freedom of expression, its international (international legal instruments and the practices of the European Court of Human Rights) and national legal bases, its restrictions and the abuse of this freedom.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Internet is not fully embedded in the country’s political communication (or, more precisely, not properly embedded). A key precondition for optimal use of the Internet in the field of political communication is the rapid application of technology with the simultaneous transformation of people’s minds. This transformation involves rejecting the principle of secrecy in the political activities of the government and political parties in BiH, which is in layers contrary to the nature of the Internet. There is also a need to cultivate public awareness of the importance of online public opinion and the need to more clearly distinguish between the online and offline political scene. The transformation of the media in North Macedonia is an absurd that is worth studying, and evaluating and should serve as a lesson.

21 Bobbio, N. (1987), *The Future of Democracy*, p 36.

The role of the media in society is in constant regression and instead of covering the turbulent development of the democratization process, it can be said that, arising or resulting from them, they are losing ground. From process leaders, they have become chroniclers of the political affiliation of certain centers of power, oligarchic circles, and in the worst cases; they became megaphones of the interests of their owners, of the political and other alienated interests of their bosses.

Serbian media and politics are still living in the past. Tamara Skrozza²² gives an excellent overview of the situation today, equating it with the time of Slobodan Milosevich, with the only difference being that Milosevich is no longer here. The media “voluntarily” agree to be an instrument in the hands of politicians and tycoons in order to survive economically in the market. At the local level, the situation is even worse, where local politicians wield all their economic and political power, making it almost impossible for a local media outlet to report independently and politically neutrally. The Law on Public Information and the Law on Broadcasting has been adopted, but the problem is in the institutions responsible for their implementation.

The challenge of the Western Balkan countries is large-scale. It includes not only the phenomenon of promotion, development and integration of this literacy in the system, but also building crucial changes in the way the entire media sphere functions. These processes are inevitably closely linked and interdependent. It can simply be said that media and digital literacy are correctors of the functioning of the media world. One thing is for sure, this literacy is necessary in the process of building a strong state and strong educated citizens.

Conclusion

The media is a sensitive topic for our country. We are aware of the prevailing propaganda, of the flow of information, much of which is even untrue. The awareness of the citizens starting from the youngest age must be developed in the direction of real evaluation of the information and formation of real attitudes about the events. It is necessary to make great strides in defining media literacy as a key competence and in appropriately integrating it in the strategic documents in the field of education and in the media sphere as a critical understanding of media content. Encouraging public debates between the representatives of the competent state institutions, the education sector, non-governmental organizations, and the media industry on the importance and the state of media literacy in the Republic of North Macedonia. The involvement of the academics should be increased, because they are drivers in scientific proposals and knowledge, conducting research and projects through which this concept will be promoted. Encourage the competent institutions to organize campaigns to raise awareness of the techniques used for commercial purposes, especially for product placement, and online advertising, in order to better understand the citizens on the border between marketing and content. Encouraging increasing access to media and information and communication technologies at local, regional, and national levels, so that more citizens have access to media and information and communication technologies, including the elderly, people with physical disabilities, people in a difficult economic and social situation.

22 Skrozza, T. Media and politics: Living in the past.

Providing all citizens with information on the safe use of media and information and communication technology, paying special attention to sensitive categories, such as children and youth. To achieve all this, cooperation must be ensured with all relevant international institutions and organizations active in the field of media literacy, including UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the European Commission, because a media and information literate person must not only be a consumer of information and media content, but also a responsible person seeking information, a knowledge maker and an innovator who can use various tools and media for information and communication.

North Macedonia must undertake serious steps for promotion and integrating media literacy in the educational programs. This requires political will and, most importantly, a well-established group with prominent members of the media community that will make a medium-term action plan with activities, exact dates of realization, source of funding and pool of members and pool of institutions. Given the fact that the international organizations give financial support to many activities regarding the promotion of this concept, the budget excuses cannot be taken as relevant. Curricula in developed European countries already include subjects that aim to develop the ability and responsibility to critically accept media messages. The German curriculum, for example, has long envisioned training the student to receive media messages critically, building the ability to counter those messages, if not based on facts, and counteracting stereotypes and consumer clichés, which is one of the priority goals of this program. Undoubtedly, this concept is consistent with the phenomenon of fake news, which is especially dangerous when it spreads through the mainstream media.

It is very important to start developing the concept of media responsibility. Media responsibility has begun to be discussed in the United States and it is complicated and includes media law, journalistic professionalism (standards in the journalistic profession) and media with the understanding of citizens with high integrity (quality media) (especially digital literacy). Nowadays, we are starting to listen more and more about future literacy²³. How can we better understand the role that the future plays in what they see and do, if we do not have the skills and competences for critical thinking about the media and information that we consume? In the 1970s, when McLuhan wrote about the “classroom without walls”, saying that the media contested the educational pre-eminence of the school, he would never have been able to imagine what occurs nowadays.

23 Since 2012, UNESCO, in its role as a global laboratory of ideas, has demonstrated that people can become aware of why and how they use the future.

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Case Study

Photo by cottonbro from Pexels

Violeta Cvetkovska

The narrative in digital space, hate speech, fake news, and attempt for their ethical cleansing

Abstract

This paper raises the question of the need for “detoxification”, the ethical purification of the narrative in the digital space. The serious penetration of hate speech and fake news in this area becomes a serious ethical problem for any society. The Republic of North Macedonia is no exception to such global communication trends. The paper presents an author analysis of several months of trends in media reporting during the Local Elections in the municipality of Karpos 2013, through data from the big data platform and analysis of hate speech on a homophobic basis in cyber-space during the 2021 Pride Parade. Both cases show that fake news and hate speech have a high degree of virulence, with the priority being the truth, then the media that accept such speech, then the general public and especially the young people who are the most frequent consumers of such speech. Research shows that the source of such speech is political discourse, and religion, tradition, ideology, sexual orientation, mental health and other differences are abused for their own purposes. Both cases show that hate speech has a growing trend and that it is more than necessary to act on a purge on several fronts. The first is the introduction of regulation in cyberspace, strictly against hate speech, but with due attention to the right to freedom of speech i.e., caution against hyper-regulation and second, long-term, but also with long-term feeding back is the media literacy that should start from the earliest age i.e., from the moment when the young population first meets and begins to use any kind of communication cyberspace. In the Republic of North Macedonia, some steps have already been taken in the legislation, in the adoption of codes of ethics, partial criminalization of hate speech, as well as in the field of media literacy in a completely rudimentary form.

Keywords:

Ethics, digital speech, hate speech, fake news

Introduction

If we try to make a thread connecting Heraclitus' belief that the world is in accordance with the Logos (literally, "word", "reason" or "account") then cyberspace can be defined as a digital paradise in the context of freedom of speech. However, in the spirit of Heraclitus the Dark, who says that the word (Logos) is basically made of fire (or the word is the source of all evil A/N), then the same space is also the legal enclave of hate speech which is in a penetrating trend. On the other hand, if we assume the idea of John Locke and his "blank slate", "white paper"), then the question arises: Who first started to contaminate the communication site, especially in the digital sphere, the Internet and social networks, not excluding the classic mass media.

We will make an attempt to locate the influence of the biggest influencers and opinion makers in the public discourse, through the specifics of their speech and the accompanying forms of communication, through mainly, two empirical cases in the Republic of North Macedonia. Both cases are related to the virulence of hate speech. The first is in the field of political democracy and its power to infect the media space, and the second in the field of human rights and discrimination on several grounds: gender, ethnic, etc.

No dilemma exist anymore that political communication today is not only an aid to achieving a goal, but also part of political action. "Primeval evil" (the original crime) may have originated from the most misinterpreted philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli and his never-written sentence: "The end justifies the means", instead of the authentic translation "The end determines the means". However, politics and politicians focused on the ultimate goal - power and authority, they have literally mastered both variants of Machiavelli's interpretation of thought, and with the overall intonation they use in everyday politics (and intensified in pre-election) it is empirically confirmed to contaminate the media space.

This primarily refers to the connection of (un)ethnically intonated campaigns and their indisputable connection with the way of media reporting, which are sometimes difficult to prove; however, their parallel intertwining can certainly be measured quantitatively and described qualitatively. Finally, they create a picture of the reality of the electorate and the citizens, where it is reflected through the act of voting, and consequently at the conception of social discourse in all walks of life. Hence, the public interest and the ethical motive for encouraging positive communication in political campaigns i.e., the fight against propaganda and hate speech, as part of the cleansing of the communication site at all levels.

And what actually happens in practice?

We are witnessing that public speech has gradually but surely turned into hate speech. In such discourse, propaganda replaced information, defamation and lies are spread about the politically "different" and political communication turned into provocative hysteria. In such created real state, the insertion of intonation into political-media discourse (Vacić, 2004: 7) three battles are won: the war for the media, the war in the media (in their home territories), and then, using the subordinate media, the submissive journalism and media were obtained, which, in the end, started a war with each other. As a result, the first victim in this area was the truth, and then the citizens who are definitely deprived of truth.

On the other side of the social scene is the theoretical knowledge that the task of ethics is to reach the truth of morality as a regulator of social life. Politics and politicians as well as their communication teams have accurately located the “G-spot”, the “underbelly” of the general public and knew exactly how to affect public discourse. With their speech, language, images, and emoticons (like audiovisual communication) they persistently pull the card of reciprocal effects: shock states, anger, hatred, astonishment, rage in the reader and the transgressor (Eco, 1995), and the final effect is causing frustration, anxiety, constant anticipation of something dreadful, undefined threat, prolonged fear, all to apathy and collective depression.

In order to support the adversity, except in the purely political communication of opposing ideological rivals (the neoliberal left wing, in the Macedonian case, SDSM and the right wing VMRO-DPMNE A/N), the same methods and tools are also used (again predominantly through political vocabulary) in spreading hate speech in the field of sexual rights and freedoms, LGBTI rights, social inclusion for persons with disabilities, ethnic and religious affiliation, etc. (www.govornaomraza.mk).

Even in these spheres of life, the presence of hate speech and creation of lies (fake news), the ideological matrix is more than legible backed up by policy that in nature is different from morality. While morality is based on belief, politics aspires to power to achieve its own goals, ideologically or selfishly.

Research methodology

Analyzing narrative (language concepts), messages and practices in several public segmentations: politicians and political parties, media, quasi-activists and other groups and individuals (in order to discredit the opponent, dissident or gain the benefit of the general public) we need to demonstrate whether and how much public discourse is actually contaminated and delves deeper into the ethical freedoms that are seriously affected through strategic manipulations in public discourse. In doing so, maximizing public impact is the first step that will empirically lead us to two extremes: social apathy or anxiety before possible activism in an undesirable direction from a moral, and in general from a value aspect.

The focus of the media communication narrative (mostly digital space) through hate speech, fake or manipulative news can be illustrated through two exact empirical sets of data:

-Through the “Local Elections - Karposh 2013” case study, with an original (author’s own) presentation of a campaign in the Republic of Macedonia, conducted in a way that is increasingly present in our country, where the ethical principles of political communication are affected reflecting the media narrative space, and as feedback to the public in general.

After applying several research methods, quantitative and qualitative media analysis, using a big-data platform, or press clipping of a specialized outsourcing company (Image PR)¹, general trends that are immanent to our political campaigns can be rendered as well as the specifics of media discourse, their susceptibility, and the reciprocal power of influence, directly related to campaign reporting and analysis, which together create a uniform code of ethics.

1 [ImagePR](#), the first independent specialized public relations agency in Macedonia, was selected by the Municipality of Karposh in a public tender for support in strategic communications and also its PR Studio for the development of continuous press clipping in several consecutive years, during the Local Elections Karposh 2013, which are the main topic of analysis by the author of this paper. The daily, monthly and annual reports are the property of the Municipality of Karposh.

The second case is a presentation of homophobic and transphobic hate speech analyzed in the Report on Hate Speech based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity for the period 15.05.-15.07.2021 (Drndarevska, Atanasovska, 2021) through which one can see a wash with hate speech on social networks in the context of the Pride Parade. That points out the phenomenon and the way in which the general public creates the image that LGBTI persons are unwanted, further inflames hatred and incites acts of violence and discrimination.

Through the desk and contextual analysis of the Report of the Subversive Front², and the analysis of the trends related to the anti-gender movement in Macedonia and internationally, among other, an attempt is made to determine the factors influencing the strengthening of conservative and authoritarian trends, a framework in which affective hate speech was created, the so-called anti-gender movement, all the way to real violence and gender-based discrimination.

Data analysis

Local elections Karposh 2013

The elections held on March 24 (first round) and April 7 (second round) 2013 significantly affected the increase of media interest and intensified reporting on the Municipality of Karposh, the institution Mayor of the Municipality of Karposh, the candidate for mayor Stevco Jakimovski and consequently introduction of the topic “Local Elections” in direct correlation with the previous three keywords.

If we compare the quantity of reporting through monthly analyzes, two months before and two months after the local elections, and in the months of the “Local Elections 2013”, we will see that the “interest” in media coverage varies drastically.

Thus, in January, although the Municipality of Karposh is considered one of the most attractive and active municipalities as well as the mayor as an institution and a person, the number of media reports would be large and satisfactory (a total of 436 coverages in all types of media: classic mass media and the Internet). 224 Internet posts dominate for the Municipality, of which, according to the intonation, 130 are neutral, 92 positive and only two negative. Two months later, however, when the “battle for Karposh” actually begins, according to the analysis of the press clipping, in the two “decisive” months, March and April, when the election campaign was in full swing, the monitoring of the events (through the number of media contents, but also according to the tonality), is multiplied by an almost geometric progression.

Already in March, the total number of media reports reached 1,581, of which 988 on the Internet, while in April (the second round of elections) pieces of media content reached 1,565, of which 936 on the Internet portals.

After the end of the “fierce election period”, from May to June there is a drastic decline in media coverage, which can be interpreted as an “already resolved topic” i.e., the official end of the “Local Elections 2013” and a certain outcome. In practice, in addition to the drastic fall in the number of media coverages, which was almost fivefold (from 1565 to 292, or 324) there is a change in key topics (keywords) of interest to the media. Reasonably, the key topic “Local Elections” disappears.

2 Subversive front is the Association for Sexual and Gender Minorities within which the Report on hate speech based on sexual orientation and gender identity for the period 15.5.-15.7.2021 was prepared by Dragana Drndarevska and Slavica Anastasovska, Skopje. August 2021)

The increase from 436 to 1581 i.e., 1,565 pieces of media content, in March or April, or almost four times more than in January, explains several issues: actual political moment, “heat” of the campaign, but also the rapid interest of the media that report on the mayoral elections. Primacy is taken by the social media according to the number of posts.

For the election months March and April, a qualitative change in the narrative is indicative i.e., more visible “coloring” of the notifications in a positive or negative context. Neutral coverages still dominate, but the impression remains that they are transmitters of the political vocabulary used in the offline space. News aggregators of the information internet portals in that period registered mass downloads of the verbal duels, negative campaign in any form, and the narrative used therein, which de facto contaminates the media space.

So, in that period of intense follow up of political campaigns conceived with their communicative narrative, hate speech, mutual slander, denigration, or “shower of mud” as it is called in some American political experiences, begins to spread in the communication site.

Behind anonymous authors with the so-called nickname @Stevce-grevce on the YouTube platform videos were posted that had no informative component other than personal discrediting, with fabricated or unverified data and an intriguing call: “You did not have any idea: Look at this”.

The extent to which the hate speech directed at the political rival posted on the Internet (and taken by the media without any critics) extends, is shown by the example first transmitted in one media outlet, Republika.mk, and then taken by the aggregate (time.mk). In this case, a street dog is dressed in the dress code with the election number of the candidate Stevcho Jakimovski, which raises two allusions to the public, that the candidate is a dog, or that only dogs would vote for number 8, more precisely for Stevco Jakimovski which is a direct insult both for the candidate and for the electorate. Such creativity is widely distributed in all print and electronic media.

The more intensified the campaign, the more escalated the rhetoric and range of “paratexts” (Eco, U pp.27 1993) messages that precede, accompany or follow the speech or text (advertising messages, titles, subtitles, prefaces, comments) which in this example are aimed at political opponents that are seen as the primary threat.

A news item was posted on the local website Kurir with an illustration in which the former party sent a wreath to the candidate for mayor Stevcho Jakimovski with the message “rest in peace”, with an allusion that he is dead to them or that they wish him (political) death.

If we follow the political campaigns during the local and parliamentary elections, we can see a series of mutual conditionality in the manner of creating and conducting political campaigns with the way of media reporting.

Apart from the experience with “Local Elections Karpos 2013”, where the analyzed data from the big data platform made by PR Studio on Image PR, this view is confirmed by the Local Elections in the Republic of Croatia 2013, more precisely Predrag Haramija and Jagoda Poropat Darrer in their paper “Negative Electoral campaign-causes and consequences” claimed that politics and politicians greatly affect people’s lives. That is why politics should be an area of human action in which ethics or ethically correct behavior will be the most important, while placing a special emphasis on the responsibility of public relations and advertising (asmedia). (Haramija, P., Poropat Darrer, J. (2014: 19).

The media, by their function, convey the tonality and manner of political speech to the public, the readers (potential electorate), which means if it is dominated by negative (hate speech), neutral or

positive, by the very quotation, such speech prevails and in the media reports. The period of inclusion of the political momentum - local elections has a rapid impact on the increase of media coverage in volume. It is the matter of “stickiness” to the topics and the offered audio, visual and written contents, messages or comprehensive communication strategies with the intensity of following and reporting by the traditional mass media, and mainly by the modern social media, especially Internet portals as well as all available platforms, which take seriously the primacy in political and in media communication with the target audience.

Moreover, both theoretical and practical experiences go in that direction according to the fact (Kiss & Hobolt 2012: 5-8) that the media are more inclined to report on a negative campaign and that a relevantly based negative campaign offers more information than usual.

Although a negative campaign as a political strategy that seeks to win votes by attacking and criticizing a political opponent has been an “imported” practice from the United States for “only” the last decade, and is ruthless in Europe, (Van Muiswinkel 2012: 2), in the last election cycles, it is even a dominant strategy in our country. However, it must be borne in mind that no matter how much the negative impact of the negative campaign on political discourse and communication is confirmed, as well as the media coverage, in a “package” with the tone, it is indisputable that it has a mobilizing effect on voters and we would say “Polarized” on the political opponent, the subject of the black campaign. Experiences from the reports, but also from the outcome of the local elections show that negative messages with or without content, and with a tone that causes anxiety, have a much greater negative impact when it comes to a competitor party than to an individual.

Moreover, according to some knowledge, negative campaigns not only sometimes prove to be more informative (Sides, Lipsitz & Grossmann 2010: 504) but also give a chance to re-evaluate a policy or attitude, even treating it as more democratic, although at the moment remains a dilemma in scientific, media and political circles about the positive or negative effects of the negative campaign.

Not only is the political space and vocabulary tainted, and as such transmitted in the media discourse, but also other sensitive social topics and spheres of everyday life (human rights in general, inclusion of persons with disabilities, gender identity issues, religious and ethnic issues, the problem with refugees, etc.) enter the domain of political interest and struggle for influence, on the one hand, and uncritical shift in part of the media, on the other.

The Pride Parade and Homophobic Hate Speech

In the period of multiple events that increase the visibility of LGBTI persons, such as the International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia, the Weekend of Pride and the Pride Parade (from May 15 to July 15, 2021) LGBTI issues occupy a larger part of the public space than usual, the focus of the media and the public is on the Pride Parade and other LGBTI right issues, which encourage discussions and comments. Especially during the Pride Parade, which is covered by all media, the public opinion can be most appropriately seen and the homophobic and transphobic hate speech can be shown (Drndarevska, Atanasovska, 2021 p.5.). According to them:

“In the reporting period, 111 cases of hate speech based on sexual orientation and gender identity were documented, most of which on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and a smaller number on web portals. Hence, it is not a representative, but a random sample, which is still sufficient to show the dominant discourse created by such speech. Most of the documented cases are posts accompanied by numerous comments of hate speech, and in some individual comments hate speech were documented by online media. 14 (fourteen) cases are presented and analyzed and reported to the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, the Public Prosecutor’s Office, the Cybercrime and Digital Forensics Department of the Ministry of Interior and to the self-regulatory body, Council of Media Ethics. In this case, too, it is a purposive sample, collected by the most active associations in the area, according to which a relevant picture can be obtained on how institutions act.”

That it is a matter of hate speech and homophobia with an extremely affected social discourse is shown by the comparative analysis of posts during the Pride Parade two years earlier, when the first Pride Parade was announced by the National Network against Homophobia and Transphobia (NMHT) on May 20, 2019. Immediately after the announcement, bias, contempt and intolerance towards the diverse through unashamed hate speech pervaded social networks. A total of 159 reports were registered on the govornaomraza.mk platform for the period from May 15 to July 15, of which 52% or 98 reports were based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

If hate speech is often defined as engagement in the act i.e., violent activities, especially in the sphere of diversity (gender, ethnic) which in the real situation is confirmed (when a participant in the Parade was attacked) such examples speak of the need for intervention of several social levels: educational, ethical, security, regulatory...

Discussion

Using one of their legitimate selection functions in the creation of events, the media have the power to thematize, or to impose a dominant topic or topics. In the internet space, search engine algorithms, news aggregators, or available Google analytics (SEO Analytics and Reporting) do that for them. Media thematization, or targeted imposition of a topic, can be done in case some of the political actors intentionally aspire or do not want certain topics to come to light (affairs, scandals, etc.). The media then have the power to impose the topic in their reporting, with intonation, frequency of reports, the place and the way where and how they will publish it thus influencing which topics will be dominant in society (environment, human rights and freedoms, corruption, etc.) at the macro level as well as their strength and importance in segmented publics at the micro level (protection of greenery, excessive construction of buildings, excessive urbanization, construction of monuments, pride parades, introduction of CSE-Comprehensive Sexual Education in the education system, etc.), which is also called Agenda-Setting Theory (Brettschneider 1998: 635).

In cyberspace, Google analytics can recognize this through the identification of paid or organically generated posts, and Google itself offers a new “Top stories design on desktop”.

Only two-three months ago a Google spokesperson confirmed that this new design with Search Engine Land is rolling out globally. “We’re always working to make it easier for persons to dive into the most useful, timely articles (texts A/N) available through Search to help them form a better understanding of the world and topics they care about most (Schwartz on December 6, 2021).”

However, the policy-media feedback is more than obvious.

In such a “game” of hate speech and expedient creation of lies (fake news) no one remains innocent: neither the author of the news (e.g., politics or political ideology A/N), nor the narrator who conveys the style (usually the media) nor the reader (the public as the recipient).

Therefore, political actors must be constantly vigilant about public opinion and what is published in the media. Otherwise, underestimating or post festum valuing public opinion in the event of delay in terms of the dynamics of political developments can cost them dearly. As a result, political actors who are, provisionally, in a better starting position in the current political moment in the system, impose topics that are proactive, affirmative, through information, advertising and positive communication, in a manner more favorable to them, following successes and achievements, in order for the media echo to achieve the desired dimension of their work. If all this is ignored, on the other side of the media mirror, with critical reporting and even complete distortion of the facts (negative reporting), the messages that the political actors originally wanted to send to the public, can be set aside. Here one can also find a gap where the negative campaign can easily penetrate and make disorientation and even a dramatic turn in the public perception.

On the other hand, political actors who at a certain social or political moment do not have access to established and influential media in the political arena assume a bottom-up strategy (Kriesi 2011: 247), when staging media events that with their informative value completely occupy the attention of both the public and the media. Surprise, spectacularity, negativity and personalization factors are usually used here. They are the stickiest topics that are the basic “hook” of the negative campaign, and at the same time “food” for the media. This means that if one fails to personalize one’s successes, achievements, competence, personal integrity, then the door is wide open to everything that is the opposite: incompetence, ineffectiveness, questionable personal integrity of the one who aspires to govern, etc. The media follow, download and influence.

The media, and lately the free cyberspace i.e., web portals, blogs, and even platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram are a public forum in which political rivals fight fiercely for attention and gaining trust of the audience or the general or segmented public. In fact, this confirms the thesis that we are becoming a media society in which the way of communication is crucial not only for political actors, but also for the overall political, economic and social environment, current or anticipated. They become a socially integrating or disintegrating factor to the extent that the more present one is, the more visible or imperceptible one is. Politicians “learned” this through their communicators and communication strategists, and the public i.e., the audience, got involved in that interaction more instinctively, especially as the doors to intense two-way communication opened, turning it even into a rectifier, if not a creator of public opinion and the perception of what is being offered to them as a political or other proposal that existentially affects them. But do social media become absolute masters of truth and the only bearers of moral (verbal) evil?

Perhaps in this dilemma we can locate the extremely critical attitude that Noam Chomsky, one of the most famous anti-globalists and world analysts at the moment, has towards the campaigns (which are understandably supported by PR strategists i.e., communication teams A/N). More than eight years ago, while lecturing in Bonn, he said that the role of PR services today is to undermine democracy. Only informed voters, says Chomsky, make good decisions, while the goal of the PR machinery is to misinform them and make them make irrational decisions. PR industry reached politics through a simple transformation of its primary function – commercial marketing, and commercial advertising was invented to undermine the market. The market, in our case, would be the government obtained in a democratic manner, then the media, up to the overall social discourse.

We are witnessing that, at the point of constructive debate in the “free space”, the Internet and all available communication platforms that are increasingly open (or consolidated) but undoubtedly highly positioned, instead of democratization, transparency and interactivity, we are experiencing extreme polarization. It is primarily political division, with a frequent tendency of extreme ideological division to the level of extreme catharsis and anxiety that leads to apathy and degradation of social discourse from an ethical and verbal point of view. That cannot be corrected, but it is heated, depending on the current topic and position of power. One topic heats up with another topic day after day, agendas are created from different spheres of life, and the new media, instead of an influential rectifier, turn into an affected field of discussion in which the “conversation between the deaf” actually echoes.

Conclusion

The example of “Local Elections 2013” shows that the new information and communication media i.e., the Internet or social network formats, provide huge opportunities to reach the target audience (segmented public) and to offer special information contents to special electoral groups. Networked communication, the Internet, and above all, the social networks Facebook, Twitter, etc., use the option of multipliers by spreading rumors or following the “influential” creators of public opinion. With a dose of bias, we can say that the media are the first and last victims at the “battlefield” on which hate speech, disqualification, negativity and nihilism, lies and deception are fighting.

From the point of view of spreading hatred and stereotypes in another, equally important, if not more important social discourse (gender, sexual rights and freedoms, ethnic issues), the Macedonian example, and also numerous European experiences, show that homophobic hate speech is closely related to nationalist and ethnocentric speech and discourse. Individuals and groups that hate LGBTI persons are the same who do not tolerate other diversities, especially related to race, ethnicity and religion, disability, resistance to social inclusion for persons with disabilities, etc.

While in the first case of hate speech, as the ideal or presumed author, we strictly viewed politics and the desire for power and authority, in the second case blatant homophobia and stereotype-based hatred are involved, in addition to politics and other influential factors such as religion, tradition and established patriarchal values.

It is a serious social and ethical threat, especially since in this way their position in this sensitive discourse is framed as a “new gospel” or as part of a national, ethical axiom, which contains a mystical force of persuasion, threat, fear and punishment (against the national betrayal of liberalism, left-wing ideology, and their attack on traditional family values, religion, progeny, children ...). Once religion enters as an established dogma, then the space for critical thinking is extremely narrow. Religion and religious affiliation as one of the indisputable human rights is set against science i.e., they take the comfort of having a “claim” on the final truth.

And in practice, in fact, two different ideological positions are created: right-wing in determining what is “given by God” and anything different is a left-wing “blasphemy” which, according to them, is artificially imposed and additionally creates an emotional charge in the “orthodox”. They, in turn, in the case of homophobia (even inclusion of persons / children with special needs A/N) present themselves as victims of some kind of liberal propaganda. Perhaps the most effective reply to such social right-wing opinion would be the thought of the great Fyodor Dostoevsky from the “The Diary of a Writer” where he says: “You do not prove your common sense by locking your neighbor in a madhouse.”

What further obscures the ethical discourse is that religious conservatism is equally veiled under the guise of democracy and the right to freedom of speech, although it leaves behind a “bloody” trace of hate speech before it becomes an act of hate violence. What also stands out specifically in the anti-gender movements and right-wing populisms is the transfer of discussions from the political to the public sphere through social media, which gives them freedom of dissemination, impunity, and extreme virulence. Once again, politics is the author; the media become the narrator, and the meta-reader as the victim of the uttered hate speech.

Once we came to a conclusion that all this is happening to us strategically or against our will, the question legitimately arises how to “normalize” the debate space, while not violating the freedom of speech, the right to information and social inclusion? Is it sufficient to change the established ethical matrix and how, or which actors should be mobilized on the path of ethical cleansing of the Internet space?

Researchers in the psychology of social influence have been able to classify several ways in which persons can influence one another (Vasovic, M 2004 p. 250), through the power of coercion, the power of reward, legitimate power (obedience to authority), reference power (identification with others), expert power (superiority in knowledge) and information power, which depends on the persuasive power of the information available to a medium in the process of communication. The last type of power, in the new age of mass audiences (societies) has proven to be the most effective in controlling people’s opinion and behavior.

Once we have already concluded that in this “dirty game” of sowing discord between persons and radicalization of public discourse no one is innocent, neither among socio-political actors, nor in the media, nor in the general public as a recipient and interactor (accomplice) in creating lies and spreading hate speech, we can focus on the media and media literacy as possible carriers of positive ethical change.

What is the limit that cannot be crossed in media reporting will probably remain an eternal dilemma that will be debated for a long time. The media, willingly or not, find themselves caught between the right and the freedom of expression and transmission of information (which is one of the fundamental human rights, such as the right to life, property, human dignity) and current trends in political communication, in which Narcissism is prevalent, self-promotion in the best light against political rivals, at account of expressing malice, violence, evident manipulation, creating rumors and hate speech. There are almost no journalists or media that in their professional experience have not faced censorship (under pressure under a law or by other authority) or self-censorship (fear of taking responsibility for the consequences of a publicly spoken word). This is why the media often trample on the thin red line of ethics and ethical reporting, often coming into conflict with the interests of the media as a business, and the media as a means of information.

Most common solution in liberal democracies for such ethical dilemmas is the codes of ethics and professional codes of ethics in media, although world experiences in this field are diametrically opposed.

Hate speech specifically, which is most prevalent (visible or in hidden form), in the negative media coverage campaigns, there is open “freedom” and even protection in the United States, because their constitutional right puts the right to speech first, as priority right, although the price for such speech (hate speech) can be paid with the dignity, honor or inequality of the victim, or it is paid at a high price for the civilization of the public hearing or even with disturbed public peace (as already seen here). To the contrary, in Canada, Germany, Council of Europe members and in international law, hate speech is seen as more hateful than speech and does not prioritize freedom of speech over other values such as dignity, honor, equality, civilization, and public peace. (Beham, 2004: 165).

However, it is inevitable to note that there is a third current among theorists that speak of the ethics of negative campaigns. According to Katie Allen (Allen, 1996: 69) negative campaigning is an ethically sound way of communicating in the following ways of political communication: “if we are attacked, seriously threatened and have no other way to defend ourselves, if we have significantly less campaign funding than other political opponents, if we have unequivocally accurate information that a political opponent has done something wrong or if our opponent has done something really bad.” Hence the proponents of this theoretical “balance” conclude that a negative campaign does not always have to be morally unjustified, it can even be ethically justified, but only if it serves the truth and not lies, manipulations and fabrications i.e., if it is not abused.

In international law, this issue is resolved by the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms 1950, which, in Article 10, defines the freedom of expression, and its restriction, because “the use of those freedoms imposes obligations and responsibilities”. Speaking of media literacy, putting this topic on the “top agenda” as often and visibly as possible is one of the top priorities. The topic for discussion is just where and from whom to start? Young people are the first agents of change, given their power of absorption and the skills they have in mastering IT technologies, but not alone in that battle for social cohesion and the battle against disinformation and hate speech.

Media literacy and battle should start at an early age, both in formal and non-formal education. Whether it will start with high school students, in the upper classes or throughout the whole primary education, or even in the preschool age is just a field of discussion. Perhaps it is most logical as of the time they meet or are in initial contact with the media (usually electronic, smartphones, tablets, and computers). Evidently, the ability to detect eroding components in an ethical sense must be accompanied by appropriate vocabulary and age-appropriate tools. Through games, fun, creative content, all the way to open campaigns and establishing new learning models.

We have different experiences in such battles: A UNESCO study (UNESCO 2015,16) lists four initiatives against hate speech: an early warning system for recognizing hate speech, coordinating international coalitions, strengthening the response on social networks and Internet service providers, and promoting media literacy to prepare users to respond to hate speech. Considering that young people who are committed to combating hate speech can become the target of such campaigns young people in the so-called “counter speech”, should pay attention to their own safety.

Well-known internet campaigns against hate speech are No Hate Speech Movement part of the Pan-European movement started by the Council of Europe that aims to take an aggressive stance against cyberbullying, develop appropriate strategies and offer support to victims of hate speech; www.jugend.support, youth platform focused on peer violence, etc.

Almost all contemporary authors dealing with this issue are unanimous that personalization of hate speech is needed as well as creation of individual learning agendas that will be inclusive and sustainable. If such digital (media) literacy system starts from local to central level, through interdisciplinary approach (throughout all forms and subjects of education), from primary to higher education level, only then will we reach the level of greater ethical cleansing and social cohesion.

Limitations

From a communication, psychological and sociological point of view, social networks, in addition to free space, often have the function of “emptying” through debate and opposing views, but they are also a great mobilizing potential for closing ideological gaps on any social issues. On the other hand, they are a fertile ground for nurturing and radicalizing various stereotypes relating to most sensitive issues, which then widely reflects from the online to the offline space.

Evidently, despite their proven virulence, they are not the only carriers of public discourse contamination with hate speech. We are witnesses that all measurements of the extent of progress of the democratic processes and functions of the state show that there is a pronounced distrust in the institutions of the system, which is constantly fostered and upgraded by all above factors. In such conditions, when we have low trust and accumulated anxiety, undefined fear and constant uncertainty, it is very easy to mobilize the fear and concern of the careful public and to turn on the defense mechanisms and put into question everything that is new and unknown to the citizens as opposed to the established traditional order, comfort of what has already been seen, the past, instead of the challenging future. There is, however, a “hidden self-destructive factor” that is “read” in the claims of proponents of the “Videomalaise Theory” according to which “the ingrained practice of political communication, as carried out by the media and political consultants, prevents the engagement of citizens, which means “It reduces their knowledge of public affairs, reduces their trust in the government and adversely affects the level of political activism.”

In practice it happens again, human rights organizations are to address and alert institutions to hate speech as well as potential hate crimes at various times. However, as noted in the Report of the Subversive Front (Drndarevska, Atanasovska-2021), the prosecuting authorities neither over the last year nor in previous years have filed any charges of hate speech based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In the absence of case law and hate speech judgments, as a counter-effect, perpetrators and potential perpetrators are encouraged, and hence the increase in hate speech from year to year.

This, in turn, indicates that hate speech must still be regulated in terms of its criminalization, professional and ethical mapping and sanctioning (especially in media reporting through the Council of Media Ethics), and also at other levels. At the administrative level, social networks and the Internet are not fully regulated. The Audiovisual Services Agency (AVMS) has adopted a Guide to Monitoring “Hate Speech” which refers to European legislation, ie Recommendation CM / Rec (2011) of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the new media concept, adopted on September 21, 2011 Which says:

“The media should refrain from transmitting hate speech and other content that incites violence or discrimination for any reason. Special attention should be paid to entities working with collective online shared spaces designed to facilitate interactive mass communication.” (or mass communication in general). They should be careful when using and editing responses to expressions motivated by racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic, misogynistic, sexist, or other prejudices. “Participants in the new media ecosystem may be required (by law) to report to the competent authorities criminal threats of violence based on racial, ethnic, religious, gender or other grounds that they become aware of.”

... National law and practice in the field of hate speech should take appropriate measures regarding the role of the media in transmitting information and ideas that expose, analyze and explain specific cases of hate speech and the relevant phenomenon in general, such as and the right of the public to

receive such information and ideas. One of the most important differences that should be clearly expressed in national law and practice in order to make a clear distinction between the responsibility of the author of hate speech, on the one hand, and some responsibility of the media and media experts who contribute to the spread of as part of their mission to convey information and ideas on issues of public interest, on the other hand.

Self-regulation in the media sphere has a limited effect due to problems in the implementation of decisions, which is left to the professional capacity of the media, but there are certain protections in the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination and the Criminal Code (Article 144) which states:

“Anyone who, through an information system, threatens to commit a crime punishable by up to five years in prison or a more severe sentence, against a person because of his or her gender, race, skin color, class, or belonging to a marginalized group,” ethnic group, language, nationality, social origin, 21 religious beliefs, other beliefs, education, political affiliation, personal or social status, mental or physical disability, age, marital or marital status, property status, health status or any other grounds “provided by law or a ratified international agreement, shall be punished by imprisonment of one to five years.”

The Code of Ethics of Journalists incorporates all these suggestions. However, the codes should state that the general obligation of journalists is to fight against media concentration, blackmail and the influence of advertisers and sponsors. To accept that writing itself and developing codes of ethics in media reporting (even laws) is a utopia and will initially change and “detoxify” the media sphere in our country from hate speech. It is a long, if not ambitious, historical process. We write history every day, with every text and publicly proclaimed word.

Despite the necessity of the legal “purification” of the digital space, in the Macedonian discourse there is a warning of the danger of „Hyperregulation as a means of control over media and academic freedom“ where the authors (Shishkovski. J, Lechevska. K 2015) in the conclusions warn:

“Laws in the Republic of Macedonia that cover the media and education provide for numerous fines that serve as a means of controlling media and academic freedom. Media freedom is violated through direct interference with the programming and editorial policy. Numerous prescribed fines are an effective tool for controlling the media. Namely, only 2-3 fines for trivial errors in the minutes of the media program can lead to their bankruptcy or extinction. “That way, self-censorship is provided to the government, and if that fails, then the fine is an effective tool for silencing dissidents.”

The harmonization of ethical rules in journalism and media begins with adoption of the Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The countries after becoming members of the Council of Europe ratify and incorporate the Convention into their domestic law. Following this international legal procedure, the citizens themselves, on the other hand, receive a legitimate right to protect their rights and freedoms, and be able to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights. Hence, Article 10 of the Convention is of particular importance both for the media and citizens, which guarantees the freedom to receive and the freedom to disseminate information, except in specific cases where free expression of opinion phenomena occur that have fatal consequences for the life of individuals or groups.

This speaks not only of the need to implement positive experiences from outside (while waiting for the EU) through international conventions and national legislation, but also of the need to clean up primarily “our own backyard” of infected communication sites.

The steps will adhere to the following order: literate, detect, actualize and act.

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Case Study

Photo by Marley Clovelly from Pexels

Tane Dimovski

The use of public relations and social media by schools in the process of informing the public

Abstract

The Internet is a natural environment for the new generation. Children today do not learn how a computer is used, but use a computer when learning. Through the search engine, it is possible to find an answer to any question that someone might have. In other words, the Internet has penetrated all areas of human life. In the future, the computer will play an even greater role in people's lives. However, the chief institute in the direction of the educational system of young people remains to be the school. Today, public relations and social media are an integral part of the educational process, precisely in the part of the availability of information to the public. They represent an essential and firmly integrated relation in public policies in every field of interest. Their use in today's world, in an era of fast communication, has become part of our daily lives, because they summarize public opinion. The schools managed to maximize this free internet space, and use public relations and social media management techniques by placing photos, content, comments, videos, etc. i.e., sharing informative announcements for the public, which contributed to creating, establishing, and projecting the image of the educational institution. Thus, schools managed to bring their activities and information to the public and change the long-standing habit of non-compliance with public information.

Keywords:

Public Relations, Social Media, Communications

Introduction

Public relations are a very important planning process for influencing public opinion, i.e., for mutually satisfactory two-way communication. Public relations contribute to creating and projecting the perfect image of an institution to the public. As mentioned, it is a two-way process in which the message is transmitted to the audience, but there must be feedback, above all, due to the practicality of the work. In recent years, a major upswing in Internet communication has brought to the forefront social media (especially certain social networks) that are a set of numerous communication channels, interaction among more people, who can share a variety of content and at the same time to cooperate. It is even considered that “online” communication through social media can create public opinion, that is, contribute to the initiation of certain activities among citizens for various issues. In addition, social media are increasingly used in public relations by practitioners. The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the impact of public relations and social media, which is indeed of great importance and crucial in the process of informing and familiarizing the public in the part of the educational process.

Research methods

The research methodology used in this scientific paper is content analysis combined with a qualitative methodology. The research method is an analysis of documents as a data source. Using content analysis, we will quantify and analyze the presence, meanings, and relationships of certain concepts of the use of public relations and social media by schools. Sources of data will be from interviews, field research notes, conversations, or literally any occurrence of communicative language (such as books, essays, discussions, newspaper headlines, speeches, media, historical documents).

Early media education and its practice

Education on media literacy in Europe occurs in different contexts, depending on the various traditions of school systems, and in practice, one can come across different models. Most often, it is a matter of media literacy as a separate subject or its integration, through different text sets, in many courses. Each model has its advantages and disadvantages. This approach today occupies the attention of experts, especially because of the findings that media education as a special (most often election) subject is low on the list of priorities for schools and teachers, while its integration into other school subjects makes it “invisible”. So, it’s harder to learn, that is, every teacher teaches “a little bit” of it. One of the most important documents currently in the field of media education is certainly the Declaration of Media Education (Grunwald’s Declaration on Media Education), which UNESCO brought to the international symposium in Grunwald, Germany in 1982. It emphasizes the necessity of a coherent and systematic form of education for mass media, as a prerequisite for modern citizenship. In that direction, the competent authorities in the states have called:

1. To initiate and support comprehensive media education programs, from pre-school to university level, as well as in lifelong education and adult education aimed at developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will encourage the level of critical awareness and greater competence among users of electronic and print media. Ideally, such programs should include the analysis of media products, Media use as a means of creative expression and efficient use and participation in the available media channels;
2. Develop teacher training courses and mediators, increase their knowledge and understanding of the media and train the appropriate teaching methods, taking into account the significant, but fragmentary familiarity with the media already possessing many students;
3. To encourage research and development activities in the interest of media education, from the sphere of psychology, sociology and communication science, and
4. To provide support and strengthen the activities undertaken or provided by UNESCO aimed at encouraging international cooperation in the field of media education.

Numerous other conferences ensued, expanding, clarifying and developing the concept, theory and practice of media education. Thus, 1990 in Toulouse, France, the conference's new routes in media education (New Directions in Media Education) embraced the concept of media literacy as "knowledge about the structure, economy and functions of the mass media system in the society, as well as the analytical skills for reading both the aesthetic and ideological content of messages on mass media (THOMAN, 2000). It is determined that modern society, from an era of linguistic literacy, has transferred to the era of electronic literacy, and therefore media literacy is not a luxury, but a necessity. What is most important is the understanding of the role of media consumers. If in the '50s and in the '60s they were seen as "Tabula Rasa", now they are already becoming active creators of content and the question is no longer how media impacts people, but what people do with the media. The goal is to enable citizens for having an active relationship with the media, rather than their protection from the potentially harmful influence of mass media (through mediation ideology, commercialization, paid advertisements, and content with low aesthetic and educational values). The elements needed for the development of media education are as follows:

- a. Establishing guidelines for curricula (at the national or regional level) of appropriate educational institutions,
- b. Training programs for teachers at the university level (not journalism programs, but education with specific specialization),
- c. Teacher support - educational programs during work, summer courses, etc. through which teachers will advance in the selected specialization,
- d. Educational resources for teaching - teachers, curricula, lists of activities, videos, posters, and brochures needed for teaching.¹

1 http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/MEDIA_E.PDF

An effort of implementation in elementary education

The importance of Grunwald's declaration from 1982 was confirmed at a government meeting in 2007, and it was estimated that the importance would become much greater in 25 years. At the meeting, it was emphasized that everything that was then said on that occasion is made more imminent in the context of information society and dissemination of knowledge in a global context. The place and role of the media are growing in our societies, and the citizens, now more than ever, must have the ability to critically analyze content, regardless of the symbolic system used (image, sound, text) to adapt to social change. Hence, there is an urgent need for international mobilization for increasing media education and involvement in the process of all stakeholders. 12 recommendations for four priority activities arose from the gathering: developing a concept for comprehensive media education at all educational levels, teacher training and raising the awareness of other stakeholders in the social sphere, research and their network dissemination, and international cooperation. In this context, the first two (with 8 recommendations) seem to be significant. They include:

1. Adoption of an inclusive definition of media education with three main objectives - Access to all types of media that are potential tools for understanding society and participation in democratic life, developing skills for critical analysis of messages, encouraging production, creativity and interactivity in different areas of the media;
2. Strengthening the links between media education, cultural diversity and respect for human rights by adapting curricula to the diversity of the cultural, educational, social and economic context;
3. Defining basic skills and assessment systems. They have an interdisciplinary character and should be listed for each level of the school system. Their assessment should take account of students, as well as training teachers, and should help improve the relevance and effectiveness of media education curricula.
4. Integration of media education in the initial training of teachers. It is a key element of the system and must include theoretical dimensions and practical skills, based on a good knowledge of the media needs of young people. In times of rapid change, this training must rely on institutional activities and self-interference, using teaching aids that have been tested and confirmed by teachers and students.
5. Develop appropriate and advanced developmental pedagogical methods. The main goal is to set new "active" methods that are not compatible with already prepared recipes for lecture, as well as the evolution of the role of the teacher and greater participation of students.
6. Mobilization of all participants in the education system. The integration of media education in the educational system must mobilize all stakeholders. You need to increase awareness of the curriculum managers for school principals, the main educational officers, in order to take responsibility for the legitimization of these actions.
7. Mobilizing other stakeholders in the social sphere. Media education cannot be limited to the school environment, and families, associations and media professionals. Media education should be integrated into the professional training of journalists and include legal entities and ethical knowledge. The same applies to all media professionals, content manufacturers, editors, broadcasters, etc.

8. Establishment of media education within lifelong learning. Media education is not only for young people, but also for adults whose main information and sources of knowledge are the media. In this context, media education is a process of good quality lifelong learning. Adults should be provided with training that will help them become freer and more active citizens in society. Continuous training should be implemented locally, with the support of civil society associations, non-governmental organizations and experts.²

What do public relations represent?

Public relations represent an essential element in the management of any transparent and responsible organization. By implementing public relations in the work, a positive reputation is acquired and the image of each organization is being built. Permanent two-way communication with citizens and the media is an obligation and a challenge for each organization whose task is to inform citizens about their work in a timely, truthful and open manner, thereby providing mutual trust and support. Thanks to public relations and their use in the information process, citizens actively take part in the policy making process. In the past period, public relations in the Republic of Macedonia have experienced a real boom, especially in public institutions, which began to recognize their importance.

The public sector has seen the importance of implementing public relations in the work because it constitutes a part of creating the image and the positive reputation of public institutions.

The practice of public relations is a challenge for the functioning of organizations, primarily in terms of the need for citizens' information for the undertaken activities by government institutions involved in all spheres of life, starting with the creation of laws on the economy, the construction of road infrastructure, ventures in culture, tourism, sports, etc. Including public relations is a step forward in the direction of professional planning, creation and realization of two-way communication with citizens. With timely, daily and real informing of citizens about their work, each government institution can expect their trust, support, but also their active participation in the process of policymaking and decision-making. The establishment of public relations in public institutions ensures the citizens' initial contact with the institutions in the area of public services, so they eventually create and have the overall picture of the institution.

Public institutions are those that should clearly use the opportunity to respond to the need of people in a manner of positively contributing to society. The offer of programs and services increases the interest of the citizens. By improving government performances and reporting about them, support is acquired. By developing the road infrastructure, the conditions and the safety of every citizen are increasing. By providing easy access to public sector services, the interest in and utilization of them increases. When misdirecting public relations in the public sector, the activities of public sector institutions are marked as unsuccessful, thus, the programs of public sector institutions are equally marked. Above all, contact and communication with citizens will be lost, and thus the real picture will be lost. Therefore, when speaking of public relations, that means a long-standing process of interconnected activities. Public relations are an essential and firmly integrated link to public policies in every field of interest.

2 Shopar, V., Temenugova, A., Aksentievskaja, M., (2018) Media Literacy in Macedonia: An Attempt at Implementation in Primary Education, School of Journalism and Public Relations, Institute of Communication Studies, Skopje

Their practice in today's world, in an era of fast communication, has become commonplace, because, above all, we sublimate public opinion. In a broader sense, public relations imply communication, a systematic planned process of influence in order to gain a positive impact, interactive communication based on open, democratic action in favor of the organization and the public. It can be said that public relations are science and art or analysis of current events, counseling, introducing novelties in programs, and realization. In particular, they represent a concept, the realization of the created activities and events that are important for the public or, more simply put, public relations are a systemic process of communication between the organization and the public in order to improve the image. First, the term "public relations" had been used by US President Thomas Jefferson in his address to Congress in 1807. US historian Robert Hailbronette described this area on one occasion as a "Brotherhood" of 100,000 members whose joint relationship is the profession and whose common problem is that none of the two can agree on what the profession is.

What do social media represent?

Social media are a dynamic medium that changed the way we work. They are commonly defined as new sources of "online" information that are created, initiated, circulated, and used by consumers to exchange information on products, services, peculiarities, and specificities. There are numerous different media such as web pages, blogs, email addresses, social networks, instant messages, etc. It is very important to distinguish between classical and social media.

Social media essentially are places of "gathering of people" with similar interests. In this way, certain virtual communities have been created that gather around certain topics and information, which can interact with each other, transmit views, and comment.

Social media are a strong instrument, especially for marketing, advertising, and free publication of information, because they have their own target - goal.

Social media began with the development of technology in France, by the discovery of the telegraph, and the emergence of radio, and TV, creating a revolution in information, but also in the creation of public opinion. But the communication was one-way. With the emergence of the Internet that connects a large number of people, mass communication was created, first through e-mail, then the websites, blogs, social networks that make a real explosion and are one of the most important communication tools in modern society. People can say that social media have become one of the most important channels for communication between people, as well as contributing to the formation of public opinion. The popularity of social media and networks begins in 1995 with the emergence of the US portal classmates.com. The project proved to be quite successful, after which other services appeared analogously.³

Officially, social media appear in 2003-2004 with My Space, Facebook, and LinkedIn. In Macedonia, social media take an upswing in the late 2000's⁴. Social media are a social structure of nodes (individuals or organizations) associated with each other through values, visions, ideas, financial interests, and the result of those structures is complex. The nodes are individual "actors" inside the network, and the links are realization between the actors. With proper use of services and targeting, effective results are obtained. Because of its widespread prevalence, social media are widely used.

3 Asatjani, S., (2011) Social Media at School, Sandros Books Publishing, Tbilisi, Georgia

4 <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/uploads/960d8b50-c9e6-48b4-8745-ab68d682b5f9/mapping-digital-media-macedonia-20120625.pdf>

Nowadays, it is incomprehensible for people dealing with marketing, communication, media and public relations, not to be present on social media. It is very important to know how social media can be successfully used, because the advantages are related to transparency, co-payments, the focus of the community, large user capabilities, conversation, the massive connection. Social networks begin with communication among young people who wanted to contact each other. Their use and growth increased in the 21st century. Moreover, not only did the use of social networks increase among people, but also in public relations practitioners. In addition, at least in the past period, social networks are “creators” of public opinion, but also they are appropriate for marketing and product advertising. Social networks, as part of social media, as we previously noted, first appeared in 1995, with the emergence of the US page www.classmates.com, which was founded by Randy Conrads, who wanted to find a way not to “lose” mutual relationships between classmates. As his idea grew and the project for creating the first social network has developed, the coverage of users was also expanded. Conrads made it possible to meet friends and colleagues from other institutions, organizations - kindergarten, primary and secondary school, faculty, work, and military through his website. In 1997 “AOL Instant Messenger” appeared on the market, which popularized the exchange of instant messages. The same year, the site “sixdegrees.com” appeared and it allowed the creation of profiles and adding friends. In 2002, this continued through the “Friendster” page, by allowing “online” connecting friends. The database of users of this social network was most popular in Asia and it grew to 3 million during the first three months. If compared to the total number of Internet users at that time, one can conclude that 1 of 126 Internet users had their own profile on “Friendster.” In 2003, Tom Anderson and Chris Dewolf created the largest Internet music library in the world “My Space”. With the emergence of this site, social networks got their standardized shape, followed by a huge array of similar websites around the world. Facebook appeared on February 4, 2004. This page originally appeared as a network for connecting students from American faculties. With the first Facebook member at Harvard University, more than half of the 19,500 students opened their own Facebook profile. Twitter appeared on the scene two years later.⁵

The practice of public relations and social media in schools

In Macedonia, primary and secondary education is compulsory for all children. Special laws, the Law on Primary Education and the Law on Secondary Education, regulate the educational process, the activity, organization, functioning and management of the two levels of education. The Law on Primary Education is based on the right to free and high-quality education of each child (Article 3) and emphasizes the basic principles of primary education, including the best interest of the child, equality, availability, accessibility and inclusiveness, quality education and international comparability of students’ knowledge, etc. (Article 4). The Law on Secondary Education determines that secondary education (gymnasium and vocational) is mandatory for every citizen, is free of charge and provided equally for all (Article 3). The Law on Primary Education defines the objectives of primary education (Article 7) including:

5 Stojanovska, S., (2012) Communication in Public and Private Schools (Master Thesis), Faculty of Philosophy - Institute of Pedagogy, Skopje

- Providing a full scope in the educational process and responding to the diverse needs of all students, by providing the essential participation of all students in it,
- Achieving national standards for primary education from the areas: Language literacy, learning other languages, mathematics, natural sciences and technology, digital literacy, personal and social development, democratic culture and citizenship, entrepreneurship and financial literacy, as well as artistic expression, culture and multiculturalism,
- Developing self-esteem and awareness of the student about their own individuality and responsibility for their actions,
- Education for respecting diversity, cooperation, basic human freedoms and rights,
- Preparation of the student for a responsible life in a free, civil and democratic society,
- Developing skills and competences for research, experimentation and problem solving,
- Acquisition of general and applicable knowledge and skills needed in everyday life or for further education,
- Preparation for further education and lifelong learning.

Nowadays, people's primary source for education is the school, yet they gather other information using radio, television, computers and the Internet, wherein lie our dominant cultural tools for pursuit, selection, collection, storage and transfer of knowledge. Information is coming from everywhere, there is no longer a distinction between traditional and digital media, people can read a newspaper, watch television and movies on a computer or mobile phone. However, the increase in knowledge in the use of mass media and communication has its advantages and its drawbacks. While we should take advantage of their merits, we should try to avoid the negative.

Therefore, we need to develop media literacy, especially among children, population born and brought up in the age of the new information and communication technologies, present both at home and at school. Public relations and social media are the main tool in terms of sharing information with the public outside schools. When schools emerged as a social institution, and teaching as a form of work, the education became communication. Educational communication is achieved in the process of upbringing and education work with the transfer of knowledge and personality development. The nature and quality of communication depends on the achievement of the goal and objectives in teaching. The educational process is communication. In schools as an organization, this activity is directed towards the goals of the school. The information as the subject of communication in the school can be of different content. This information can be of varying intensity on the rights and obligations of individuals, stakeholders. Many factors depend on communication in the school. Managers need to be effective communicators to achieve good results in today's schools. No matter what kind of school communication is concerned, the important thing is the process and not be one-way communication. In terms of school communication, there are three directions, as follows:

- * Communication should go from the school principal to the teachers and vice versa, but it should go between teachers;
- * There must be a good horizontal flow of communication between teachers;
- * Also there should be communication with external factors such as parents, staff and other educational institutions.⁶

6 Stojanovska, S., Communication in Public and Private Schools (master thesis), Faculty of Philosophy - Institute of Pedagogy, 2012

Case Study - Primary Municipal School “Gjorgjija Pulevski”

The case study of the primary municipal public school „Gjorgjija Pulevski” portrays the way of practicing public relations and social media, which will contribute as an example for further practice of public relations and social media in other schools.

The school was founded in 1983. The school has 38 classes and 19 classrooms. The building stretches over an area of 4.915 m², while the yard is 11.757 m². According to the basic info that is posted on the official website of the Municipality of Aerodrom, its address is “Jane Sandanski” Blvd, 27A, the email address of the school is gpulevski@yahoo.com, while the website is <http://www.ougjorgjija-pulevski-aerodrom.edu.mk>. The number of teachers is 69, while the number of pupils totalled 994. The school principal, Marjan Jovanovski, is responsible for providing information and for representing the school before the public. According to the analysis we did on the online database, we can conclude that actions should be taken to improve the learning conditions i.e., renovation and training premises for inclusion and digitalization of the educational process. Though, there are the international successes of the students from this elementary school.

MPS “Gjorgjija Pulevski” as part of the Erasmus Project

(Published 06.02.2020)

The elementary school “Gjorgjija Pulevski” from the Municipality of Aerodrom was part of the Erasmus + project, dedicated to ecology, held in Riga, Latvia, in the period from 19 to 25 January 2020. At the first meeting in the school partner in Riga, there were the project coordinator, teacher Ana Petrovska, two other members of the teaching staff, as well as the school principal Marjan Jovanovski. The participants participated in a paper reeling workshop, exchanged ideas and draft measures for the prevention of environmental destruction, and exchanged experiences from the education system and the way of working in their countries.⁷

MPS “Gorgjija Pulevski” primary school installs an elevator for students with physical disabilities

(Published 22.07.2019)

The elementary school “Gjorgjija Pulevski” in the Municipality of Aerodrom will get an elevator, which will allow and facilitate the movement of persons with physical disabilities in the facility itself, the municipality said. The construction of the elevator started these days and is expected to be completed before the start of the new school year. The elevator is a donation from the US Embassy, and its value is about 57 thousand dollars. Construction of such lifts is also foreseen in the primary schools “Ljuben Lape” and “Lazo Angelovski”, the Municipality of Aerodrom informed.⁸

7 <https://skopskiportal.mk/aerodrom/50832-ou-gjorgjija-pulevski-del-od-proekt-za-ekologija-na-erazmus>

8 <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/ou-gorgjija-pulevski-dobiva-lift-za-licza-so-fizicka-poprechenost/>

Completely unusable classrooms at MPS “Gjorgija Pulevski” renovated

(Published 15.03.2021)

Today, the Mayor of the Municipality of Aerodrom, Zlatko Marin, inspected the renovation of classrooms in the elementary school MPS “Gjorgija Pulevski”, which are being completely restored these days. The classrooms, which have not been in use for 15 years, are being currently renovated by the Municipality of Aerodrom. This is the first time they are renovated since the school was built and will soon be adapted for teaching. They got a new floor, restored walls, brand new lighting, as well as new windows and doors.

“It is very important to provide better conditions for students and allow uninterrupted teaching,” said Mayor Zlatko Marin. He pointed out that, in the past years, all primary schools are being regularly renovated, and the construction of 4 new classrooms in the elementary schools “Lazo Angelovski” will be finished very soon, and classes will no longer need to be held in three different shifts. Also, with the predicted pace, the construction of the new facility of the school “Dimitar Makedonski” in Lisice was carried out.⁹

Euroins donates sensory room at MPS “Gjorgija Pulevski” – Aerodrom

(Published 13.09.2021)

The primary municipal school “Gjorgija Pulevski” from the Municipality of Aerodrom received a new sensory room made with the donation of Euroins Insurance, as part of the project “Be IN, be INclusive, be INcluded” which is funded by the European Union. This is the second donation made by Euroins Insurance for fully equipping the sensory room, after a sensory room was opened in the elementary room “Blaze Koneski” – Aerodrom.

The official opening of the sensory room was attended by the executive director of Euroins Insurance - Ravila Goberova, school representatives, as well as representatives of the project “Be IN, be INclusive, be INcluded”. “With this second donation, Euroins Insurance once again shows its social responsibility and unreserved support that it gives for the most vulnerable categories. We are happy that in a short period we managed to equip two sensory rooms in the schools “Blaze Koneski” and “Gjorgija Pulevski” that are intended for learning and the development of students with disabilities. At the same time, we are grateful for cooperation with the project “Be IN, be INclusive, be INcluded” and the opportunity to support inclusive education “- Ravilova, executive director of Euroins insurance, pointed out.¹⁰

9 <https://mia.mk/renovirani-celosno-neupotreblivi-uchilnici-vo-oou-orgi-a-pulevski/>

10 <https://denesmagazin.mk/evroins-so-nova-donatsija-za-senzorna-soba-vo-oou-gorgija-pulevski-aerodrom/>

14-year-old mathematician Alexis Tasic won a gold medal at the international Iranian Geometry Olympiad

(Published 17.03.2021)

With societal trends where young people often are directed towards social media, in Macedonia there are individuals who not only can stand shoulder to shoulder with the world's talents in science, but also can win the most important awards in international Olympiads. Young talents from Macedonia become the most important Macedonian ambassadors in the country, affirming successes and positive values. 14-year-old mathematician Alexis Tasic won a gold medal at the International Iranian Geometry Olympiad. He was a ninth grader at the primary school MPS "Gjorgija Pulevski" in the Municipality of Aerodrom. His desire to compete has moved his teacher Biljana since fourth grade. He had offered to apply to the municipal contest in mathematics. Thus began the mathematical story of Alexis. - I've always liked maths, but that love really started to soar above other subjects in my first competition - he says. His mother Elizabeth, who is a professor of mathematics, gave him love and truly supported his interest in mathematics. It was her, when he was little and when she recognized his talent, who gave him guidance and knowledge that could not be covered by regular classes. Alexis' shows that it is very important to engage in extracurricular activities where children with the same interests can work together and share ideas.¹¹

The Olympic Committee of Macedonia and the Municipality of Aerodrom marked the Day of sport

(Published 06.04.2021)

In the elementary school "Gjorgija Pulevski", today the Olympic Committee and the Municipality of Aerodrom marked April 6, the International Sport Day.

The president of the Olympic Committee, Daniel Dimevski and the principal of the school Marjan Jovanovski sent messages to all young people about the importance of sports.

"Sports can cross all boundaries, improve our physical and emotional health and inspire hope among the nations, but we will be able to return to this, only if we recover better and help in stopping the pandemic by ensuring that we will ensure that all are protected from Covid-19," Dimevski said.

As part of the International Sports Day, basketball, handball, cycling, football, volleyball, athletics and other sports matches were held, where all participants sent a strong message for the appropriate and long-term development of Olympism, sports, healthy life and fair play.¹²

11 <https://www.fakulteti.mk/job/17032021/matematiciharot-aleksij-tasikj-na-14-godini-osvoi-zlaten-medal-na-megjunarod-nata-iranska-geometriska-olimpijada>

12 <https://sportclub.mk/dominatsija-na-skandinavskata-zemja-nitu-sad-nitu-kina-nitu-rusija-nemaat-tolku-medali/>

Physical education - necessary for young people in times of a pandemic

(PUBLISHED 13.04.2021)

Professionals already alert - the lack of adequate physical activity can lead to serious problems in developing students.

The neighbourhood basketball courts. Once the place where young people got together, yet today they are almost abandoned. This is the image across the city playgrounds for more than a year, ever since the pandemic halted sports activities.

“All those sports competitions that we organize, as an alliance of school sports, at the level of the Municipality of Aerodrom, stopped and we could not continue,” says Dejan Stojanov from the School Sports Union of Aerodrom.

The situation is similar in the schools - physical education gymnasiums remained almost empty. Only the pupils from grades 1 – 3 go to school, while the others stayed home, attending classes remotely.

“We could assign some exercises that the children would be able to do. However, when it comes to exercises that involve a ball or sports that include a ball, the fact is that the children simply cannot do them in their homes. Or, perhaps, there is one percent of students who have backyards and could do them” Marjan Jovanovski, principal of MPS “Gjorgjija Pulevski” stated.¹³

Social network - Facebook

From the social networks, the municipal primary school “Gjorgjija Pulevski” uses Facebook, where it can be found under the name MPS. “Gjorgjija Pulevski”. We analysed their profile and it can be concluded that they are constantly updating their page. Information on the public and students, especially for the successes of students’, but also for the activities in the school are shared.¹⁴

Findings/Results

Communication is at the heart of school’s success in the community. While a proactive communications policy is essential, it’s not as easy as it sounds to create one. As communications evolve, however, even a robust website is not enough. Parents don’t want to check a website; they want information to be “pushed” to them through social media and news. The engagement and leadership by municipal elementary school “Gjorgjija Pulevski” in the part of public relations and social media shows that the practice of communications gives excellent results. The MPS “Gjorgjija Pulevski”, with their constant presence in the media and the presentation of all current activities, shows that the school has built an image of an open school for the media and the public.

13 <https://mk.voanews.com/a/5851718.html>

14 <https://www.facebook.com/MPSGjorgjija-Pulevski-%D0%9E%D0%9E%D0%A3-%D0%83%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%93%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0-%D0%9F%D1%83%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%B2%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8-Aerodrom-111658040266052>

The engagement and leadership by the school in the part of public relations and social media shows that the practice of communications gives excellent results. All activities undertaken by the municipal elementary school “Gjorgjija Pulevski”, are timely communicated with the public and students and parents are informed about all procedures.

Conclusion

Public relations and social media, in terms of school districts, aim to establish and properly maintain relationships between the school and its stakeholders to make more effective decisions and function at unprecedented levels. Public relations and social media grants school districts the opportunity to share pertinent and accurate information (through mutual collaborations and decision-making) on how the school is of benefit to not only the students but the society as well. Subsequently, other stakeholders (i.e., the public, businesses, realtors, etc.) should reciprocate and collaborate with their local schools in partnerships, supporting their endeavors to render exceptional service to the students. Effective, ongoing, two-way communication is at the heart of successful schools that help students succeed. Students simply do better when parents and the community are involved with schools. Test scores climb. Remediation rates dip. Graduation rates improve. And everyone understands and values their roles in the success of the school enterprise.

But solid communication is essential to creating the foundation for effective partnerships with parents and the community. Schools and educators need to carefully talk and listen as they build the collaborative environment that meaningful engagement needs to truly work. Parents too have very specific expectations for school communication. And those demands have been expanding as changing media and greater access to information-on-demand places more pressure on schools to be open, responsive and transparent. Public relations and social media help schools welcome outsiders in meaningful ways. It accommodates the diverse communication needs communities have. It identifies the meaningful ways in which everyone can take a stake in student achievement. And it provides the accountability framework for planning, monitoring and evaluating communication accomplishments and their links to student and school success. This paper will contribute as an example for further practice of public relations and social media in other schools, or with other words the guidelines that the schools need to follow toward a better image.

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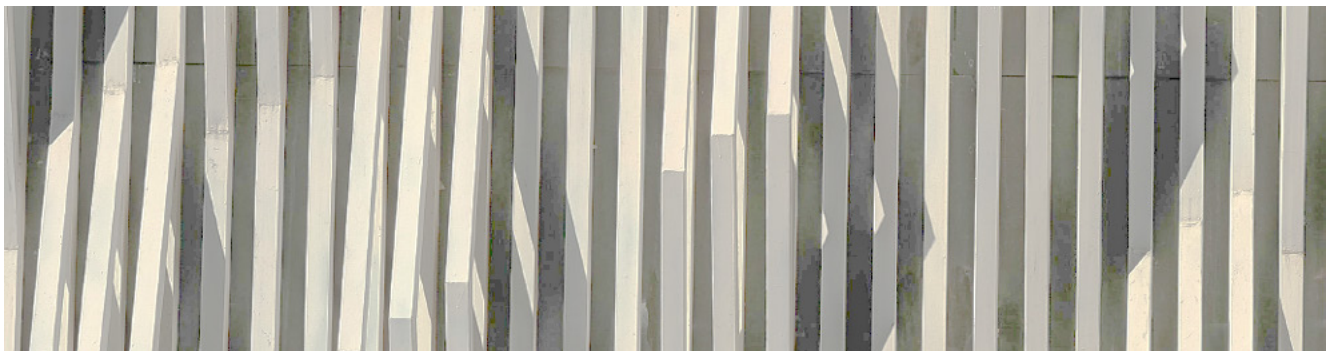


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