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Education and media literacy in Russia: genesis and current trends
Evaluation of the level of media literacy of students HSE / National Research University Higher School of Economics

Abstract: Media in the USSR was introduced as a subject of study and education in the 1960s. Media education, as a major attempt at general democratic and humanistic teaching and social development, appears in the new Russia in the early 90s.
News Literacy is the new concept for Russia and the direction of education. Russia's first News Literacy course has been developed at the Faculty of Media Communications (National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow) in 2013. In 2013-2014 the course held more than a hundred undergraduate students. The curriculum includes lectures and seminars and consists of two-modules. The aim of the authors of the course was to show that News Literacy develops "critical thinking" and "critical autonomy" of the audience. To appreciate the result the implementation of the course has given, the research with the participation of more than two hundred students in two reference groups was conducted. The questions were divided into several categories: the use of media gadgets; variety of information channels/ sources; trusting different information sources. The first-year student group before the course and the second-year student group after the course differ greatly in their attitude to the core concepts of News Literacy.

Keywords: Russia, media education, news literacy, students, research

Media Education and Media Literacy is one of the most important parts in the life of a modern society, in which Media is understood as a «public benefit» and institution for the development of citizens.
Media (although the term was not used in its modern sense) in the context of education in the USSR was introduced as a subject of study and education in the 1960s. Media education[1], as a major attempt at general democratic and humanistic teaching and social development, appears in the new Russia in the early 90s. Historically, it is understandable why the development of media education has not received official support in the Soviet times. The government was interested in the idea, that mass audience (both adults and students) should think very little about the goals and objectives of a particular media text (especially of the "national and political importance"). The lack of a media literate public is always open to a wide scope of manipulations in the press, on radio and TV.

After perestroika media literacy concepts were complicated due to the following factors: researchers anxiously viewed media education through the usual international practice "ideological" theory (e.g. Len Masterman); the position of school teachers who have suffered post-Soviet trauma "negative identity" often interpreted commercial media in the new Russia exclusively as a "source of immorality and violence"; and neglect of understanding and developing interdisciplinary approaches in this area by the media industry and its researchers.

The activities of several local schools of education, the Russian Association for Film and Media Education received a boost as a result of cooperation with the UNESCO "Information for All" and the UNESCO Moscow Office with the support of the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications. But these efforts have not yet resulted in acceptance of an ambitious program in the field of media education and did not prevent the strengthening of the protective (often seen exclusively in the context of information security of the state) direction in the development of media literacy, which we see (and realized because of the mass development of the Internet and social networks) at the end of the 2000s.

Even today many Russian scientists and educators do not see much of a difference between media education and the use of information technology, distance learning and media technology in the educational process. In

[1] "Russian Pedagogical Encyclopedia" defines media education as the branch of pedagogical science, which studies "mechanisms of mass communication (the press, television, radio, cinema, etc.). The main tasks of media education are: to prepare the new generation for the life in modern informational conditions, to the perception of different information; to train people to understand it and to realize the consequences of its influence on human psyche; to help them master the means of communication on the basis of non-verbal forms of communication with the help of technical means". (Russian Pedagogical Encyclopedia. Moscow, (1993). P.555).

many schools media education is understood as the creation of school media[2].

In addition, twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet system, at a new stage in the crisis of values and disputes about Russia's place in the world, the treatment of media education accepted universally[3] is as a newly perceived threat to national interests and an attempt to impose alien standards. The conflict with Ukraine and the propaganda clash with the Western world sharply raise the question of the most important parts of media in modern Russia – News Literacy.

News Literacy is the new concept for Russia and the direction of education.
Russia's first course in News Literacy has been developed at the Faculty of Media Communications in 2013. This is a required course in the Baccalaureate curriculum.

In 2013-2014 the course was attended by more than a hundred undergraduate students (age: 18-20). The curriculum includes lectures and seminars and consists of two-modules (62 academic hours). The course also includes the topics: “The news in society: historical retrospective”; "News in today's society: patterns of production, distribution and consumption"; “The news in the modern communication space”; “The news and its "neighborhoods" in media space (the problem of identifying the news)”; “News and opinion: how to distinguish one from the other?”; “Balanced and fair news: myth or reality?”; “Information sources / Methods of information sources evaluation"; “Truth and verification / Methods of analyzing, decoding and deconstructing news (print media, TV, radio, social media)”; “Power of images/ Analysis of the visual content”; “News Literacy: research and pedagogical approaches”[4]. The course is partly based on the materials of the News Literacy course, suggested by The Center For News Literacy (Stony Brook University, School of Journalism[5]). Some examples of questions and tasks for tests and analytic trainings at seminars: “Analyze information sources in suggested materials (texts in print press and information agencies) and evaluate their reliability, being authoritative / informed and not biased”; “Truth and balance of news: explain the difference of the notions”; “News and raw information: what the difference?”; “Enumerate characteristics that enable to tell news from advertisement, propaganda, public relation etc.”; “Make deconstruction of TV news, evaluate context, quality of information sources, level of balance etc.”; “Analyze given information from blogs and social media and assess its reliability, being authoritative and not biased viewed from the News Literacy”; “Find examples to presentations, demonstrated at seminars (search of “inaccuracy” and “lie” in news)”.

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[2] It can be clearly seen from the subjects and results of the two Conferences held in Moscow with participation of the teachers and researches from different regions of Russia.
In March 2014 the Faculty of Media Communications (National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow) organized and held The First International scientific-practical conference «News Literacy and problems of modern media education» (*The First International scientific-practical conference // http://cmd.hse.ru/en/mediaconf/2014*). It attracted a large number of Russian and also foreign participants from the USA, France, Brazil, India, Poland, Armenia, Ukraine. A year has passed since the first conference and the condition of the Media Space in the world and in the country, as well as global and local information conflicts has made the subject of the Conference extremely acute.
In November 2015 the faculty held the Second International Scientific-practical Conference «Media Literacy and Media Education: Digital Media for Future” (*The Second International Scientific-practical Conference // http://cmd.hse.ru/en/mediaconf/*).

[3] Media education is concerned with the full range of media, including moving image media (film, television, video), radio and recorded music, print media (particularly newspapers and magazines), and the new digital communication technologies. It aims to develop a broad-based ‘literacy’, not just in relation to print, but also in the symbolic systems of images and sounds. Media education is concerned with teaching and learning about the media. This should not be confused with teaching through the media – for example, the use of television or computers as a means of teaching science, or history. Media education is not about the instrumental use of media as ‘teaching aids’: it should not be confused with educational technology or educational media. Media education aims to develop both critical understanding and active participation. It enables young people to interpret and make informed judgments as consumers of media; but it also enables them to become producers of media in their own right, and thereby to become more powerful participants in society. Media education is about developing young people’s critical and creative abilities. (A Policy Paper Prepared for UNESCO. Sector of Communication and Information by Professor David Buckingham. Institute of Education, University of London, England. March 2001// portal.unesco.org).
[4] The News Literacy Course program in Russian // http://www.hse.ru/edu/courses/133079617.html
[5] The Center For News Literacy / Stony Brook University, School of Journalism // http://www.centerfornewsliteracy.org

The aim of the authors of the course was to show that News Literacy develops "critical thinking" and "critical autonomy" of the audience, and media literacy (*formally introduced in 2013 by the Russian Ministry of Communications among the priorities of the country's media industry*) should be part of the media ecosystem and society itself.

The non-standard view for media-students when looking at news (a view from the perspective of the average consumer, rather than the producer's information content) allowed students to see the complexity of the problems of the modern information field, qualitatively change the perception of the news as a tool of mass communication as a whole and realize its manipulative possibilities.

The course program declares students' competence, formed as the result of the discipline study. In the end of the course student should know the main requirements for the media texts (accuracy, reliability, information resource references, distinguishing facts and assessments, pluralism of opinions and view points, balance of interests) and understand the importance of adherence to them; they should know the particularity of journalist text, informative and structural-compositional originality; know features of different journalistic texts and comprehend their specifics; be able to use the basics of humanitarian knowledge while preparing and analyzing journalistic materials; analyze social reality on the basis of philosophic and general scientific principals; use the methods of deconstructing media texts, including their own journalist materials.

During 2013-2014 more than 10 students chose News Literacy in the context of Russian information space as the subject of their scientific course papers, including successful defends of the following subjects: “Manipulative technologies in modern Russian media (on the examples of federal TV channels reports 2011-2014)”, “Social media and News Literacy in Russia (on the examples of social networking websites of Russian information agencies)” etc. The lecturers of the course became their scientific tutors.

While teaching the course, besides traditional Russian High School lectures and seminars (with the wide use of different presentations), active teaching methods as trainings, practical tasks and cases solution, team and individual projects work are used. During seminars business and role-playing games are held; besides every seminar includes cases on news deconstruction. We should stress that the course is especially important in the conditions of modern Russian information space, when media faces political difficulties that appear on the territory of Russia, when a certain point of view is imposed on the audience, when substitution of values, functions and mission of journalism takes place, when propaganda is given as journalism. Also it is important today not to “lose way” in modern media space, when the news travels through all media platforms: it is converted, rewritten and transformed; when any person can be the supplier of information. Consequently, the process of information verification is getting more complicated.

After the News Literacy course we can state, that the students, who studied the course are more likely to find errors and inaccuracies in news than their peers. The event and examples that illustrate the course make students (for the first time in their life) to start thinking about the information that they daily receive, carefully treat sources of information, analyze them, distinguish direct and indirect evidences, find all references, determine the approximate hierarchy. The course helps students to focus on the problem, how they know that the information presented in media is reliable. Analyzing the examples students become more attentive to the sources, begin to understand, how the process of information verification works and why it sometimes fails. While discussing media text students trace the balance kept by the author, find the faked information. Having studied the course students become leaders among their peers, sorting out the information and also explaining why it is reliable or not.

To appreciate the result the implementation of the course has given in National Research University Higher School of Economics, *the research with the participation of more than two hundred students was conducted.*

The study at the faculty in 2014-2015 confirmed not only the academic, but also a very practical benefit of the news literacy course. The surveys in two reference groups were conducted within the study.

The first-year student group, which has not yet studied the News Literacy, and the second-year student group, which has already completed the course, differs greatly in their attitude to the core concepts of News Literacy.

The following parameters and methodology was used: the questionnaire was given before and after the News Literacy Course in both reference groups of students (the first year students, who just entered the university, who didn’t attend the Course (Group 0) and those, who attended the Course in 2014 (Group 1). The students in both reference groups were given the same questions. All respondents have secondary education and study at

the faculty of communications, media and design (school of media HSE). Our hypothesis was: Before and after the course the level of critical thinking/ analyzing / deconstructing the news changes, also the tendency to build a more complicated reality increases. The method is survey and comparative analysis (groups before and after the course) with the use of mathematical methods. For data processing we used Software Statistica v.10.
News Literacy – is the new method of teaching. Search for information and doubt in its reliability is the process, which causes new questions about the correct way how to teach media literacy. And this process should be also studied.
In the research we have two statistical samplings (Group 0 and Group 1). We compared the difference from the statistical point of view (figured out if there was statistically significant difference; how the results differ before and after the course). The detection of the significant difference is defined with the Fisher criterion (two tailed fisher's exact test).

The questions were divided into several categories: the use of media gadgets; variety of information channels/ sources; trusting different information sources. Questions about social mission and functions of journalism and its professional ethics were included in the additional block.

The main categories of questions were indexed including indirect ones connected with geography, age, knowledge of language etc. We consider that more serious sampling should be taken to extend the research covering a greater number of respondents as they are entering this particular Course.

Now we can speak about the following tendencies: after the Course students refuse to believe one source of news and tend to check; the percentage of students, who don't trust news from the media changes from 4 to 32 percent before and after the course (we can speak about the appearance of critical thinking skills); before the course all the students know at least one foreign language, but no one uses foreign sources to receive news; the number of students who are able to find mistakes/unchecked information in the news is growing; there are just a few students after the Course who never feel deceived or given faked/unchecked information (20% - before course, 2%– after the course). There are statistically significant differences in students' attitude to "giving personal information in social media" before and after the Course. There is the direct connection between the Course and the amount of information that students share in social media. Students after the Course become more "open-minded". Media space becomes for them more understandable and less threatening. The skills of self-expression are developing. But there is also sad tendency – respondents refuse from one source and prefer foreign source to domestic. (So before the Course they didn't doubt the reliability of the information and didn't approach to it critically. After the Course they preferred not to doubt but refused to use familiar sources in favor of new sources).

Our hypothesis is confirmed. Before and after the course the level of critical thinking/ analyzing / deconstructing the news changes, also the tendency to build a more complicated reality increases. But students become much negatively disposed to all information. They often turn away from all sources instead of checking / critically comprehension. And now one of the main questions is: how to achieve a balance? Also it is very important to mention that students "acquire immunity". They start realizing how serious the profession they going to master really is and how great their responsibility they are going to take is.

Comparing and analyzing the answers from *additional block (about social mission and functions of journalism and its professional ethics)* of the first and the second year students, we can come to the following conclusions. The second year students who have studied the course keep "news diet"; demonstrate a deeper understanding of the political and social problems (take an active position as citizens); demonstrate an understanding of the mission of media; see into the information, that can or cannot be trusted; distinguish news from other types of information (propaganda, advertising, PR); are capable of detecting manipulation of the media. The first year students, who have just entered the university, mostly came from different Russian regions. Analyzing the materials we can notice that absolutely all of them have daily access to computer and Internet. Practically all of them watch TV every day. Members of this group generally receive domestic and international news from watching Russian federal channels. They also note, that they get the news from their relatives and friends and discuss it with them. Respondents of this group also say, that they read the news in social media and use Internet every day – mainly to communicate and watch films. Usually the students of this group don't check the news in more than two sources. In answer to the question: "While watching TV, listening to the radio, reading newspapers and magazines, how often do you have the filling that you are being deceived, giving faked and unchecked information or trying to impose a certain point of view?" they say "not very often". In answer to the question: "Imagine that you heard the news, but the information caused some doubt. Where would you tern to check it?" some respondents said: "that they would not waste time to check the information". Most of them wrote that they would check the information on the Internet without any special

references. Mostly respondents trust TV, noticing that Russian federal channels present the events “quite objectively”. Almost none of them consider social media reliable source of information, though all of them are registered in (at least) one social network. Nearly all the students wrote that they know foreign languages, but none of them wrote that they read foreign media. They do not have the slightest idea of the function of journalism, the mission of the profession; they confuse concepts such as journalism, advertising, public relations and propaganda.

In May 2015 (with the support of “Liberal Mission Foundation”) developers of the course ran the first News Literacy School course in in Russia, St. Petersburg. The program of the course was designed for "non-media students" from various regions of Russia. Moreover, within the framework of the school several discussions were held: “What is the "power of information" and who needs the "freedom of speech"?”; “The new generation of media": from popular-science formats to multimedia formats and interactive museums”; “Cinema and Media Literacy. How movies are used in the propaganda?”. The results of the study, which was carried out during the school, also show that the attitude towards the key concepts of News Literacy ("before" and "after" the training course) differs greatly.

According to a nationwide media literacy study (Zircon Research Group, 2009-2014[6]) and a study on the Russian media landscape (Levada-Center / Yuri Levada Analytical Center, 2014[7]), more than 50 percent of Russia's population gets their news from the single source of information and only 10 percent of the citizens use more than four sources in the same time. According to the research TV is the main source of information for most Russians and it does not depend on their place of living, social status or education. Almost everyone including those, who learn about current events “in the country and all over the world” from other sources, watch TV news. (Curious fact for 2014 – over 32 percent of Russians never used Internet).

This is yet another signal indicating how important it is for a modern audience to have News Literacy and feel more confident in the information field, not only for inexperienced users, but also for students studying journalism. Obviously, the News Literacy course generates students “taste” for independent research in this subject area, as well as triggers additional interest in such related questions regarding the theory of media ecology of the journalistic profession, the patterns of production, distribution and consumption of news in today's society.

[6]Zircon Research Group // http://www.zircon.ru/en/about/
[7]Levada-Center / Yuri Levada Analytical Center // http://www.levada.ru/eng/