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MEDIA EDUCATION AS A VACCINE AGAINST INFODEMIC AND A FACTOR OF COUNTERING MANIPULATION**МЕДІЙНА ОСВІТА ЯК ВАКЦИНА ПРО ІНФОДЕМІЮ ТА ФАКТОР ПРОТИПОКАЗАННЯ МАНІПУЛЯЦІЇ**

Media literacy is considered as a component of the information security of an individual in the context of growing tension in the media sphere, the spread of infodemic ("epidemic of disinformation"). Media education is called a condition for the development of a culture of existence in the global information space, of the skills media discourse independent critical analysis.

The author argues that the confrontation with infodemic is a kind of test for the level of media literacy, which a significant part of citizens cannot pass successfully. Gaps in mass media education cause a proportional increase in the influence of "information viruses" on social reality. The second part of the problem is represented by a paradoxical increase in the quality of misinformation and conjectures, the use of effective manipulative strategies by media actors, which led to the emergence of a phenomenon defined as "Post-truth".

The author comes to the conclusion: media education is able to resist manipulative strategies. This requires the implementation of the following directions: 1) the formation of skills for recognizing distorted information; 2) teaching an adequate response to the applied manipulative strategies; 3) creating an attitude to block the spread of fake messages; 4) teaching the reconstruction of objective information based on distorted fragments; 5) formation of an attitude to prevent deliberate distortion of information.

The mass introduction of tools for the formation of media literacy in the programs of non-formal education and informal learning will be productive. In this case, media

education can become a resource for information hygiene, an instrument of social therapy. This allows author to consider infodemic from the standpoint of not only risks and challenges, but also the possibilities of forming mass information literacy, establishing a new type of citizens' media culture.

Keywords: media education, infodemic, manipulative strategy, disinformation, media, Internet.

Медійна грамотність розглядається як компонент інформаційної безпеки особистості в умовах зростання напруженості медіасфери, поширення інфодемії ("епідемії дезінформації"). Медіаосвіту названо умовою розвитку культури існування громадян в глобальному інформаційному просторі, навичок самостійного критичного аналізу змісту медіадискурсу.

Автор стверджує, що протистояння інфодемії являє собою своєрідний тест на рівень медійної грамотності, який значною частиною громадян не може бути пройдений успішно. Прогалини в масовій медіаосвіті викликають пропорційне зростання впливу "інформаційних вірусів" на соціальну реальність. Друга частина проблеми представлена парадоксальним зростанням якості дезінформації та домислів, використанням акторами медіасфери дієвих маніпулятивних стратегій, що призвело до виникнення феномена, що визначається як "постправда".

Автор приходять до висновку: медіаосвіта здатна протистояти маніпулятивним стратегіям. Для цього необхідна реалізація таких напрямів: 1) формування навичок розпізнавання спотвореної інформації; 2) навчання адекватному реагуванню на застосовувані маніпулятивні стратегії; 3) створення установки на блокування поширення фейковий повідомлень; 4) навчання реконструкції об'єктивної інформації на основі спотворених фрагментів; 5) формування установки на недопущення навмисного спотворення інформації.

Продуктивним буде масове впровадження інструментів формування медійної грамотності в програми неформальної освіти та інформального навчання. В такому випадку медіаосвіта здатна стати ресурсом інформаційної гігієни, інструментом соціальної терапії. Це дозволяє автору розглядати інфодемію з позиції не тільки ризиків і викликів, але і можливостей формування масової інформаційної грамотності, затвердження нового типу медійної культури громадян.

Ключові слова: медіаосвіта, інфодемія, маніпулятивні стратегії, дезінформація, ЗМІ, Інтернет.

Introduction

The goal of media education is to develop the audience's ability to identify the political, social, commercial and cultural interests of media sources, to analyze and critically assess the media: "The standard of personality, the formation of which the educational reform is directed, is a cosmopolitan,

who is characterized by tolerance and readiness for dialogue, the ability to innovate, create and adapt to change” [6, p. 143]. Consequently, the characteristics of a media-competent personality determine the ability of an individual to organize his information connections.

Media educational programs have the main goal of increasing the media literacy of citizens, developing a culture of living in the global information space, skills of independent critical analysis of the media discourse content (including hidden). An equally important goal of media education is the formation of a sufficient level of resistance to manipulative influences from the media, understanding the possible mechanisms of media influence on the citizens’ consciousness, the content of socio-political discourse, and the formation of a distorted local and global agenda. From this point of view, media literacy can be considered as a component of the overall information security of an individual (social group) — a state of protection from unwanted outside influences associated with a possible loss of control over personal information and access to data that best meet the criteria of objectivity.

The second goal of media education that we have named is, perhaps, no less relevant than the development of media literacy itself. This is due both to the objective saturation and growth of the tension of the global information field, and to the manifestation of negative phenomena caused by the desire of political and economic actors to transform the global media sphere. Among similar phenomena actively discussed in academic discourse, in 2020, the so-called “infodemic” (“epidemic of disinformation”) [3, p. 57]. This concept was proposed by the World Health Organization in response to the widespread dissemination of distorted, false, inaccurate information about the COVID-2019 pandemic, but it can be applied in a wider context.

Purpose of the study

The aim of the study is to determine the potential of using media educational resources to counter information manipulation, to neutralize the communicative consequences of infodemic.

Research results

It is obvious that the existing conspiracy theories and non-traditional methods of treatment, which are actively shared by Internet users, can cause real harm to physical and mental health. On the other hand, such phenomena represent a kind of test for the level of media literacy, which a significant part of citizens cannot pass successfully.

Thus, gaps in mass media education cause a proportional increase in the influence of “information viruses” on social reality. However, this is only one of the factors of the current infodemic — another part of the problem is represented, in our opinion, by a paradoxical increase in the quality of disinformation and speculation, the use of effective manipulative strategies by media actors. Among those in modern studies, negative connotations, universality of statements, generalization of certain precedents, the use of an indefinite reference index (“as you know...”), the use of emotional and evaluative concepts instead of neutral ones, the use of the modality of duty, the blurring of the evaluation criterion, false metaphors, an appeal to the generally accepted norm, communicative sabotage, etc. (our translation. — S.V.) [1, p. 10]. The use of these technologies has led to the emergence of a phenomenon defined as “post-truth”: “...referring to or indicating circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeal to emotions and personal beliefs (of citizens)” (our translation. — S.V.) [5, p. 184]. Propaganda, framing, simulacra, and fake news have similar features.

Especially dangerous in the context of infodemic are technologies aimed at influencing the sphere of the unconscious, when the media audience deals with semantically correct information, which, nevertheless, forms the social attitudes desirable for the manipulator, makes adjustments to the existing public opinion. For example, such technologies are manifested in focusing attention on negative news of an economic, criminal, epidemiological nature, information about natural and man-made disasters, psychologically traumatizing the audience, inspiring a feeling of insecurity, loss of the usual stability of the world. In this case, the loss of a sense of reality by individuals becomes the basis for the formation of a subconscious mindset for the production of false information and the dissemination of distorted information. Thus, a person feels the opportunity to influence the information picture of reality, to confirm the opinion about the world as an unstable system.

We also note the technology of expanding the scope of the permissible, known as the “Overton window”, within which the transformation of ideas introduced into public discourse takes place according to the algorithm “unthinkable — radical — acceptable — reasonable — current norm” [4]. According to Overton’s theory, the beginning of an active discussion in the media of social phenomena that are negatively perceived and assessed by society (for example, the legalization of same-sex marriage, the permission of euthanasia, the introduction of criminal liability for violating the

self-isolation regime in a pandemia, etc.) can serve as a signal for the start of the process of its “legalization”.

The object of misinformation during the infodemic can also be the results of sociological measurements, which allow manipulators to act on behalf of the conditional majority: “Within the state — from the standpoint of the «majority of citizens», at the world level — from the standpoint of the «international community»” (our translation. — S.V.) [1, p. 14]. For example, on news portals, instant messengers and social networks, online voting services on discussion issues have become widespread, which are very vulnerable from a programmatic point of view. As a result, opinions, which are created and corrected by the manipulators themselves, are replicated. In this case, there is a pattern revealed in the middle of the XX century during the famous experiment of Asch: an individual opinion is formed (and changes) under the influence of the collective, the individual seeks to take a position that provides him with a state of protection and minimizes the risk of sanctions, that is, the position of the majority.

With regard to news discourse related to the COVID-2019 topic, an actual manipulative strategy is to use an authoritative opinion, which does not exclude the artificial creation of authorities. The method of referring to “British scientists” or “a group of researchers”, which has already discredited itself, is replaced by the analysis of real-life research works, carried out through the fragmentation of the material and the placement of accents necessary for the manipulator. This approach was used when submitting mortality statistics from COVID-2019, information on the development of mandatory vaccination programs, on the study of the effectiveness of the use of personal protective equipment in public places, etc.

Speaking about the peculiarities of the situation in the global information space, which actually led to the emergence of the concept of “infodemic”, the researchers focus on potential risks, suggesting that we should not even talk about manipulating information, but about zombification through the consumption of media content. In particular, V. Baghdasaryan notes that “zombification is all the easier when a person is atomized, torn out of the system of social connections and is captured by the whirlpool of information falling on him” (our translation. — S.V.) [1, p. 18]. Social distancing as a preventive measure for COVID-2019, which has become a common practice on a global scale, increases the susceptibility of citizens to distorted information, reduces “information immunity” at the individual and collective level.

The sphere for the spread of infodemic is mainly the Internet. Without denying the fact that the Network has a powerful potential to influence public opinion, we note another pattern: the search for information on the World Wide Web is often aimed at confirming already formed position (independently or under the influence of a manipulator). In other words, users choose online resources to make sure they are right, to show the validity and consistency of their opinion — it is important for us to be right, competent, belong to a “knowledgeable” community. And given the information scale of the Internet, it turns out to be easy to do, as a result any distorted idea sooner or later finds its adherents.

A question arises: what can media education oppose to manipulative strategies? In our opinion, the answer is related to the implementation of the following directions:

- 1) formation of skills for recognizing distorted information;
- 2) teaching an adequate response (at the level of perception and actions) to the applied manipulative strategies;
- 3) creating an attitude to block the spread of fake messages in the social environment;
- 4) teaching the reconstruction of objective information on the basis of distorted fragments distributed by the manipulator;
- 5) formation of an attitude to prevent deliberate distortion of information disseminated in public discourse.

In order to counteract the negative manifestations of infodemic, it is also necessary to form an understanding of the social and legal consequences of the dissemination of distorted or false information among citizens (the criminal and administrative legislation of a number of states provides for fines, restrictions or imprisonment for such actions [7]). These areas, of course, cannot be quickly implemented within the framework of formal education, the system of which is rather inert — the mass introduction of tools for the formation of media literacy in the programs of non-formal education and informal learning will be more productive.

Conclusions

In the formation of citizens’ resilience to manipulative media strategies, the educational environment is of particular importance. This is due to the influence of both subjective and objective factors. The subjective is the motivated readiness of the individual to assimilate (consume) information and the conscious need to be able to handle it. The objective factors include the existence of an individual in parallel

streams of heterogeneous information (political, educational, social, gender, etc.), which inevitably puts forward a number of requirements for the competence of the subject of communication. The influence of this factor becomes especially significant in the context of obtaining higher education, which requires the introduction of a multi-level coordinated model of media education in the “school — higher education institution” system. Researchers are increasingly paying attention to the fact that the main task of the educational system is to translate the experience of independent information handling.

The importance of media education as a vaccine against infodemic extends to all the main components of a person’s media competence: through working with mass information, an understanding of its place in modern society arises; subjective information filters are created to neutralize the influence of negative information; the skills of critical analysis of messages, as well as independent search for information are acquired; the ability to establish differences between real objects and their reflection in the media sphere develops [2, p. 195].

All the main agents of media communication socialization should be involved in the process of forming an optimal media education system: local communities of regions and educational institutions, regional and national media sphere, scientific and academic environment. This creates the basis for informational socialization, although it is not a panacea for the communication crisis in the era of infodemic. Nevertheless, media education is a powerful resource that allows you to create conditions for the establishment of a new paradigm of personal competence and the formation of an innovative type of civic interaction in the media sphere.

In this case, media education can become a resource for information hygiene, an instrument of social therapy, counteraction to stressful and panic reactions spread by infodemic and representing a social threat — no less than an economic crisis. This allows us to consider infodemic from the standpoint of not only risks and challenges, but also the possibilities of forming mass information literacy, establishing a new type of citizens’ media culture that is resistant to manipulation.

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