THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL THINKING AND FACT-CHECKING AS A BASIS FOR SHAPING THE MEDIA CULTURE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH OF MODERN YOUTH

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Abstract: The second decade of the XXI century is characterized by new approaches in human communication and society's interaction with mass media. Starting from adolescence and childhood, modern people spend a significant part of their time on social networks. These networks have evolved from simple communication and dating services to full-fledged information platforms. In complex social systems, where collective action is a vital life structure, the most crucial foundational principle is coordinating managerial actions and organizational measures with the laws of social self-organization. Creating something significant without understanding how social processes are organized and regulated is impossible. The task of creating a system of media culture in the country's educational system is, first and foremost, about meeting the needs of the learners, the specifics of the situation, and changing trends.

Keywords: information space, media culture, media literacy, propaganda, facts, fact-checking.

1 Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICT) have become an integral part of children's and young people's lives. Today, pupils and students quickly navigate the virtual world. They discover their own opportunities to use the latest information and communication technologies, determine their preferences and develop their new needs. As society has evolved into an information one, much of the activity and communication has moved to the virtual space. For this reason, media literacy is becoming essential.

The theoretical part of this study outlines the concept, substantiates its relevance, and identifies the components of the students' media culture formation. The practical part of the study includes an assessment of educational process areas that involve fact-checking and acquiring media competence skills.

The authors have drawn conclusions regarding the issues raised based on the study results. In particular, it has been established that effective integration of media literacy into the educational process contributes to increasing students' ability to resist the manipulative influence of media resources.

1.1 Literature review

Modern information resources, especially the Internet, have a strong and controversial influence on the education of the younger generation. They often become a leading factor in their socialization, spontaneous informing, a means of distance learning, and a source of non-formal education. At the same time, it is necessary to bear in mind the aspect of the vulnerability of children and young people to media content that can harm their well-being and development. The absence of effective self-regulation mechanisms in the information market cannot prevent the influence of low-quality media products, low moral ideals and values, and other socially harmful manifestations of information influence (Aimeur, Amri & Brassard, 2023), (Dwivedi, 2022), (Thornhill-Miller, 2023).

Media literacy is a part of media education that enables information consumers to analyze media messages critically and recognize propaganda, censorship, and one-sidedness. It also allows them to consciously perceive and critically interpret information data and separate reality from its virtual simulation. This type of literacy will enable them to navigate in the sphere of power relations (among different types of information), to understand the means of controlling public opinion that are used, the reasons for such attempts at control, as well as to understand the aspects that affect the purpose of presenting information (media ownership, their funding model, political preferences of the information resource owners, etc.) (Li et al., 2022), (Chen & Xiao, 2022), (Mourato & Patrício, 2019).

Teachers play an essential role in guiding self-learning and helping young people develop media literacy and critical thinking skills by using resources, tools, and platforms to adapt the format of each lesson to the learning process. Nowadays, media education and media competence training are prevalent. Many organizations and institutions help to implement them so that youth can adequately perceive modern reality and successfully resist possible negative influences (Gasevic, Tsai & Drachsler, 2021), (Kleimola & Leppisaari, 2022), (Coman et al., 2020).

The media education system should align with the leading modern trends in education modernization and work to strengthen progressive educational changes synergistically. The principles of organizing media education for children and adolescents are generally divided into the following:

- Socio-psychological principles related to the interaction of subjects and their relationships.
- Psychological and pedagogical principles, which are necessary to substantiate pedagogical influences in the current educational system.

The area of media pedagogical practice is between these two levels of media pedagogical organization. The latter aims to prepare a person for healthy and mutually beneficial interaction with the media space, focused on the student's development. It is based on a personalized and stylistic approach to the person while enriching their worldview and contributing to the efficiency of their life (Babu & Sridevi, 2018), (Sadeghi, 2019), (Cacheiro-Gonzalez et al., 2019), (Odit-Dookhan, 2018).

1.2 Aims

The practical aim of this research is to study and summarize the experience of a methodology for teaching media literacy and developing critical thinking in students. This paper has the following tasks:

- to define the concept of "critical thinking";
- to consider the principles of critical thinking as a key concept of state standards in secondary and higher education;
- to generalize the means and technologies of media culture education as a prerequisite for the mental health of the younger generation.

2 Materials and methods

A practical study of the current trends in the formation of fact-checking skills and the basics of the media culture of a person was conducted by assessing the following materials:

- practical recommendations of higher and secondary education institutions for the formation of media literacy;
- textbooks;
- scientific literature on the research topic.

Also, the authors evaluated the curricula of educational institutions and educational NGOs. These include the use of various tools for the formation and development of media

culture of young people as an age group that especially needs critical processing of media space information.

3 Results

The peculiarities of shaping young people's media culture can be clarified by highlighting the main provisions of media education implemented in general and higher education institutions (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The directions of media culture formation implemented in secondary and higher education institutions
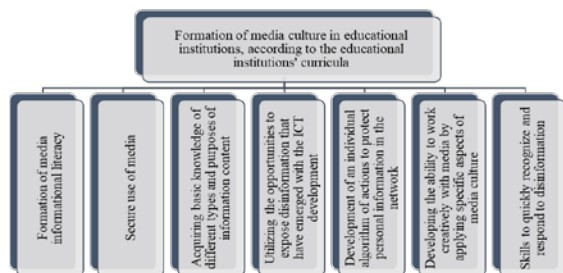
Source: compiled by the authors based on data from (Zaporozhchenko, 2022)

As Figure 1 shows, media education is provided through the development of media and information literacy, safe media use skills, basic knowledge about different types and purposes of content, and the application of an algorithm of actions to protect personal information online.

Current socio-political and economic global events determine the social need to form a creative personality capable of thinking independently. This person should be able to develop original ideas and make non-standard decisions. At the same time, the experience shows that school and university graduates today do not always know how to solve problems on their own. They lack initiative, creative imagination, and ingenuity. Therefore, the development of critical thinking becomes most relevant in times of intense social change, when it is impossible to act without constant adaptation to the new.

Modern curricula of general education institutions provide for the development of students' critical thinking. It involves the acquisition of certain skills that allow them to interact effectively in the information environment (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The components of pupils' critical thinking that are envisaged by the curricula of secondary educational institutions

Source: compiled by the authors based on data from (Zaporozhchenko, 2022)

The development of critical thinking is currently an essential task in school education. Students' formal acceptance of ready-made material does not allow them to acquire critical thinking skills and, therefore, quality knowledge in adulthood.

Critical thinking implies a comprehensive scientific evaluation of the positive and negative properties of phenomena in reality. Some scholars define critical thinking as scientific thinking, the essence of which lies in making well-thought-out and weighed decisions regarding the reliability of statements: whether we should accept it, reject it, or postpone it, as well as the level of trust with which we do it. Such thinking is characterized by controllability, reasonableness, and purposefulness. In other words, critical thinking is used to solve problems, draw conclusions, and make estimates and decisions.

The development of critical thinking is one of the value orientations proclaimed by state standards of secondary education. Critical thinking is an interdisciplinary skill that is developed during the study of subjects such as language and literature, mathematics and computer science, and others. Critical thinking is a key competency in education, and its development is the foundation of the educational process.

Media education is a highly relevant component of the educational process. There is an urgent social need for media literacy among young people in today's information society. An integral part of teachers' professional competence includes:

- the formation of teachers' awareness of the psychological and pedagogical peculiarities of youth socialization in the modern complex media space;
- the development of personal media culture of children of different ages,
- the cultivation of fact-checking skills.

Media education is a demand of the modern world. It opens up wide opportunities for the development of young people, their intellectual and creative potential, and their independent thinking skills. Media pedagogy develops the ability to navigate modern information flows, increases the media competence of pupils and students, and changes their position in perceiving various media texts - from passive perception to critical analysis of obtained information.

Some important competencies of a modern teacher include:

- the ability to teach media immunity skills;
- to promote the effective acquisition by students of the ability to abstract from the aggressive media environment and harmful information influences;
- to develop the necessary knowledge to protect mental health when consuming an information product;
- to filter information flows;
- to recognize hidden destructive influences in the school and university environment.

At the same time, the following skills are crucial:

- to analyze information sources and pay attention to the experts' opinions;
- to distinguish between the informational essence of content, falsifications, and information aggression in the media and social networks;
- to see the danger not only in distorted information but also in a diffused panic.

In the context of this research, it is worth highlighting the work areas of educational institutions and NGOs that have been conducting awareness-raising activities among young people over the past 10 years to protect their mental health from the effects of harmful media content (Figure 3).

Figure 3. A system of directions for awareness-raising activities of educational institutions and NGOs to protect the mental health of young people from the influence of harmful media content
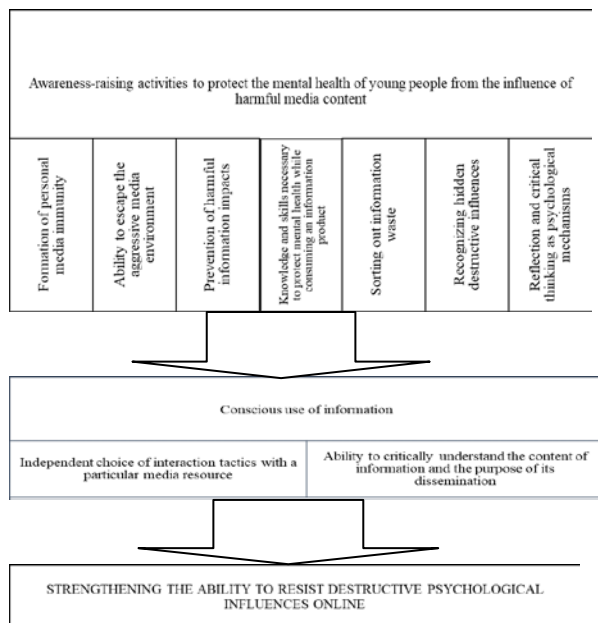
Source: compiled by the authors based on data from (Fletcher, Cornia, Graves & Nielsen, 2018)

As Figure 3 shows, developing the ability to resist destructive influences online requires a set of awareness-raising activities aimed at the conscious use of information by young people. At the same time, it is essential to independently choose the tactics of interaction with a particular media resource and to acquire the skills of critical understanding of information content and the purpose of its dissemination. As a result, young people develop the ability to resist destructive online influences.

During the educational process, education seekers are introduced to the basic rules of digital security. They develop the ability to maintain the confidentiality of their personal data, behave safely online, develop basic academic integrity skills, and train in digital (especially Info-media), psychological, and ethical competencies.

Today, the Internet plays a vital role in spreading knowledge. It provides both scientific and false literature, as well as twisted information called "fake news." The reasons for focusing attention on them lie in the design of online content, which is based on the desire for quick recognition.

Fakes are often spread by people who do not know that the information is of poor quality. At the same time, fakes are created to manipulate society and consciously spread disinformation.

Nowadays, it is extremely important to educate young people as critical thinkers in the information society. For this reason, educational institutions should be properly equipped with modern computer hardware necessary for ICT development, which is the key to preparing young people for the future.

4 Discussion

The evolutionary progress of humanity towards digitalization and virtualization of life, accelerated by various causes of forced isolation (pandemics, disasters, and wars), requires the study of virtual group interaction as one of the modern media education vectors. At the same time, the media space, with its multi-vector purpose and means of interpersonal communication, creates new opportunities for abuses by information providers (Burac et al., 2019), (Suresh, Priya & Gayathri, 2018), (Tran & Kuula, 2023).

Those who can think critically have their own opinions and can reason them out. They recognize the possibility of different views on a problem, relate the issue under discussion to their own practical experience, can listen to the other's opinion, and remain discreet and correct in disagreements. Thus, a person capable of critical thinking is a full-fledged member of society. Such a person will not only survive in the modern social environment but will also be tolerant of others. Moreover, this person will ensure the progressive development of humanity, recognizing one's rights and opportunities (Beerkens, 2018), (Cano, Murray & Kourouklis, 2022), (Yanqing, Guangming & Edwards, 2020).

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) play an essential role in developing the critical thinking skills of education seekers. They provide opportunities to develop students' and learners' thinking in the media environment. The media space helps to create well-informed citizens and critically-thinking readers who can transform information into knowledge. The high level of students' media culture plays a significant role in this, as it increases the number of information sources and prevents them from trusting only groundless facts. The media culture also helps students to compare different interpretations of facts, critically evaluate them, and avoid being manipulated (Cui, French & O'Leary, 2021), (Germain-Alamartine et al., 2021), Hazen et al., 2018).

According to the scientific literature analysis on this topic, significant consumption of media content for professional and personal development makes it necessary to learn how to adequately and critically perceive information using media products. The curricula of educational institutions and many public educational projects study the content, components, and mechanisms of media culture, the phenomenon of media competence, and the psychological basis for its development. The practical significance of mastering media competence skills contributes to the successful orientation of young people in the modern information space and the development of their qualities as active competitive professionals (Hou et al., 2022), (Moscardini, Strachan & Vlasova, 2022).

Teachers' organization of tasks to develop critical thinking and fact-checking skills, as well as students' quality performance, will ensure the development of abilities related to critical information analysis. This will be a step towards the development of better critical thinking in the future. In high school, the work with information sources and the acquisition of critical analysis experience becomes more complicated. Therefore, the knowledge of tools and technologies for critical thinking formation as a category of pedagogy and a cognitive method is mandatory at any stage of the educational process (Senoner, Netland & Feuerriegel, 2022), (Wright & Wernecke, 2020).

5 Conclusions

One of the main competencies of the educational process subjects is the ability to "think critically and systematically". This is reflected in the definition of the specific features of phenomena, events, ideas, and their interrelationships and the following abilities:

- to analyze and evaluate evidence and the weight of arguments in judgments,
- to consider opposing opinions and counterarguments,
- to distinguish between facts and their interpretation,
- to identify attempts to manipulate data,
- to use various resources and methods to assess the quality of evidence, sources, and information reliability.

The study analyzed the formation of students' critical thinking. The authors found that critical thinking is an essential skill that needs to be developed in secondary and university education.

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