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## **NEWS LITERACY in the system of formal and informal media education in Russia**

A multifaceted approach to the solution of media information literacy problems is not yet shaped in Russia as well as in many other countries of the world, although the society keeps placing greater emphasis on this issue.

At the same time, in general, there are all primary entities and institutions in Russia which can and have to participate in media literacy projects: scientific community, suppliers of audiovisual content, media editors' offices (regional mostly)<sup>1</sup>, educational and awareness-raising online platforms, governmental authorities<sup>2</sup>, mass media regulators, and civil society organizations. However, the lack of relevant systems, coordination of efforts, and sources of funding allows us to speak more about initiative projects and efforts of enthusiasts than the elaborated and coherent strategy of media literacy for various population groups.

Media education and news literacy as its part are not considered in the context of "public interest", and become neither compulsory nor wide (inter alia, for adults). They are basically implemented within the framework of informal education (system of additional education of children), professionally-oriented education aimed at creation of media content. Mandatory informational training in schools is regarded in an unjustifiably narrow way and is typically reduced to informatics courses and learning to use information technologies within the framework of which only computer literacy skills are developed. At the same time, the challenges of shaping knowledge and skills needed for understanding informational flows and media, both industrial structures and structures representing reality, mastering critical analysis and analytical information processing methods are not being dealt with.

The number of media and information literacy projects that have emerged and developed in recent years is not as high as it could be in a state with a population of more than 140 million people and the largest territory in the world. Let us review the most notable of them.

### **1. Media education, research, humanitarian projects of higher education institutions and particular people being scientific and university workers, or initiatives of civil organizations.**

Among the oldest projects which arose in the late 1980-s on the basis of the Chair of Socio-Cultural Development of Personality of A.P. Chekhov Taganrog Institute (branch of Rostov University of Economics) are the following: a project of cinema education and media pedagogy, and later the

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<sup>1</sup> About 10 private media holdings in the regions of Russia are developing the project of the World Association of Newspapers "Newspaper in Education", producing special newspapers and magazines concerning entertaining journalism and "understanding media" with the help of children and adolescents (Barnaul, Belgorod, Kaliningrad, Lipetsk, etc.).

<sup>2</sup> Starting from 2013, the Ministry of Communications, and since 2016, and the Ministry of Education have publicly supported the idea of media education for schoolchildren, but rather in its technological dimension, namely, computer/digital/Internet literacy and "protective" dimension implying security/restriction of harm inflicted by the Internet and social networks.

"**Information literacy and media education**"<sup>3</sup> portal created in 2007 which contains one of the largest collections of literature, documents, training programs on media and information literacy in Russian for the past 25 years. The editor-in-chief of the website, Professor A.V. Fedorov, is one of the first researchers of media education in Russia and the author of some monographs and books on this topic. Since 2007, he has been heading the first Russian magazine dedicated to pedagogical problems of teaching children, young people, and adults, through and on the material of mass communication, entitled *Media Education* (since 2014 it is published in electronic form only)<sup>4</sup>. Mr. Fedorov is also the President of the Association for Cinema Education and Media Pedagogy.

The activities of the **Foundation for Internet Development** (founded in 2000), are aimed at promoting the development of the Internet as a safe space for children and adolescents, building the capacity and readiness of representatives of different generations to make full use of all the capabilities of modern digital technologies. The "Children online" hotline was established under the Foundation's auspices<sup>5</sup>. G. U. Soldatova, Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Education, Doctor of Psychology, Professor of Chair of Personality Psychology at the Department of Psychology of M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University, and editor-in-chief of the *Children in the Information Society* magazine hold the position of the Director of the Foundation since 2005.

**The Public Collegium for Press Complaints** is a project that exists from 2005 (at the Human Rights Council). Its goal is the development of the honest journalism culture and affirmation of freedom of the media in Russia<sup>6</sup>. The Collegium serves as an instrument for self-regulation of the media, creating professional ethical standards and monitoring implementation thereof, thereby contributing to the quality of journalists' work. The media educational function of the project is expressed in the fact that any citizen can file a complaint concerning a specific media material/program that violates his/her rights or infringes his/her interests and get an expert advice that would help gain insight on each particular case. The database of considered complaints also serves as a high-quality source of information for forming an opinion about the modern Russian media landscape and current processes in the media field from the ethical point of view.

## **2. Projects for formal and informal education in the higher education institutions**

Certain courses and programs which establish a goal for forming media consumers' critical autonomy were established relatively recently in the country. Starting from the last decade, media criticism courses are given in several Russian universities on the media and journalism faculties (for example, Moscow, Belgorod, Kazan). Since the year 2013 media and news literacy courses were incorporated into educational programs of the media department at National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow): News literacy courses are given both in the format of formal higher education (for bachelors of journalism, non-media bachelors at the university-wide "Media and Mass Communications" minor), and in the form of informal, additional education (for non-media students and media teachers in short-term News Literacy workshops). Besides, the Media Department of the National Research University

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<sup>3</sup> About the portal // Information literacy and media education URL: <http://www.mediagram.ru/about/> (date of request: 01 May 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Internet version of Media Education journal // Information literacy and media education URL: <http://www.mediagram.ru/mediaed/journal/> (date of request: 01 May 2017).

<sup>5</sup> <http://detionline.com>

<sup>6</sup> The Public Collegium for Press Complaints URL: <http://www.presscouncil.ru> (date of request: 01 May 2017).

Higher School of Economics regularly holds an international scientific and practical conference "Media literacy, media ecology, media education: digital media for the future" with a special session and sections concerning news literacy.

The establishment of the **Department of Media and Information Literacy and Media Education of Citizens** (together with UNESCO) at Moscow State Pedagogical University in 2016 is an important event in the sphere of Russian media education. Apart from the research aimed at development of required competence and training programs for secondary and higher education, as well as for teachers of media and information literacy, the main task of the department is to prepare expert teachers in accordance with the latest standards of UNESCO in this sphere<sup>7</sup>. The Project Manager I. Zhilavskaya heads the Russian Association of Media Education Specialists.

**3. Pilot journalistic projects.** "Hello, is this a noodle remover?"<sup>8</sup> is an example of such an online project. It is a response to the original project of Alexey Kovalev, one of the few independent media literacy projects dedicated to fact-checking of information in Russian mass media. The cases for examination were selected by both Alexey himself and readers who sent him the examples of disputable media materials.

#### **"News literacy" as a driver of teaching media literacy.**

Modern social, economic and political period is characterized by the following: media opposition and distortion of media space ("post-truth", digital aggression, fake information, etc.); dismal state of intolerance with regard to media; post-modernist scepticism towards values of democracy and humanism; and fundamental changes of media consumption by young people who obtain information from social networks predominantly. They cannot distinguish news from advertising and facts from falsehood increasingly frequently, and do not realize the necessity to verify information sources.

Against this background, it is extremely important to observe "cognitive distortions" and stereotypes of media perception, and to analyse the ways they are manifested and overcome or, on the contrary, become permanent in the process of news literacy training. Observation over trainees (both adults and students) and polled data (collaborative studies with Svetlana Shomova and Anna Kolchina) give an idea of the fact that information rates, changing nature of media consumption and social pressure of the environment often have bigger and more massive impact than media literacy "vaccination". It is not a mere coincidence that in the process of a role-playing game even professionals follow media stereotypes, and students face situations (as shown by polls before and after the news literacy courses) when debunking of fakes and manipulations leads to distrust in all sources of information. To some extent, this "contradiction" effect is a confirmation of scepticism about many modern scholars to illusiveness of efficient rational and critical thinking and local media education.

The following three components of news literacy training are crucial:

- It is necessary to teach people of various age;
- Qualified media teachers are required for both formal and informal education;
- Participation of media experts (researchers and practitioners) for in training of media teachers plays a pivotal role.

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<sup>7</sup> Department of Media and Information Literacy and Media Education of Citizens (UNESCO) // Moscow State Pedagogical University URL: <http://mpu.ru/ob-mpgu/struktura/faculties/institut-zhurnalistiki-kommunikatsii-i-mediaobrazovaniya/struktura/kafedryi/kafedra-yunesko-po-mediainformatsionnoy-gramotnosti/o-kafedre/> (date of request: 01 May 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Hello, is this a noodle remover? URL: <https://noodleremover.news> (date of request: 01 May 2017).

**Conclusion.** The situation concerning the media education and media literacy projects in Russia is questionable. On the one hand, the country actively cooperates with UNESCO, foreign universities and centers in the field of training of experts and holding media literacy-related scientific conferences. Media literacy is introduced in some schools as an additional course. Annual studies are held which are secured by the state financial support. Following the results of such studies, 74% of the Russian population is media literate<sup>9</sup>. The number of scientific papers dedicated to this topic exceeds 500 in the last four years alone.

On the other hand, there are no more than a few dozens of large-scale ongoing projects and institutions in Russia whose topical area is media literacy. There are no such projects and organizations on the national level at all. While children have an opportunity to choose such an additional course (provided that the school's teaching program has it), adults and especially elderly (55+) citizens almost do not have any options. There is a deficit of both projects which disclose certain competence areas of the media and information literacy, and integrated digital portals which can not only answer an arisen question and kindle someone's interest in further learning of the media sphere, but also and advise the trajectory of search, education or suitable teaching aids.

Therefore, there are different institutions and different types of projects in Russia that are aimed at developing media literacy. However, only a small part of them is focused on non-children (school) audience and considers that the priority should be given to news literacy, development of "critical autonomy" and critical thinking, promotion of intercultural dialogue, and dispelling various stereotypes in the media environment. The scale of projects is most often local (regional). Their effect it's hard to multiply in the scale of such a country as Russia. The level of public awareness of such projects is limited, and independent financing which is not related to government structures is insignificant. However, the active development of interest in the topics of media ecology, media space, still makes it possible for us to speak about positive progress and increase of public interest in this sphere.

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<sup>9</sup> High level of media literacy is ascertained in Russia // Russian Ministry of Communications URL: <http://minsvyaz.ru/ru/events/34574/> (date of request: 01 May 2017).