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About the journal

Kairos – Journal of Media and Communications Review was 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 is 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 published 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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CRITICAL THINKING – A SIGNIFICANT FACTOR FOR IDENTIFYING AND DEALING WITH STUDENT MISINFORMA-TION

Maja Mitevska-Poceva

ABSTRACT

Information technology advances have changed how users search for and use information. Technology development creates opportunities and threats to how we perceive information, politics, and relationships. The media's influence on a person's development is of great importance. Given that children and young people are in contact with the media from an early age, the need for them to be media literate is clear. The younger generations must become familiar with media literacy from an early age because the media are part of our everyday reality. It is necessary for smooth functioning in all spheres of society. Media literacy should be represented in all levels of formal education, given special attention, and offered systemic solutions to create well-informed and media-literate citizens. It is important because it contributes to developing and applying critical thinking skills, understanding how media messages influence society and shape our culture, recognizing misinformation, and preserving citizens' rights. Through this study, we will try to get a clear picture of what extent is the development and application of media literacy among the youngest students, which methods should be taken to raise awareness, with which we will strive to influence the creation of media literate persons who further in life they will be able to recognize fake news or disinformation independently and will successfully deal with them.

Keywords: information, media, media literacy, education

1) INTRODUCTION

Considering that in our everyday life, we spend a huge part of our time using various media (television, radio, newspapers, magazines, Internet), and when we add to that the advertisements that constantly greet us even on the street on billboards and light advertising panels, we can conclude that we are constantly exposed to a large amount of information, messages, and content. Our environment bombards us with a variety of raw as well as processing information and content that affects our consciousness.

Today, the media is an essential part of a young person's everyday life. Without a doubt, many young people spend most of their day in front of the TV or front of their computer, much more than with their family or at school. Many experts claim that in terms of education, the media has taken the place of the school and the family in modern society. Radio, television, computers, and the Internet are our dominant cultural tools for searching, selecting, collecting, storing, and transmitting knowledge. Increasing knowledge through the use of mass media and communications has both its advantages and disadvantages. While adopting their good points, we should try to avoid the negative ones. That is why we need to develop media literacy, especially among children, a population born and raised with new information and communication technologies present both at home and school. The new reality imposed by the accelerated development of new media and social networks encouraged the professional and academic public to devote more attention to developing the necessary knowledge and skills that they should modern man possesses to safely and responsibly engage and act in the networked digital world, as well as to remain resistant to media manipulation, misinformation and other harmful phenomena caused by the media. Media literacy also places an important emphasis on the need for education that will improve our user experience with the media and on increasing the positive opportunities in communication that they offer, all with the aim of our better involvement in society and in the decision-making processes that are of public interest.

The Internet is a natural environment for the new generation. Children today don't learn how to use a computer. They use a computer when they learn. Through the search engine, one can find an answer to any question. In other words, the Internet has penetrated all areas of human life. In the future, technology will play an even greater role in people's lives. However, the school remains the main institution in the direction of the educational system of young people. The basis of media literacy is the ability to access, understand, analyze, and critically evaluate different media and media content and create communication content in different contexts. It is necessary for smooth functioning in all spheres of society, especially in the digital world and the "new reality" of social media. Those in the know say that media literacy should be represented in all levels of formal education, special attention should be given, and systemic solutions should be offered to create well-informed and media-literate citizens. It is important because it contributes to developing and applying critical thinking skills, understanding how media messages influence society and shape our culture, recognizing misinformation, and preserving citizens' rights. Through this paper, we will try to highlight the importance of media literacy among the youngest population, more precisely among students from the beginning grades.

2) LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of the Internet in the 90s of the 20th century and its dynamic development in the first two decades of the 21st century drastically changed the structure of the media system. Com-

munication gradually spread to the Internet as an additional part of public communication. As a result of the increased use of online media and the development of communication platforms, phenomena or side effects such as fake news, propaganda, and disinformation have increased. 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.

The rapid advancement in digital technologies and the concomitant increase in internet use have given rise to reflection and research on the importance of preparing students to access, use, understand, and critically evaluate all forms of media. The expansion of the time spent on the Internet by students has increased the risks of problematic Internet use among children.

Using the Internet, students publish various information content and encourage mutual communication and interaction. Textual content, video materials, and images are most often used. After the publication of all this informative content through the global social media network, they become available to the general public. That is, the contents can be recommended from one to another, forwarded, and comments can be left. Millions of people can be present on social media at one moment. That's why social media began to be used massively in propaganda, in advertising because they influence public opinion.

Students are increasingly at risk of being exposed to various forms of misinformation, propaganda, radical and violent messages, cyberbullying, and hate speech. The spread of disinformation and "fake news" represent acute challenges for the educational systems of the member states. Students (and indeed all citizens) need to develop the appropriate knowledge and develop skills to navigate these rapidly changing environments. Research shows that media literacy education can positively affect students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes in analyzing and critically understanding media and misinformation.

Over time, more and more attention is paid to developing children's communication skills, that is, developing knowledge and skills needed for the safe use of the media, but also for a critical understanding of media content and the way the media themselves function. Today, special attention is paid to the Internet (Internet literacy), to the promotion of the safe use of the Internet by suppressing illegal, harmful content and fake news.

Media programs the habits of young people in terms of their use and way of viewing the world, influencing expectations regarding interpersonal relationships, personal attractiveness, success, fame, health, problems, and their solutions. All those who have a low level of media literacy know enough to receive the media message but not enough to be able to protect themselves from the imperceptible but constant influence in the formation of attitudes in life. When the media, by gradual influence, determines the meaning in people's lives, it means that the behavior, attitudes, and emotions of those people will be in line with such determination. A higher level of media literacy will allow young people to defend themselves from media benchmarks, erase the codes that the media tries to embed in their consciousness, and replace media programming with their own ideas.

Media literacy is the ability to think critically and recognize and appreciate all media content – the ability to "read" media messages and their meaning. Becoming media literate is not about memorizing facts or statistics about the media but about learning to ask the right questions about what we see, read or hear.

In the flood of all kinds of media, traditional and social, and all kinds of content – true and false, twisted, manipulative, tendentious, biased – the messages are always not clear and understandable. That is why it is important to recognize the role and importance of media literacy.

The process of learning media literacy includes not only reading and perceiving but also working, experiencing, experimenting and understanding. Here the student creates, produces, and under

stands the information through his personal experience, interpretation, imagination, and work. Media literacy gradually began to take shape as an educational concept in the 70s of the last century, and UNESCO's "Declaration on Media Education" from 1982 traced the development path of this discipline, thus opening up the possibility of its integration into the educational system. process. Media literacy was further defined and conceptualized in 1992 as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate information in all its forms" (Aufderheide, 1992), and a media literate person is "anyone who can decode, analyze, evaluate and produce both printed and electronic media."

Media literacy work with children is a major challenge of immense importance. Working with children is both necessary – due to their high exposure to media content, they cannot understand fully – and challenging for at least two reasons.

First of all, in terms of technology, inversion of traditional roles is common, and when using certain devices (gadgets), children often know much more than their parents and teachers. Second, the approach should be tailored to each age group. Being media literate in the 21st century means being aware of the impact of the media on the individual and society, having an understanding of the process of mass communication, the ability to analyze and discuss media content and its context, developing strategies for critical analysis of the media, independence from the influence of the media and an open mind to accept and experiment with the new teaching and learning tools offered by the information age.

3) RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As previously mentioned, media literacy should be represented in all levels of formal education, it should be given special attention, and systemic solutions should be offered to create well-informed and media-literate citizens. It is important because it contributes to developing and applying critical thinking skills, understanding how media messages influence society and shape our culture, recognizing misinformation, and preserving citizens' rights. Through this study, we will try to get a clear picture of what extent is the development and application of media literacy among the youngest students, which methods should be taken to raise awareness, with which we will strive to influence the creation of media literate persons who further in life they will be able to recognize fake news or disinformation independently and will successfully deal with them.

Content analysis, in combination with qualitative methodology, will be used as the method of this scientific paper. Using content analysis, we will perceive and analyze to what extent the development and application of media literacy among the youngest students, which methods should be taken to raise awareness, with which we will strive to influence the creation of media literate individuals who later in life they will be able to independently recognize fake news or misinformation and will successfully deal with it. Data sources will be from interviews, field research notes, or conversations.

The methodological approach in research is quite important in terms of focus. For the topic to be explained more reliably, above all, a combined research method was used. First, data from literature from public relations and social media were sublimated. Then the qualitative method was also used, i.e., delivering questionnaires to students from the smallest classes. Oral surveys or conver-

sations were organized for the students who had not yet mastered the initial reading and writing. Subsequently, the analysis of the questionnaires followed, from which relevant data were obtained for this scientific paper.

4) FINDINGS / RESULTS

The research for this paper was conducted on two groups of respondents. The first group of students from the first and second grades, and the others from the third, fourth and fifth grades. There were 110 students from 7 different elementary schools. In both groups, parliamentary polls or questionnaires were used in the same way as with the first group, who answered the questions through a direct conversation with the teacher (annex 1), and the second group of students answered the questionnaires (annex 2) independently and anonymously. They received the questionnaires in printed form, and each student answered them according to his own opinion. They were informed that they were anonymous. The research was based on the data obtained from the two questionnaires.

To assess media literacy among younger students (the first group), students answered questions adapted to their age through direct communication. To the question "Do you use the Internet?" almost all students answered in the affirmative. This was not unexpected because we have witnessed that no child does not use a mobile phone to watch certain content (cartoons, children's songs, etc.). Through the conversation with these students, we managed to find out other facts, such as that they know a greater number of sites that they turn on and search on their own, and their parents allow them to spend a longer period of time on the Internet. The question, "Do your parents check you while you are online?" may be one of the important facts that we have come to, which is that the parents of a large number of students (about 76% of the respondents) do not check what they are doing. With these facts presented by the students, we can freely say that parents don't have control and insight into what their children see on the Internet or any other media. This situation can be cited as the parents' insufficient free time and commitment to other activities.

The second group of students answered a questionnaire (annex 2) adapted to their age. Through the questions "How much time do you spend on social networks?", "How many different social networks do you know?", "How many different social networks and media do you use?" we learn that this category of students also spends most of their free time on the internet, using multiple types of social media. This means that the internet and social networks are their everyday life, where they acquire different types of information. "Do you share information on social networks without reading it carefully?" more than 90% of students answered in the affirmative. Based on the answers to some of the questions in the questionnaire, it could be seen that as a reason for sharing certain information without reading it carefully, they would mention the following:

▶ if the information was shared by their friend (trusting the friend, they will not check the accuracy of the information);

▶ if a certain title of the information caught their attention, i.e., they think it is interesting (assuming that it has interesting content), they would share it without checking its content;

▶ if a friend asks you to share some information or to like it (vote for a certain prize game, competition, etc.), you would also do so without checking the reliability of the information.

To the question, "Do you know how you can check the accuracy of a given information?" even 98% of respondents answered that they were unfamiliar with the procedure for checking the veracity of a

given information. The next question was, "Do you know what the shared information might be?" to which a large part of the respondents answered partially. It's all because of insufficient information about the same. We would put special emphasis on the questions about information and misinformation, their meaning, impact, and consequences of the same, where more than 90% of the respondents answered that they have almost no information, that is, they are not at all familiar with it.

Based on the conducted questionnaires and the obtained results, we can come to the conclusion that the students in the initial grades have very little or no knowledge of media literacy and the negative consequences that may arise and with which they would encounter.

We need to develop skills that will help us recognize values and ideas in media content, in the news, in entertainment production, and on the Internet, especially when they are hidden and subtly conveyed. That way, we can make correct and reasoned decisions about which messages we will accept and which we will reject. Media literacy teaches us to be able to ask appropriate questions and support our points of view with examples. Tracking the key points of media literacy allows us to know what was published and when, why it was published, and most importantly, what is our opinion about that article, video, etc.

5) DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The modern education system inevitably includes media literacy at all levels – from preschool to higher education. It is a concept that is systematically and continuously upgraded by the development of new media and forms of expression. From the aspect of the involvement of media literacy in the educational system in Macedonia, which faces numerous challenges and reform processes, a clear conclusion is reached that this sphere is underrepresented. The need for immediate improvement in this area in primary education is a necessity detected by teachers but also by students. Based on the findings obtained from the research, the need to introduce media literacy from the youngest age of the students is seen.

The general conclusion from the discussions with teachers in primary education is that there is a lack of continuous training for media education, even though the professional upgrading of the teaching staff is foreseen by the Law on Primary Education. This is because technology and new media are living matters, and teachers must keep up with the opportunities they offer. Similar to other countries, our educators also feel the gap in the knowledge and skills possessed by students and teachers (especially for computer and digital literacy), acquired mostly outside formal education. It requires new, modern learning methods that keep up with modern online living.

The need to study media literacy stems from the fact that the media are an indispensable part of the life of a modern person and, as such, undoubtedly influence the formation of opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of the audience. Therefore, it is necessary to accept that today, in the socialization, upbringing, and education of young people, other factors, such as the media, and not only parents and school, participate. That is why the goal of media literacy is to increase the understanding of the role and function of the media in society, but also to develop the basic skills for research and expression of citizens in a democratic society.

Media literacy and education imply the ability to receive, review, question, and check the information and to select and fit the mediated information with the other available information. It also implies an understanding of how the media create the messages and content they send to the public and how the audience receives and elaborates on them.

We live in a time when our media coverage is changing rapidly. We are surrounded by different media forms and platforms, from printed paper to digital content. This includes electronic media, print media as well as online content. From the research itself, we concluded that students mostly use online content. In doing so, they become creators and distributors of certain information. By simply clicking on "I like" or simply by sharing a video, post, link, photo, etc., they become direct participants in the process of spreading the news and transmitting the information. Our friends, relatives, and family see this post and trust us, but sometimes mistakenly consider the information reliable and trustworthy, which we may not have checked ourselves.

The information we come across on social networks or in the media itself can be true or false. From the conducted research and the obtained results, it can be seen that the students cannot recognize true and false information. They also have little knowledge of its negative impact. Disinformation and misinformation are terms that are often used interchangeably. But although both carry certain dangers to society, they are not the same. Misinformation is misleading, inaccurate, or contains false information, often communicated without the intent to deceive.

Disinformation is most often information shared with the intention of deceiving people. Here the goal is not benevolent. On the contrary, an attempt is made to create division or to arouse fear.

The rise of targeted advertising undoubtedly helps spread misinformation and disinformation. Social media platforms can now profile their users, collecting information about which websites they visit and which posts they like, share or otherwise interact with. It allows them to more precisely target posts and news they are likely to agree with or want to see.

Considering the different forms of malicious information students face daily, it is necessary to familiarize them with certain ways of identifying the reliability of those information, images, or videos.

Identifying disinformation and misinformation can be difficult. A key part of identifying them is developing a critical mindset about the information you consume and checking it against other sources. To verify the reliability of certain information, one should know who the author is and whether it's a reliable source. It is necessary to take into account the person who is the author of the information to check if it is seen as a credible source, if reports in the past have been accurate, and also as an important piece of information; it is to know what other sources are saying on the subject. It is also necessary to check if other sources have shared that information or if it is based on someone's opinion. As an important segment during the research, we will also mention checking the date of publication of the information because sometimes old publications and information are manipulated.

Checking the information's date is one aspect they should check. We are faced with much information that is possibly quite old and from a source with the specific purpose of conveying misinformation that will confuse readers. Apart from the date, the source of information also plays a significant role. Students should check if another source has published the indicated information. They often trust the source and do not check it, leading to misinformation. Identifying and separating disinformation and misinformation can be difficult and often requires extra effort on the reader's part, especially on the student's part.

It is also important to remove the financial incentives that encourage misinformation and disinformation on social media. Currently, platforms make money by delivering targeted content. Popular content earns more than unpopular content. Misinformation and disinformation need to reach their target audience to harm. They rely on microtargeting to reach the people most likely to be affected.

From the questions of this research, we learned from the students that with a large number of them, it happens that certain posts, news, pictures, or information published on social media,

and they don't look at them at all, and a feeling of anger, condemnation, hatred, anger, disappointment, confusion, etc. An emotional reaction appears in them, which they continue to share without identifying or checking, thus contributing to misinformation. That happens either because of a well-thought-out photo or caption, which the person sharing it knows will attract readers. To prevent the spread of this type of misinformation, students (readers) need to stop, think, check the news or information, and only then reach a conclusion. Our own emotions should be removed to help prevent and share something that we are not sure if it is true or not.

One of the simplest ways of manipulating and misinforming students and other readers on the Internet is through photos and videos. Manipulating images is usually done by sharing old photos, and the person who shares them claims that it is new and even connects it to an event that he is aware of will attract attention and thus cause emotions among readers. Another phenomenon is the distortion of the truth, i.e., the sharing of edited photos when certain components are removed from them, and others are added.

Photo manipulation is becoming easier due to the rapid advancement of technology. To protect students and other readers from this method of spreading misinformation, it is necessary to distinguish between an authentic and edited photo or video. Students, like other readers, must think critically about the information they consume, making an effort to question it and open their minds to opposing views. When well-informed, you can decide what to believe and what not to believe. Being exposed to such a variety of information creates a certain vulnerability for us, considering that information is full of bias, manipulation, propaganda, fake news, hate speech, and whatever intentions the author or authors might have. Information disorders (conscious and unconscious misinformation, malicious information) create confusion and misunderstandings, especially among elementary school students.

Since fake news contains wrong (incorrect, untrue) information and usually has a hidden and manipulative agenda (commercial, political or corporate), not recognizing it leads people astray. It contributes to mutual misunderstandings and is a problem in overcoming conflicts. On the other hand, citizens remain curious but "lazy buyers" of information who do not have time to check all the news that passes through the media daily. This creates room for further growth of misinformation by spreading fake news.

6) CONCLUSION

At a time when the media influence our lives daily, media culture is noticeably neglected in school curricula and teaching processes. And it is necessary to empower citizens to apply media literacy, which will enable them to cope with the dangers and benefits of the increasingly complex media environment. The development of media literacy is a complex process that requires a long-term investment and a systematic and strategically developed national approach. The situation is too alarming, and any delay regarding the development of media awareness causes pessimistic forecasts regarding building a civilized social system.

Media literacy should develop the ability of young people to understand, read and penetrate the core of media content and enable them to perceive, analyze, evaluate and create the media message in different ways. Being exposed to such a variety of information creates a certain vulnerability for us, considering that information is full of bias, manipulation, propaganda, fake news, hate speech, and whatever intentions the author or authors might have. To save ourselves from drowning in this sea of media and information, we need to acquire basic skills and competencies. We need to learn ourselves and then teach others how media and information work. What techniques are used, by whom, and with what intent? We need to develop critical thinking skills, and media and information literacy can be helpful in this regard.

Disinformation can obstruct the public's ability to debate issues and make decisions in three ways. First, both provide false information to students and other readers, sometimes false analysis, and thus lead students to make decisions that are contrary to what they want or are in their best interest.

Second, disinformation is not intended to foster public debate. Quite the opposite. They are almost always polarizing, deliberately pushing people to adopt extreme opinions and beliefs that leave no room for compromise. As the possibility of finding a middle ground narrows, it becomes increasingly difficult for politicians to defend positions of compromise and find solutions that allow for a happy and safe coexistence for all.

Finally, even if disinformation (or misinformation) is not accepted as factual by those who consume it, the effect of exposure sows distrust in media and institutions. When students are served conflicting messages that are extreme and do not fit in the slightest, they lose confidence in all sources of information, including relevant news.

Disinformation is most successful when targeted at those who consume news from a small and consistent number of sources. This often means that the person has chosen those sources and is destined to trust them. It also means that such people are less likely to check information outside their list of sources. The rise of targeted advertising also helps spread misinformation and disinformation. Social media platforms can now profile their users, collecting information about which websites they visit and which posts they like, share or otherwise interact with. It allows them to more precisely target posts and news they are likely to agree with or want to see.

A promising approach for developing media and information-literate students as well as media-literate citizens is through education, which includes all forms: formal, informal, and informational. Formal education occurs in educational systems, such as schools and universities. In contrast, non-formal education takes place outside these formal learning environments, usually in the local community, but is carried out with a specific intention (and non-formal educational activities aim at acquiring specific knowledge).

In short, the experience encouraged students to improve their learning process, made classes more inclusive, and improved students' critical thinking skills. Media literacy in formal education has another added value; it challenges traditional ways of teaching where students are considered "empty vessels" that come to school to be filled with information. In contrast, media literacy considers teachers and students as active contributors to knowledge transfer and learning. Media literacy strives to teach students "how" to think, not "what" to think.

The general conclusion from the discussions with teachers in primary education is that there is a lack of continuous media education training. The teachers stated that the media literacy training they received was personally and professionally useful. Students gained new perspectives and views on media and information reflected in all subjects (e.g., asking challenging questions, using different sources to compare information, and not just reproducing content but going a step further and making their analysis). The introduction of media literacy in school curricula, starting from the youngest ages and beyond, is necessary for students' media literacy. This alone will enable students to start thinking critically before making a decision. It would help them deal with and spread incorrect (false) information and disinformation. This would be one way of improving students' safety when using the media and the information published by them.

What is important to understand is that media literacy is not about "protecting" children from unwanted messages. Media literacy, therefore, is about helping students become competent, critical, and literate in all media forms so that they control the interpretation of what they see or hear rather than letting the interpretation control them.

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MAJA MITEVSKA-POCEVA

OOU "Braka Miladinovci"
St. Goce Delchev 2 – Probistip, North Macedonia
majamitevskapoceva@yahoo.com

Maja Mitevska – Poceva is a department teacher in the primary school "Braka Miladinovci" in Probistip, North Macedonia. She has worked for two years in the UNICEF project for the education of mothers from rural areas and was the coordinator and trainer of large projects such as language literacy in primary classes, interethnic integration, media literacy, etc. In 2018/2019, she was selected as the best teacher of the year.

(SOCIAL) MEDIA LITERACY COMPETENCIES IN THE WORKPLACE: ENHANCING THE COMMUNICATION OF YOUNG EMPLOYEES

Bojan Kitanovikj, BSc.
Ivana Kitanovikj, MSc.

ABSTRACT

New media technology and social media impact all employees directly and indirectly, becoming a ubiquitous element of the workplace. Members of organizations feel the impact on an individual, group, organizational, and even societal level. Young people especially are heavily influenced by new digital media channels, including social media platforms, which later on impact their communication as they enter the workforce in large numbers. Moreover, their ability to work together, collaborate and coordinate among themselves relies on synchronous and asynchronous communication that happens over digital devices, mainly spurred by various contemporary working arrangements (remote work, hybrid work, coworking, working on mobile technology, and similar). This makes using social networks and other digital media platforms and tools imperative for successfully completing work-related tasks and objectives (Ligurgo, et al., 019). Therefore, enhancing (social) media ccompetencies in the workplace is essential and shapes new ways of working and communicating on different organizational levels. This paper will attempt to answer what the social media literacy competencies needed by young employees to communicate better in a professional work environment are. Answering this question will be addressed from the perspective of a social media literacy (SML) model rather than from the technical aspect. As a data collection method, the authors conducted semi-structured interviews with office workers, whereas the results of these interviews were analyzed with the employment of grounded theory. Investment and collaboration for a comprehensive social media literacy education are vital for organizations to start addressing the phenomenon in the workplace and educate the employees on how social media and communication via this platform can better the overall work climate, communication, and well-being.

Keywords: media literacy, social media, young employees, communication, workplace

1) INTRODUCTION

We live in a world filled with challenges in numerous aspects, especially in business. The rising prices, unpredictable movement of natural resources, financial crisis, bigger competition, reduced profits, etc., bring the necessity to make some changes on a global scale. This directly impacts organizations and their culture as possible reinvention and inclusion of innovative approaches may be vital to achieving greater employee satisfaction and productivity (Pitt & Bennett, 2008).

Employees play an essential role in the success of the organization in the business surroundings that are changing all the time. In this regard, one of the major changes currently is the shift from manual to knowledge workers. Knowledge workers represent more than 2/3 of the entire workforce (Ramírez & Nembhard, 2004).

Among the essential skills that, aside from employees, everyone should possess to succeed in life are internet connectivity and digital literacy. Therefore, organizations and businesses are at a crossroads provoked by digital changes. It's clear the internet has become a place where most human interactions and activities happen. In their nature, humans need to form relationships, networks, and alliances to build a community for their interests, friends, family, education, religion, and of course work.

Having this in mind, in the previous period, such innovative communities based online occupied the personal and workspaces of employees (Shirky, 2008). This is especially the case with young employees. Still, there are some doubts regarding networking websites that millions of users utilize globally, leading to reserves for sharing personal information.

Regardless, young employees tend to spend a great deal of time on social media, usually for non-work purposes such as engaging with personal connections, communicating with family and friends, following sports, downloading and streaming content, and similar. With this enhanced presence of social media in people's everyday lives, it has become a necessity to find the balance between the usage of social media and its impact on the productivity of young employees regarding organizational time and resources.

Moreover, participation in social media brings other benefits to youth that should be taken into consideration. They include informal learning, exchange of knowledge, preserving the organizational resources in digital formats, and even enhanced workflow and productivity and effective utilization of computer-aided technologies. Due to this, information technologies and social media have entered the workplace and are inevitably a part of it.

Social media tools are key for effective communication with global customers, coworkers, and suppliers. It's a bridge between continents and countries, helping in the management of the complexity of the global organizational setting. Not to mention that whole processes have been entirely automated because the employees aren't able to complete all required tasks within a specific timeframe anymore. So, in the words of Hutley (2009), 'None of us can work in a vacuum in today's world; we must work with one another to get things done'.

A constant challenge that organizations deal with is contextualizing this occurrence and how it affects the ability of employees to complete tasks at hand and separate the personal and professional utilization of the information technologies of the organization. The wasted time through activities on social media and the internet represents a hidden cost to the organizations. For instance, let's say that an organization has a department comprised of eight people and each of them is on social media or doing some of the aforementioned internet activities for an hour per day. This means an employee goes to waste considering the eight-hour working day.

In terms of disabling access to certain sites and networks, the IT technician can't know every social networking platform to do that. This has also led to an ethical debate about the extent to which employers should monitor the online communication of their employees.

On the other hand, employees, with an emphasis on young ones, experience a challenge related to work overflowing into their personal life. Through the regular use of internet-connected devices to stay in touch with the work network even outside of the office, the employees may find themselves sending emails from home or interacting on organizational social media channels after working hours. It's a fact that more and more professionals use social media platforms daily. Yet the way social networking software is utilized, if it has an impact on the rise or fall of productivity, and the way the enterprise-friendly use and design may advance remain open questions (Skeels & Grudin, 2009). According to Pitkow & Kehoe (1996), social media isn't the primary reason for technological innovations that endanger employee productivity.

Every new technology raises concerns until it is fully understood and endorsed. That was the case with the appearance of telephones in offices, which is still a topic of discussion. This occurrence affected employees' productivity as well, since they spent time talking to people outside of work to build their social network. Personal computers followed; the employees spent a considerable time playing games, threatening their productivity.

Still, the role of social media networks and other information and digital technologies is key for advanced communication between employees, predominantly young employees. Productivity that involves cognitive tasks can be challenging to measure when compared to productivity that can be identified in units. So, there is more room to assess this topic further and see how advancing the (social) media competences in the workplace can lead to better communication between young employees considering the fact that organizations are widely utilizing social media in different operations from marketing to customer outreach.

2) LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptualization of literacy has been connected to the broader concept of information (Bucher et al., 2013). With that in mind, the term information literacy term was born, achieving its peak usage in the U.S. in the 1980s, 1990s, and even today. Mackey and Jacobson (2011) revisit what was once known as the ability for locating, using information, and evaluating it to become independent individuals who commit to lifelong learning. They outline the literacy framework and the multiple literacy types (media literacy, digital literacy, visual literacy, and cyberliteracy) and advocate for the conceptualization of meta-literacy as an "overarching, self-referential, and comprehensive framework that informs other literacy types" (Mackey & Jacobson, 2011). This comes at a time when social media and online communication platforms massively entered the workplace and impacted the everyday lives of employees. The traditional thinking of what literacy represents and even what information literacy represents may not suffice now that "being social" has become the new normal in the professional world.

Considering this, the semantics of what literacy means has changed and broadened recently. From gaining the ability to read and write, now it refers to the ability to comprehend and produce information via a variety of media channels (Lanham, 1989). From this, it can be deduced that a media-literate individual refers to someone who can read and participate in the creation and evaluation of messages through various media (Ashley et al., 2013).

During a time when we are all overwhelmed by media and media platforms are at our fingertips, the importance of being media literate is growing by the day. Whether it's analyzed on a societal, group, organizational, or individual level, media

literacy can help foster conversations, new ideas, partnerships, struggles, and opportunities. Barton and Hamilton (2000) point out that we can understand literacy, in general, better based on 1) literacy practices (ways of using the written language and what we do with literacy), 2) literacy events (activities and occurrences, requiring or demanding different literacies), and 3) texts (the focal point of the activities).

The media ecosystem is constantly evolving and complex to be put into a single box. As a result, studies conceptualize various types of media literacy, including news literacy, film literacy, digital literacy, and now social media literacy. Social media platforms increase both in number and popularity by the day. They have become an inseparable part of people's daily lives. These platforms burst with different types of content – the text being one of the core ones – which users create, share, and consume. This active, daily usage of social media brings an onset of fresh literacy events demanding literacy practices.

Social media represents a web-based service, enabling people to open a semi-public or fully public profile in the framework of a system with defined boundaries, generate a list of fellow members of this said system with whom they connect, and browse and explore this list and lists made by others (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). It functions on user-based activities where both creators and consumers can interchange and, as such, rests on three pillars or constructs – Web 2.0 as the infrastructure, communities of interest, and content generated by the social media users (Ahlqvist et al., 2010).

The relevance of social media is seeing upward trends as users generate, distribute, and filter content based on their needs and preferences. The platforms, themselves encourage contribution, participation, exchange of information and opinions, and providing feedback from interested parties. At first, focusing on young users, now social media platforms have become versatile to accommodate users from various age groups and backgrounds.

In the workplace context, the professional lives of users have easily overspilled on platforms like LinkedIn, and even Facebook employees can be found browsing during working hours. Researchers have analyzed the various benefits of using social media in the workplace. These refer to improvements in communication, morale, engagement, and overall job satisfaction, increased knowledge and skills sharing, increased productivity, recognition and promotion of diversity, and introduction of new ways for informal learning (Pitt & Bennett, 2008; Sophia van Zyl, 2009; Luo et al., 2018).

On the other hand, using social media in the workplace comes with some possible negative aspects and challenges. Organizations can experience higher absenteeism, waste of productive time, decreased work-life balance, abuse of the Internet and social networks usage which can lead to a reduced organizational reputation, addictive features of social media associated with the need for quick feedback, impatience, the rise of self-centrism in employees, and similar (Armstrong et al., 2000; Chen et al., 2008; Kidwell, 2010).

After reviewing the concept of literacy and media literacy historically in literature, as well as defining social media and its impact in the workplace, we can establish what social media literacy is. Its conceptualization is derived from the foundations outlined by media literacy in a way that social media literacy incorporated the social media aspect besides other digital and traditional media. As a result, social media literacy focuses on how efficient and effective users are when they're communicating via the Internet while benefitting social relationships (Vanwynsberghe et al., 2015). Vanwynsberghe and Verdegem (2013) understand it as "practical, cognitive, and affective competences required to access, analyze, evaluate, and create content on social media in a variety of contexts."

As can be seen from the literature review and the definition, the competences play a crucial role in what (social) media represents. Most of the studies reflect on cognitive competences as the top

competences required for this type of literacy. Understanding, analyzing, evaluating, synthesizing, interpreting information, assessing the motive, purpose, and credibility of social media posts, critical thinking, and related skills can be part of these competences (Polanco-Levicán & Salvo-Garrido, 2022). Besides these, other vital competences related to social media literacy include technical, practical, and socio-emotional competences (Polanco-Levicán & Salvo-Garrido, 2022). The employees' competences and (social) media literacy is at the heart of our research to explore their connection to overall communication in today's contemporary organizations and business world.

3) RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in December 2022 – January 2023 with seven (7) employees that use social media in their workplace in civil society organizations and the private sector in Skopje.

The participants were between 23-33 years old. Only employees that use a minimum of one social media platform were chosen for the interviews (i.e., Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp). The semi-structured interviews were held in Macedonian and English language, facilitated by one of the researchers that asked the questions and guided the discussion while the other one recorded the sessions and transcribed them.

The transcribed data were analyzed using grounded theory and the constant comparative approach (Glaser, 1965). The researchers analyzed it in three steps. Firstly, in the open-coding stage, they examined each data line and coded all transcripts independently. The latest codes were compared

to the ones before them to see if the same code suits the following line or if a new code should be made, or if the one before should be modified in any way (Saldaña, 2021). This was done repeatedly until every transcript was coded.

In the second coding stage, the researchers conducted axial coding, during which they grouped the codes into conceptual bins and started the categorization (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Eventually, they elaborated the categories from the primary coding and put them into groups based on emerging themes.

4) FINDINGS / RESULTS

The interviewees were asked a variety of questions regarding their experience with social media usage, skills as well as challenges they encountered. Their answers were categorized into four (4) key areas that the analysis is based on. The areas are technical competences, awareness about information that's posted on social media, privacy protection skills, and knowledge of social relationships. The examples that appear below are taken from the transcripts of the interviews.

Technical competences

In this area, the young employees answered how a profile on a social media platform can be opened as well as which challenges they faced while utilizing social media. The aim was to identify how much they know the technical aspects like opening an account, adding or deleting friends, following people, and posting content.

Most of the users know how to launch accounts on different social media platforms, while one 32-year-old male participant said he uses only one

social media platform, LinkedIn, and knows how to make a profile only on this platform. He said that he doesn't post anything "because I don't have time to maintain it, and I use it only to stay in touch with what my colleagues and peers are doing".

Especially the younger participants, aged between 23 and 28 years old, said that they consider themselves knowledgeable of multiple platforms and use at least 2-3 platforms at once, exploring all options they offer.

Regarding the challenges they face while using social media in their workspace, two female and a male participant agreed that they can't respond to messages regularly when they have tasks to complete at work. Another male added that he couldn't post personal content as regularly as he would like due to his focus being on posting content on the organizational social media page.

Awareness of information that's posted on social media

To see how aware the young employees are of the information posted on social media, they answered whether they have encountered fake news on social media. All of them said that they had seen such news and half of them found the real news afterward.

A female 27-year-old participant said that she always checks the source first and reads the comments to see if the news is legit. "If it's something that's really important to me or my job, I go to the search engines, too, and look for the information in multiple reputable places that I trust".

Privacy protection skills

Some users stated that privacy is their priority while they are in the online world. "I didn't even add my boss during the first two years on this job", says a female 24-year-old employee.

Most interviewees publish photos and videos of their personal life on Facebook and Instagram, but only three of them said that they accept only people they know to be their friends and view their posts. The others expand their network further, no matter if they know the people they accept or not.

On the other hand, only two participants stated that they have enabled two-factor authentication when logging in to their profiles to keep them protected from hacking.

Knowledge of social relationships

Eventually, the young employees revealed their competences when it comes to social relationships. Most of them confirmed that they follow their colleagues on social media and communicate online with one another during the workday. "We are a big company and I found out that my colleague got her master's degree through Facebook", says one of the male participants.

However, they all agreed that it could sometimes be hard to keep everyone satisfied. A 25-year-old female employee recalls how a post with pictures of a colleague's wedding was a reason for a feud among the team due to the fact that not everyone was invited to the wedding.

Still, when asked whether using social media in the workplace helps them communicate better with their colleagues, five participants gave a positive answer whereas only two consider that their communication remains the same with or without using social media in the workplace.

Below (Table 1) is an overview of the findings through statements of the participants that fall under the specific key social media competences areas that were discussed.

Table 1: Statements from the semi-structured interviews

| Technical competences	Awareness of information	Privacy protection skills	Knowledge of social relationships
► I use Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram during the day. ► I can make an account on all social media platforms. ► I don't have time to maintain my LinkedIn profile, and I use it only to stay in touch with what my colleagues and peers are doing.	► I have seen fake news in my feed. ► If it's something that's really important to me or my job I go to the search engines, too, and look for the information in multiple reputable places that I trust. ► I know who can see what I post and what they can do with the information. ► I don't always believe what I read on social media without checking the source first.	► I have a two-factory authentication enabled every time I log into my account. ► I only accept people I know to be my friends. ► I want to have more friends and followers on social media, so I accept everyone. ► Privacy is my top priority. I didn't even add my boss during the first two years on this job.	► I follow my colleagues on social media and we communicate there during working hours. ► We are a big company and I found out that my colleague got her master's degree through Facebook. ► My colleague posted pictures of her wedding and everyone saw it. Those that weren't invited confronted her about it in the lunch area. ► Using social media in the workplace helps me communicate better with my colleagues. ► It's the same for me with or without social media when it comes to communicating with my colleagues.

Source: The author's interpretation.

5) DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In the context of improving social media literacy levels and related competences of employees at work, we adapt the Social Media Literacy (SMILE) model, which was first developed by Schreurs and Vandenbosch (2020). The model aims to map and understand the mechanism and processes relating to social media literacy to empower social media users (in our case, employees who use social media) and develop social media literacy. The empowerment aspect of the model is based on the Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model (DSMM) (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). In contrast, the model's development aspect is grounded in an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), pointing out that users can develop social media literacy when interacting with the environment. An overview of the adapted SMILE model, which we propose, is given in Figure 1.

The model assigns social media literacy the role of a moderator and a predictor. It acts as a moderator between the users' consumption of social media and their well-being. Their competences regarding social media literacy should help employees understand how to use social media for their and their organization's benefit and mitigate the negative effects. This will most likely lead to better communication in the workplace, a positive work climate, and ultimately well-being for all parties involved. Moreover, social media literacy acts as a predictor in the sense that it impacts the content preferences of the users. This may most likely be a result of the user's personal social media behavior and exposure to other pieces of content on social platforms. When users have the skills to use social media in the right way, their content preferences will change as a result of that. So, informational, educational, and factful content is shared and prioritized.

Figure 1: *Adapted Social Media Literacy (SMILE) model*
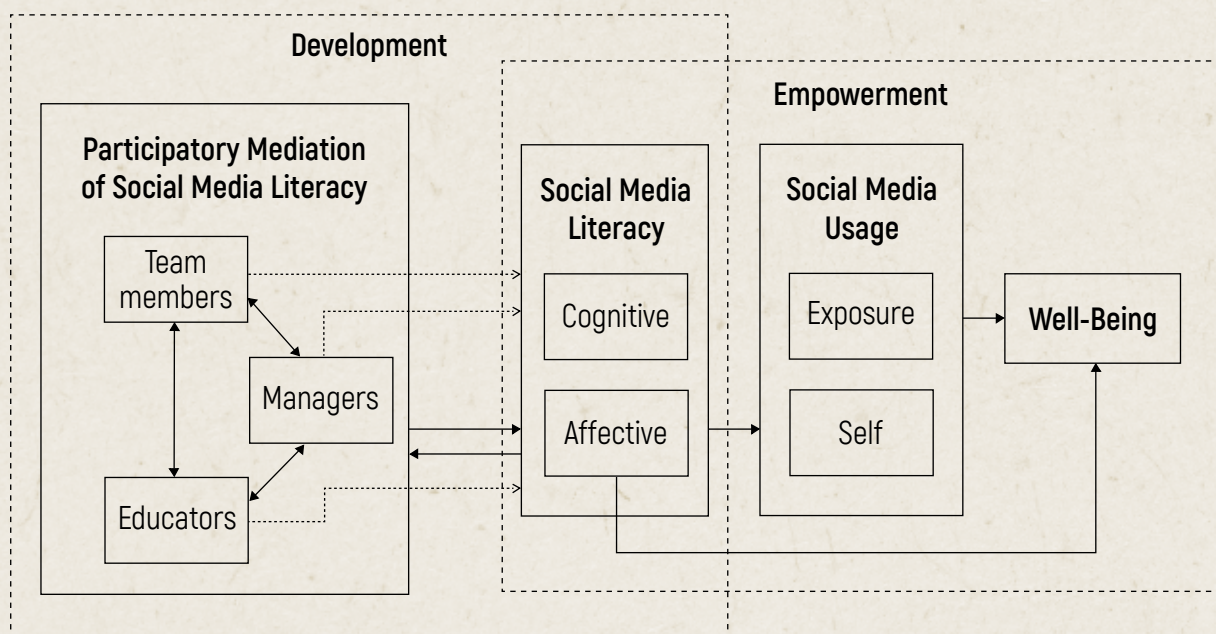
Source: *Adapted from Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2006). The bioecological model of human development. In W. Damon & R. M. Lerner (Eds.), Handbook of child psychology: Theoretical models of human development (p. 797). New York, NY. Wiley.*

An important element of the model is the reciprocal and conditional processing occurring between the actors in the model, including the employees or the social media users themselves, on the one hand, and the team members, management, and educators on the other hand. These processes grounded in the socialization theory (Grusec & Hastings, 2015), argue that different actors in the environment don't affect people individually, rather, they work in synergy and simultaneously, thus weakening or strengthening each other. With that in mind, the development of social media literacy will be fruitful when one actor interacts with the impact of other fellow actors.

Accordingly, the model points out that employees acquire different social media literacy competences based on the type of actor or agent they interact with. We emphasize team members, managers, and educators as crucial agents in this model. As such, we can talk about socialization and qualification actors (Biesta, 2006). The former explores the development of social media literacy in informal surrounding with team members and peers. When employees share their personal views, knowledge, opinions, and experiences, they acquire new skills as part of a social group, which in our case, refers to a team within a business organization or the entire organization. Creating a mutual channel of learning where everyone learns from everyone is paramount in nurturing social media literate members of the organization. Opposing this, qualification is a more formal and structural way of acquiring new skills. Educators (external consultants, researchers, workshop facilitators, and similar) are an exemplary type of actor that facilitates this form of learning. These people are usually in charge of instructing employees how to comprehend, use, and evaluate messages in the media.

Considering the conclusions of the published literature, our qualitative research, and the adapted SMILE model, we can stress that nurturing and facilitating the process of acquiring new social media literacy skills in the employees is beneficial for the work climate, professional communication,

and well-being. Only through a structured and systemized education on this topic can managers and members of an organization see the benefits of using social media even in the professional surrounding. As social media becomes ubiquitous and new generations, including Generation Z, become present in the workforce, all interested parties should work towards bringing this topic into the limelight and investing more in this type of education.

6) LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Some limitations to this study exist and, at the same time, influence the potential next opportunities for new research. The research was largely conducted through a literature review and a qualitative research method, i.e., semi-structured interviews. This may guide further research and efforts to try qualitative approaches like surveys that employ standardized questions and a Likert scale as a complementary analysis. The study focuses predominantly on Skopje and the broader surrounding of the Republic of North Macedonia. Yet, other countries may deal with other factors and different social contexts. As a result, future research can explore in more detail the state of social media literacy in the workplace across multiple countries. Eventually, semi-structured interviews can result in subjective interpretation, which can be considered a limitation. Therefore, one should be cautious when generalizing the conclusions and findings of the research.

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BOJAN KITANOVIKJ

Bojan Kitanovikj graduated from the Faculty of Economics - Skopje at the University Ss. Cyril and Methodius - Skopje in 2021 as Magna Cum Laude with an award for the best Bachelor's thesis. After graduating, he was hired as a demonstration/teaching assistant at the Department of Management. In the academic year 2021/2022, he enrolled in postgraduate studies in the study program MBA in Strategic Human Resource Management. Bojan is an author and co-author of papers in proceedings, academic journals, blogs, guides, and publications. He has many years of experience in the civil society sector and entrepreneurial ecosystem through work on national and international projects and is an active contributor at the Yunus Center for Social Businesses at the Faculty of Economics - Skopje.

IVANA KITANOVIKJ

Ivana Kitanovikj holds a Master's degree in corporate financial management from the Faculty of Economics – Skopje at the University Ss. Cyril and Methodius - Skopje in 2021. She works in communications and public outreach at the Macedonian Civic Education Center (MCEC) and has been involved with national and international initiatives, USAID-supported projects, and civil society organizations. She has extensive experience in copywriting, graphic design, video making, and digital marketing and has implemented numerous activities aimed at amplifying youth's voices, tackling issues that young people face, and making a positive impact in society.

INFORMATION DIET OF THE SOUTH CAUCASUS: EXPLORATORY STUDY OF INFORMATION CONSUMPTION AND RESILIENCE TO DISINFORMATION

Ana Keshelashvili, Ph.D.
Maia Mikashavidze, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Proliferation of disinformation online and its distribution through social media platforms is harming the democratic institutions and processes. Abundance of information flowing through all kinds of sources and channels has fueled uncertainty among societies, especially among the younger generation, whose information diet might be limited to occasional news posts suggested by the algorithm of Facebook, Instagram, or other social media platforms. Ignorance about the socio-economic and political affairs makes people more susceptible to the influence of disinformation and eventually harms the development of countries and democracies, especially in smaller, younger, or even hybrid democracies as in the case of the South Caucasus. Resilience to disinformation is a complex concept, measured on the macro- meso- and micro levels. For the purposes of this research, however, we focus on individuals, especially young adults, and explore their information diet across the three South Caucasus countries – Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, to understand the social media use, consumption of public affairs news along with the trust in legacy media, and ways of discerning between the false and trustful news. The research uses triangulation of quantitative and qualitative secondary and primary data from the three countries. The findings contribute to better understanding of habits of the young audiences and can help improve the ways of strengthening their resilience to disinformation.

Keywords: Caucasus, media consumption, social media use, disinformation, resilience

1) INTRODUCTION

Three countries of the South Caucasus, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, differ in terms of the institutional, legislative, economic, and political context, but there are also similarities among the publics and their information consumption.

Although Constitutions of all three countries guarantee the freedom of expression and media, the regulations differ despite the strong political and state influences on the mainstream media outlets. Legislation related to the freedom of speech and media among the three countries is the most restrictive in Azerbaijan, where majority of independent from the state budget and influence media outlets operate either in exile or need to be licensed to officially function in the country (Freedom House, 2022). Such restrictions, evidently affect the advertising market, leaving the independent media reliant on international donor funding despite the comparatively wealthy economy of Azerbaijan. In the case of Georgia and Armenia, smaller publics, and smaller advertising market also force the smaller independent media outlets dependent on the donor funding. Not being able to reach the wider audience, independent media outlets do not have the capacity to become mainstream and therefore let rather politicized and polarized television channels to dominate the information space of these two countries. Often such polarizing, state-governed and politicized content on television channels results in distrust of the legacy media and forces the audiences to seek alternative sources, for example, on social media channels, making them more susceptible to the influence of disinformation.

This exploratory research aims to better understand the younger adults of the three Caucasus countries and reveal their interest in public affairs news, trust, and sources for information, use and degree of dependence on social media as well as awareness of disinformation and the ways of dealing with it.

2) LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media has become a main source for news in many countries across the world. The audiences have become dependent on the information filtered by social media, such as Facebook and Twitter (Hermida et al., 2012) for over a decade. Researchers argue that what is concerning is that "the social media generation may not be equipped – or sufficiently interested – to understand what news is, and how it differs from other kinds of information. What their parents' generation absorbed – a 'news literacy' – is missing from their children's cultural DNA" (Richardson, 2017, p. 5). "Digital natives" are also causing concerns among researchers due to their elevated trust in digital and social sources (Walker, 2019) and a general assumption that "because young people are fluent in social media, they are equally savvy about what they find there" but the evidence showed the opposite (Wineburg, McGrew, Breakstone, and Ortega, 2016, p. 7).

These platforms are well utilized by those who have an interest in spreading manipulations, propaganda, or fake news (Faris et al., 2017). Being an environment where users primarily seek entertainment and accidentally encounter current event news (Boczkowski et al., 2018), creates a fruitful ground for spreading the disinformation easily (Allcott et al., 2019, Tandoc et al., 2020). Compared to a setting where the focus is on information consumption, emotive reactions such as commenting and sharing are more likely in this entertainment-oriented scenario (Metzger et al., 2021). This behavior creates a feedback loop where liking, sharing and commenting increase the exposure of the information for additional users because of social network algorithms. Furthermore, widespread disinformation may proliferate because it indicates popularity, or is picked up and spread by politicians or celebrities with many

followers (Pennycook et al., 2021). People may disseminate false information because it supports their personal beliefs but sharing of inaccurate news is not always linked to believing in false information, as Van Bavel et al. (2021) show.

Although social media platforms have made changes to decrease the magnitude of disinformation spread and succeeded to a certain degree (Allcott, Gentzkow and Yu, 2019), still, heavy dependence on the social media as a source of information, has been demonstrated to be one of the important contributing factors to lower the resilience to disinformation (Humprecht, et al., 2021; 2020; Boulianne, Tenove and Buffie, 2022) notwithstanding the social-structural factors also affecting the degree of resilience.

Humprecht et al. (2020) contend that the political, media, and economic environments all have a role in resilience building. In terms of politics, the authors argue that a society's degree of polarization and its level of support for populism are critical factors. In terms of media, they contend that a society's reliance on news media, the diversity of each person's primary news sources, and exposure to public media are essential. Last but not least, they view reliance on social media for political information as an essential contributing factor to the lower resilience of the society.

Citizens are likely to be more receptive to alternative news sources that might promote misinformation if they don't trust the news industry and its fact-checking (Stier et al., 2020). Furthermore, producers of misinformation regularly criticize democratic intuitions, which are typically linked to skepticism in news media (Hameleers et al., 2020). The strategic use of disinformation campaigns by political parties and candidates seeking to mobilize the public translates into establishment of alternative information networks that obstruct the mainstream media and give supporters emotionally satisfying ideas (Bennett and Livingston, 2018).

Drawing from the literature review, this article aims to explore the reliance of the young adults across the South Caucasus on news media on the one hand, and social media on the other to understand the resilience of the Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani societies.

3) RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is based on the mixed methods using the secondary quantitative data and secondary and primary qualitative focus-group and interview data. The quantitative data was drawn from Caucasus Barometer, "annual household survey about social-economic issues and political attitudes," conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) in 2021 in Georgia and Armenia.

Representative nationwide survey in Armenia was conducted during the period from December 2021 to February 2022 and during December 2021 and January 2022 in Georgia. Multi-stage cluster sampling with preliminary stratification drew data from 1648 respondents with 35% response rate in Armenia and 1540 respondents with 23% of response rate in Georgia. The presented results were weighted. Survey of Azerbaijani population has become impossible to conduct after 2013, therefore the results on the Azerbaijani publics are based on the qualitative interviews only (21 interviewees).

Qualitative interviews (28) for Georgia were conducted within the framework of an Internews Information Ecosystem Assessment project, funded by Facebook, Inc. (Internews, 2021), and additional eight interviews were conducted in April and May of 2022 with Russian-speaking respondents permanently living in Georgia. Qualitative data from Armenia was collected during April and May of 2022 by interviewing 26 respondents.

Both, quantitative and qualitative data are nationwide, focusing on the respondents of the age-group 18 to 34; surveyed and interviewed people

represent different ethnicities, especially in Georgia's case, where largest minorities are ethnic Azerbaijanis or Armenians, as well as a smaller Russian-speaking minorities.

4) FINDINGS / RESULTS

News Consumption and Trust in Legacy Media

Young adults of the South Caucasus countries share interest in daily news and all kinds of topics including politics, social, economic, conflict, health, sports, arts, education, technology, etc. However, some of the younger interviewees expressed disinterest in politics, elections, or participation in general. For example, a 27-year-old Azerbaijani female from Baku said she is willing to learn the news about "everything except for politics." Similar approach could be seen in a 19-year-old Georgian student's interview: "I'm not interested in politics […] There's nothing I can change; hence I don't bother thinking about it." Survey data also demonstrates that Georgian young adults are not interested at all (25%) or are hardly interested (33%) in politics, while only 15% is very interested and 29% is quite interested. Among the Armenian respondents about the same percentage (16%) is very interested, and 36% are quite interested, while 22% are hardly interested and 26% are not at all interested. Despite the slight differences among the two countries, and the disinterest expressed by only few of the interviewees, this attitude is still concerning and is in line with the global concern over the increasing avoidance of news by the younger audiences.

When it comes to the source choices for the current events news, younger Azerbaijanis tend to go to independent or at least non-state media outlets, or media organizations in exile. Rarely they turn to state television or agencies for the governmental official information, but for immediate news they go to social media, Facebook mostly and sometimes to Telegram channels. Although the social media channels are an important go-to source for Georgian young adults, as revealed in the interviews, the quantitative survey demonstrates that the source choices about current affairs are almost equally distributed between Television (31%), social media (33%), and internet except social media (32%). On the other hand, television viewership among the Armenian audiences is lower (17%) and the social media dependence is higher as more than half (53%) of the surveyed people said they use social media as the main source of current affairs news. About one fifth (22%) of Armenian audiences seek for news in other than social media sources online. Quantitative results were confirmed also during the interviews with the Armenian young adults. Small percentage of Georgian and Armenian respondents named family members, friends and colleagues and newspapers as a main source of information.

Many of Azerbaijani young adults interviewed for this study do not have trust in state media – television or else but seek for news on the international media's local bureaus, such as of BBC and Radio Liberty, "because they publish more accurate and validated news, while other media outlets manipulate their audience with misleading headlines as they are under government control," as a 29-year-old man from Baku explained.

Other than international media branches, the younger interviewees also mentioned Azerbaijani sources they trust. Some of them are still based in Baku, others are working in exile. Independence from the state control, history of accountable, ethical and balanced coverage matter when it comes to choosing to trust the local sources however the youth still hold some skepticism, understanding that "It is the nature of media to frame, shape, give context they want to the stories, so I just follow them to be aware of things, but don't

trust," explained a 34-year-old woman. One of the interviewees expressed distrust to any of the media outlets, a 27-year-old female from Baku said that she trusts only certain Telegram channels, and a 28-year-old woman from one of the regions of Azerbaijan mentioned that she trusts only governmental media, which spreads the official information.

Armenian interviewees mentioned that they trust the media outlets they use "because they provide information, not opinions," as a 22-year-old woman from one of the Armenia's regions, or as another respondent, a 27-year-old woman mentioned, her trust is based on professional and ethical decisions of a particular media outlet, which is "objective and don't serve the political interests of some group." Politization of mainstream media coverage, apparently negatively affects the overall trust in the Armenian media, as the survey results show. 53% of Armenian young adults fully distrust the Armenian media and 19% rather distrusts, while only one percent fully and 9% rather trusts, and 18% neither trusts, nor distrusts the country's media.

Polarized and politicized media landscape of Georgia affects the younger adults' trust in legacy media. The interviewees frequently noted that coverage of current affairs on different TV channels is politically motivated and target to those who share their political viewpoints, rather than wider audiences seeking for balanced information. As a 29-year-old unemployed woman from one of the regions of Georgia mentioned, "I don't trust any of them very much. There is different information everywhere and I don't know which one to believe." The survey data also reflects ambivalence of the society, as a majority, 63% of surveyed said that they neither trust, nor distrust the Georgian media. Only one percent said that they fully trust, and 8% rather trust, while 17% rather distrust and 11% fully distrust. "It is very difficult to say that I trust any source and rely on it fully," said a 23-year-old male student from Tbilisi, adding: "because if you pay attention, you will notice that all the media have at least once, or several times has published unverified information."

Whether it is oppositional political party or ruling party influence on the mainstream media, audiences in all three countries share the similar need for balanced fact-based journalism, rather than opinionated interpretations of events. This drives them away from the dominant sources of information to other, mostly online independent media or more accessible social media for news. It becomes harder to keep themselves informed and fuels uncertainty and frustration, and may discourage from getting involved in democratic processes.

Social media use

Majority of the Georgian and Armenian internet users, when asked to name the three most frequent activities online, mentioned Facebook with slightly more Georgians (79%) than Armenian young adults (65%). Another commonly mentioned activity was use of instant messaging and calls, which is frequently used by 33% of Georgians and 46% of Armenians. Third most frequent activity named by the 34% of Armenians, was downloading/ listening to/ watching/ music/ videos/movies and for 42% of Georgians was searching for information (Google, Wikipedia, etc.). All interviewees in Azerbaijan also mentioned that they were using Facebook.

Among Armenian internet users, Facebook (90%), Instagram (67%) and YouTube (83%) are the most frequently used social media platforms, while 97% of Georgian young adults use Facebook, 57% use Instagram and 92% use YouTube. Interviewed Azerbaijanis have mentioned the same social media channels. Despite the frequency of use of social media, when it comes to sharing information or news content publicly, the majority of users consider themselves as "passive recipients" of content. For example, a 25-year-old man from one of the regions of Armenia explained: "I'm active while reading but when it comes to posting no, I'm more of a recipient of news" Similarly, a 28-year-old man from an Azerbaijani region said: "I am not someone who shares a lot."

Majority of the interviewees share some content on their profiles, mainly targeted at their friends. Some share mostly personal content, others also share news content, but very few of the interviewees engages in public debates, because as some of the Azerbaijani respondents said, they do not have time for "meaningless arguments" and "hearing insults, which happens so often on Facebook." A 20-year-old female student from Tbilisi explained that she is active on Facebook but only shares her thoughts when she becomes very angry about some violence: "I am active on Facebook, but I will never enter in arguments. I don't want to get into a conflict based on a different opinion. Everyone has their own opinion. [Enter debate and defend own opinion] Very rarely, when I get very angry about violence against a woman or a child." Few of the younger people across the South Caucasus said that they are "both, recipients and sharers." Restraining themselves from sharing their opinions and entering the public debate on the one hand might mean that they probably will not be sharing the disinformation further, but such self-censorship also points to the unhealthy communication and information ecosystem of social media platforms. This can be heard from a 23-year-old Armenian woman's words: "I NEVER get involved in public discussions; I prefer to live a stress-free life."

Similar activity can be noticed in Facebook groups. People join Facebook groups based on their personal or professional interests or hobbies, but the group membership is motivated by the passive consumption of information rather than sharing or participation in debates. Majority of group members said that they only comment to others' posts only when they can offer some advice to someone's question: "I only comment on posts that seek out help and the ones that fall within my area of knowledge," said a 31-year-old man from Baku.

However, more discussions take place in private spaces. 43% of Armenians and 30% of Georgian internet users use the messaging applications to get the news. They are also used for discussions of news among the friends by the young Azerbaijani

adults. As an 18-year-old Armenian woman said, "I sometimes discuss news in private chats with my friends," and a 28-year-old woman from Georgia also said: "I frequently share news with my friends in closed chats."

Majority of surveyed and interviewed young adults in all three countries said that they use social media to get information about news and politics. In Georgia, 61% and in Armenia 80% of the internet users of the age of 18-34 rely on social media for news. The young adults of Azerbaijan generally tend to follow the trusted media outlets on Facebook, frequently watching live broadcasts from these media organizations and checking their social media feeds. Armenian users are also generally following the media outlets' pages, but almost none of the interviewees watched lives of the media on Facebook. Georgian users, on the other hand, much like the Azerbaijani users, consume the legacy media's content through Facebook rather than directly from television or websites. They are well aware of the media scene and follow the pages of not only their trusted media, but rather those of opposing political editorial policies. As an 18-year-old student from Tbilisi explained, they "post different information and it is also interesting to see many different opinions and listen to different variations on one news piece." Similar to this opinion, many younger adults in Azerbaijan follow the state-owned media organizations as well. As a 31-year-old man explained, "I haven't watched TV for ages, but I follow page of some [state television channels] just to get official news." Still, the majority of the interviewed internet users are accidental news consumers, most of the time stumbling upon them while scrolling social media rather than actively seeking for the news. As a 24-year-old woman from Georgian village mentioned, "I don't look for information on Facebook, it appears in the news by itself."

Checking the information from multiple sources is not that common among the younger Azerbaijani audiences, with a few exceptions. They still prefer familiar and trusted sources to learn about the local news "if the news is published by the media

I trust, I don't need to check elsewhere," one of the interviewees said. On the other hand, in Georgia and Armenia, where there is no state-owned media and restrictive media regulation policies, a politicized and polarized media environment pushes the audiences to click through different channels to get a full picture of current events. As a 27-year-old Armenian woman said, "it's better not to trust just one source and check the news on different channels." A 32-year-old bank employee from Georgian region said she usually watches several sources to get hold of a bigger picture, something she calls "arithmetic mean."

The younger adults across the South Caucasus are heavy users of social media, however, most of the times the social media is used as an access point to legacy media's content rather than an alternative source of information.

Discerning between the fake and true information

Younger adults across Caucasus are aware of the amount of disinformation online, especially in social media platforms and this shows in the survey results as well as in interviews. Majority of Georgian and Armenian internet users said that they have encountered disinformation about certain topics. For example, 88% of Armenian and 59% of Georgians have noticed fake news about their respective country's domestic politics. For Armenian users more frequently mentioned than domestic politics, was disinformation about Nagorno-Karabakh war (93%). Azerbaijani internet users during interviews mentioned that they encounter disinformation in social media often and majority of them also recalled Nagorno-Karabakh war-related disinformation as an example. Georgians most frequently recalled were Covid-19-related disinformation (72%) and elections mentioned by 70% of internet uses. A 34-year-old housewife from one of the villages of Georgia named the rumors surrounding the COVID-19 pandemics as an example of disinformation she has encountered circulating

on social media. Speaking about disinformation and rumors on Facebook another, 30-year-old Georgian housewife, summed up: "there are rumors everywhere, all rumors, for example, about actors or other topics and then when you listen carefully, you can tell this all is not true. Facebook is a gossiper."

When it comes to information verification techniques, the young adults rely on various techniques, some check with alternative media sources, some verify the information with their friends, relatives, and colleagues. Others rely on intuition, logic, and common sense. Sources of information and headlines are mentioned the most frequently as a way of detecting false information by the interviewees across the three countries.

Survey of Georgian and Armenian internet users asked about how they can tell if what they are reading on the internet, including social media, is accurate and reliable. Most of the respondents in both countries, 23% in Armenia and 32% in Georgia said that they look at the name of the publisher to see if it is a reputable source of information; 17% of Armenians and 29% of Georgians look for other signs of authentic news reporting such as writer's name and publisher; 16% of the internet users in both countries said that they ask someone who they trust if they think the news is real or fake. Similarly, the interviewees in Azerbaijan demonstrated that looking at the source and checking with more competent and reliable sources – media or human are common ways of checking the information. As a 27-year-old woman from Baku said, she checks with other sources, checks with "friends who are more interested in the news than me." A 25-year-old man, on the other hand, has a rather complex verification practice: "In my case, I look at the media which shared this news. If it doesn't look credible, if it's just a click-bait website, then I would think the information is not true. Also, if it's a big news story, and it doesn't get posted in other media that I follow, then probably it's not true."

5) DISCUSSION/ CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to understand the "information diet" of the young adults of the South Caucasus focusing on their interest in public affairs news, trust, and sources for information, use and degree of dependence on social media as well as awareness of disinformation and the ways of dealing with it.

Findings show that there are a lot of similarities among the young adults' habits across the three countries despite the different socio-political and media context. In line with the previous research (Allcott et al., 2019; Hermida et al., 2012), there is a heavy use of social media for news and information. Young people also tend to be more of an accidental news consumer (Boczkowski et al., 2018) rather than active seekers of information, and social media is the first place they go to for information when something important takes place. However, most of the times the social media is used as an access point to legacy media's content rather than an alternative source of information.

The young adults are well aware of news media, their political ideologies, and value more independent, fact-based coverage of events more than partisan or politicized news media. People do consume news of such media outlets and follow their social media pages, but the majority do not trust either state, government- or opposition-supportive media outlets, even if they share the media's political ideology. Therefore, the awareness of the media landscape of their countries could drive the younger internet users either to the complete distrust in the legacy media or may develop into a higher interest in the independent and more professional media, which at the moment is rather smaller, online and has weaker influence compared to dominant TV media. It seems that awareness of the disinformation and media criticism along with prioritized media literacy education and training, helped the younger audiences to develop news literacy skills and online independent media outlets have become a more popular and important news source for socio-political topics.

On social media, young adults from the Caucasus countries seek information on their topic-of-interest on diverse pages or public and private groups, rather than engage in public debates, or share publicly their opinions. Restraining from sharing content of political or socio-economic importance to engage with the public in discussion points to the social media's unhealthy environment for debates and brings stress rather than pleasure. Hostile attitudes online force users to become passive consumers of content or use the platform for entertainment only.

Humprecht et al. (2021) found that being a passive social media user hinders further sharing of disinformation and is an expression of resilience. The results of this study could be suggesting that the self-censorship and passivity described by the interviewees may as well impede dissemination of disinformation. However, some of the interviewees mentioned that they still share their opinions or news about events that they feel passionate or angry about. Emotional manipulation at the same time is one of the main characteristics of false information (Tandoc et al., 2020). Therefore, further research is needed to explore the specific cases and types of reactions and actions by the users.

The research also found that most of the young adults can recall the false information, and many have their strategies of verifying the information, which are also important factors for strengthening the resilience. Most frequently the interviewees check the source whether the news is coming from a reputable source, other times they turn to people they consider knowledgeable about the topic.

Previous researchers (see for example Humprecht et al., 2021) emphasized the role of politi-

cal and information environment in a country in strengthening resilience. For example, publics in the countries with a higher societal consensus were more resilient to disinformation, while those living in the polarized and radicalized political and informational environment are more vulnerable to disinformation. In the case of the South Caucasus countries, polarization is everywhere, but Azerbaijan is different from the other two with its restrictive autocratic rule. Young people striving for a democratic country turn to independent media sources frequently working in exile, but the debates on political issues only take place in closed chats or face-to-face meetings rather than on social media platforms openly. On the other hand, ruling party and oppositional parties of Georgia and Armenia have divided the society with partisan and offensive communication toward their opponents that the mainstream television channels have taken strongly political sides, and the coverage can be biased on either side most of the time.

To summarize, because of the existing political and informational factors in the three countries of the South Caucasus, distrust in the mainstream by the younger adults does not translate into the lower resilience to disinformation – quite opposite, could mean that they are not interested in hearing the one-sided information. Such media environment pushes the young people to alternative sources, which are independent and can provide important, fact-based, and accurate news. This finding suggests that the model of resilience could be complicated even further and consider different operationalization of alternative sources and dominant media as well as trust in these different sources.

6) LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research is not without limitations mainly due to the incomplete quantitative data for Azerbaijan, which did not allow for triangulation of survey and qualitative interview data. Sampling of the interviewees in Armenia and Azerbaijan was not representative and could carry a selection bias, which may have affected the results. This exploratory study has created a solid foundation for further research, which could improve the data collection process and present a more reliable, complete picture of the information diet of the whole population. Future research could also focus on the peculiarities of sharing habits to better understand the potential of spread of disinformation through larger-scale quazi- or controlled experimental method and reveal whether restraining from sharing content online indeed translates into resilience to disinformation as suggested by Humprecht et al. (2021). This research looked at the information consumption and social media use of young adults of ages 18 to 34, as the quantitative data would not allow for further control of the age variable; however, the age range is quite extensive and covers both the "digital natives," and previous generation as well, which may alter the final results and do not describe the habits of the younger audiences accurately. Therefore, it would be preferable for the future research to focus on the younger segment of the society and present more precise description of the younger generation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ANA KESHELASHVILI

Ana Keshelashvili, Ph.D. is a professor of media and communications at Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA), former journalist, nowadays involved in media education, research and training. She has served as a media and communications consultant for BBC Media Action, UNDP Georgia, People-in-Need, N-OST, and others. She was a lead researcher of the Internews Georgian Information Ecosystem Analysis, country researcher of "Mapping Digital Media" carried out by the Open Society Institute; country researcher of European Journalism Trainers' Association's (EJTA) trans-European study of future of journalism values and qualifications. Dr. Keshelashvili also led the Georgian media's needs assessment within the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs' project with Deutsche Welle aimed at strengthening the management of media organizations. She has obtained her Ph.D. in Mass Communication from the University of South Carolina and a Master's degree in Communications from Louisiana State University.

MAIA MIKASHAVIDZE

Maia Mikashavidze, Ph.D. is a professor of media and communication at the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA), also heads the branch office at Internews and directs its media support projects in Georgia. She founded GIPA's Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management in Tbilisi, Georgia, in 2001 and served as its dean until 2011. Prior to 2000, Mikashavidze served as a press and information assistant in the Public Affairs section at the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi, where she was involved in media development projects. She has provided expert media consulting services to the U.S. government, the European Union, the Council of Europe, OSCE, Freedom House, and other international and local organizations. She holds a Ph.D. in mass communication from the University of South Carolina, a master's degree in Public Administration from the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs, and a specialist diploma from Tbilisi State Conservatoire.

THE CULTURE OF GENERATION Z – THE PATH FOR CREATING NEW EDUCATIONAL CONCEPTS

Tamara Kjupeva Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

If we summarize the experiences of the past, it can be said with certainty that social, economic and social changes determine the culture of individuals and the community as a whole. The Covid - pandemic intensified the integration of the world into the virtual dimension of life, and together with the psychological and social consequences of its development - created a world that has grown into the greatest historical challenge of all science. The generation born after 2000, categorized as Generation Z, learns and develops in technologically advanced circumstances and influencing factors that go beyond traditional pedagogy. Among the factors that determine the personality development of these generations, in addition to family and peer groups, the media have a dominant place. Technology is a part of their identity, and they are tech savvy but lack problem-solving skills and have not demonstrated the ability to look at a situation, put in context, analyze it and make a decision (Coombs, 2013). The language of Generation Z is a communication system with authentic rules and inner structure. Faced with modern forms of communication, they create new language codes and innovative and creative forms of expression. Faced with the greatest challenges in the history of education and the impact of technology on child development, modern education systems require models, approaches, skills and literacy that will meet the individual needs of the new generation of young people and, at the same time meet market needs. For these reasons, new educational concepts should be based on approaches that ensure the integration of critical and creative thinking and the development of emotional intelligence. Artificial intelligence is increasingly creating operating systems that are predictors of user behaviour. Algorithms have become the most powerful tool for targeting, managing and directing culture. Hence, the new culture, almost without exception, is defined as an algorithmic culture.

Keywords: generation Z, culture, applications, language, education

1) INTRODUCTION

The content of this paper is a product of research conducted with students from several high schools in North Macedonia, related to the use of social media and its impact on language and culture. The group was composed of high school students aged 15 to 19, which is the richest resource for establishing examples of communication and language transformation. At the same time, they were chosen because they represent Generation Z - children born from 1996 to 2015 (in terms of age and characteristics).

The initial hypothesis of this research was formulated in the affirmative form: The culture of Generation Z is a base for creating new educational concepts. In other words, the results of the research should emphasize the intensity of using social media and their input in the culture of living. Received data confirm the impact of communication in the virtual space, on language and perception of reality.

The purpose of this research is to show the objective situation in North Macedonia in terms of social media use and youth. The research is based on the data gathered in the form of a Questionnaire, available database, interviews and interaction with parents and students. Some information was gathered from the relevant journals, direct discussion with the experts, and different magazine articles.

Due to Covid - protocols in schools and the inability (at the time of this research) to be in personal contact with students in schools, teachers were coordinators in conducting this research. In coordination with the author, they shared material with the students in the classes.

The basic method of research was a Questionnaire in electronic form, which was shared in high schools from Skopje, Gostivar, Kumanovo and Kriva Palanka (SUGS "Orce Nikolov" – Skopje, SUGS "Zef Ljus Marku" - Skopje, SUGS "Gjorce Petrov"- Kriva Palanka, SSUGS "Vlado Tasevski" - Skopje, SSUGS "Vasil Antevski - Dren" – Skopje and SSUGG " Gostivar" – Gostivar).

The questionnaire was implemented in the period from 14.11.2021 - 22.11.2021. Participants were students from the first to the fourth grade of secondary education (15-19 years). Due to the circumstances and the impossibility of approaching the research in a paper sample, the precise selection of the groups could not be precisely organized in terms of equal gender representation in the respondents. The entire selection of the surveyed groups was mediated by the teachers, respecting the diversity in age as a priority.

2) LITERATURE REVIEW

The history and epochs through which the evolution of mankind has passed, confirm that culture is the most authentic archive of human behavior. It is unique in its definition, written or left as a seal in the collective memory. Regardless of the historical period and circumstances, it is a system of values, attitudes, styles, patterns of behavior and form of communication. It reflects ideas, places, events, objects, and people. It shapes the basics of human behavior over time.

Human behavior means adapting to changing situations. "What is implied is that humans have a set of innate needs, requirements, or abilities that must be met or realized in order for vision to exist."(Johnson, 2013. p. 108). Definitions of culture have changed over time and it is gradually defined as a concept from several different aspects. Croeber and Parsons defined culture as a process of: "transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic-meaning systems as factors in shaping human behavior"

(Croeber & Parsons, 1958: 583). Even more often, culture is defined, according to Kluckhohn as "patterns of ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, which constitute the characteristic achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artefacts (Klukhohn, 1951. p.86).

Historical technological revolutions have generally marked the stages of cultural development. The last, Fourth industrial revolution raised questions that are not only related to economic change but also the question of a redefinition of existence. Technology has transposed into all segments of life and created new challenges bordering on physical power and human influence. We are now talking about an algorithmic culture that determines the culture of the new age. Alexander Galloway explains culture in terms of the use of technology and video games (gaming), referring to it as an algorithmic culture. He links the new culture to the influence of big companies like Amazon, Google, Twitter, and Netflix. These concepts are increasingly being expressed in big data logic, which is also changing the way culture is understood, practiced, and defined. (Galloway, 2006).

All definitions of the new culture are related to the rapid development of technology and the digitalization of all segments of life. In this regard, if each generation inherits features and models from previous generations, then the generation born in this technologically advanced time will produce, consume, and interpret a completely different culture. This culture no longer refers to the content, beause it is by default new, compared to the older generations. The new is in all its form, in the perception of reality, in the auxiliary tools for its reception that offer sequences (simulacra), parts of the whole and virtual experience. The difference in those processes of receiving reality, based on which culture is built, creates the algorithmic culture.

If until now, the technological revolutions have been happening for a long time, now it is certain that in an average human life, we will witness many of them. In particular, with the Covid-pandemic, these changes began the rapid transformation of the world and bring closer the future that was not expected in this time frame. If we summarize the experiences of the past, it can be said with certainty that social, economic and social changes determine the culture of individuals and the community as a whole. Covid - the pandemic intensified the integration of the world into the virtual dimension of life and together with the psychological and social consequences of its development - created a world that has grown into the greatest historical challenge in all of science.

To determine the contours of the culture of the generation born after 1996 (Generation Z), we have to start from the first step – the way of socialization and communication. The theory of communication through a series of examples confirms that each individual has an acquired personal image. Thus, great efforts are made to impose this image on others through the process of communication. Each individual has his own personal style of speaking, but at the same time, each participant in communication has the so-called "discoursive roles", related to various personal characteristics (psychological concept, social context, cultural code, status, etc.). In this sense, the American linguist William Labov affirms that "each subject belongs to a certain linguistic community, within which he acquires certain skills, structured in different subsystems (stylistic and social variations)." (Labov, 1972. p.78)

These communities are in fact different sources of culture and the big picture of the values and trends of the time. Until the advent of the Internet and in particular, social media, communication and culture were defined based on the behavior of social groups and individuals who were leaders in change. With the emergence of social groups, new, unknown challenges have emerged that create and transform communication and the culture of generations.

If "we are all wrapped up in our own ideas and interests and have trouble seeing things from other

people's perspective, especially if their perspective is different from ours" (Lucas, 1983.p.123) in real, physical communication, it difficult to explain what happens when we are part of a social group on the internet.

The culture of Gen Z is closely related to mass media and technology, so today we can no longer talk about mass culture. This generation is a generation that does not have a unique culture. Their cultural map is a mosaic of subcultures and personalized forms that are so different and have so many variations that it is almost impossible to group them into a single cultural script that will be related to their overall behavior, communication forms, styles, clothing, music and fig. Under the influence of social media, they are faced daily with trends that change so quickly, that it is more and more difficult for them to build their authenticity or maintain it in the long term.

Social media has grown into a giant network of exchanging opinions, perspectives and interests. Apparently, this is also the case in the real context of everyday life. But the difference is that, in the case of social media, communication and culture are created not only by the users themselves (through the choice of information they read), but also by other invisible mechanisms - algorithms and the overall background infrastructure that creates behaviors and cultural patterns.

Driven by the media, Generation Z represents the so-called algorithmic consumer culture which is „collections of statistically modeled consumer experiences, encoded lifestyles, technologically governed social exchanges and predicted identities, resulting from the recursive loop generated by the largely black-boxed activities of the algorithmic systems featured by digital platforms and devices."(Massimo&Rokka, 2019)

The main goal of the research, the object of interpretation here, was to define the culture of communication of the high school population (popular, Gen Z) and their interaction. The questionnaire was conducted at the class level, during the teaching of individual subjects. Hence, this re-

search will help in a general assessment of the participation of high school students in social networks, the choice of the communication platform, the number of their user-profiles and in particular, the use of communication signs and its forms. (see Exhibit 1)
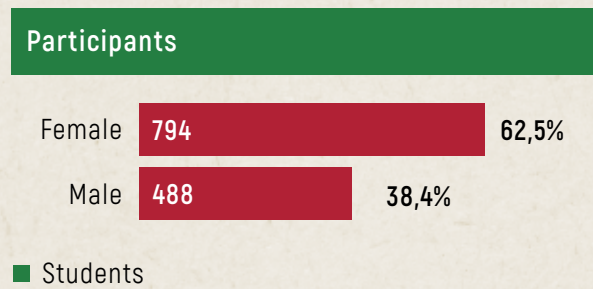

Exhibit 1: Number of participants in the research disaggregated by gender

During the implementation of the Questionnaire, we respected the principle of diversity in the target groups. In that sense, the research included students from the first to the fourth year, from high schools in several cities in North Macedonia and from different educational profiles (vocational school and gymnasium).

Due to the objective circumstances mentioned above, complete gender equality could not be reached (because it depended on the motivation of students for answering the questions and the motivation of the teachers to pursue the principle of gender equality in the selection of the group. (see Exhibit 3: Participants per age). It should be taken into account that high school classes have a larger number of girls in the classes.

Exhibit 2: Participants disaggregated by age

3) FINDINGS

The purpose of the Questionnaire was to get an objective image of the extension of social media usage and the impact of electronic communication on language. In that direction, the question was asked about the type of communication used in everyday conversations. Based on their answers, it can be noticed that digitalization, or more precisely, the virtual context amplifies the emergence of new forms of communication. Thus, texting becomes the dominant form of interaction. Intensive communication and new signs create an alternative, "secret" language of understanding.

Due to the intensity and the speed of the interactions - the members of Generation Z continuously create their own authentic language codes and expressions. "The stylistic range has to recognize not only web pages, but also the vast amount of material found in email, chatrooms, virtual worlds, blogging, instant messaging, texting, tweeting, and other outputs, as well as the increasing amount of linguistic communication in social networking forums." (Crystal, 2011: 10).

The new language, its forms and meanings are the objects of interest of science called the Internet – linguistic or internet - semiotics. Written internet language is not just made up of letters and does not necessarily consist solely of written language. Instead, the prototype of a text is changing to an amalgam of language and image elements, which constitutes the "textual reality" (Stöckl, 2009: 204).

One of the questions of the research was the question of the type of communication that high school students use most often (clearly and precisely coincide with the emergence of the new linguistic phenomenon textism). From the total number of participants, the following answers were given to this question:

What type of electronic communication do you use?

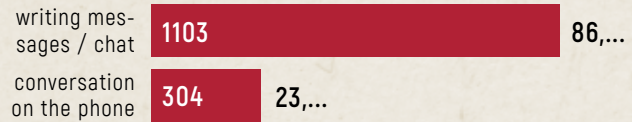|		
writing messages / chat	1103	86,...
conversation on the phone	304	23,...

Exhibit 3: The most popular type of communication

More than 86% (n = 1270) of high school students in North Macedonia use written language in everyday communication. They talk less on the phone and actively communicate through chat. In this way, they create their own sub-culture, a language with an authentic grammar that deviates from all syntaxis, punctuation and spelling rules. It is a free system, without norm, in that sense, but with its own indigenous language code.

Communication of this generation sets up a new language system of abbreviations and visual signs. They are a product of a dynamic language zone of millions of information per day, on a dozen applications, sounds and notifications.

The great technological revolutions have had a mutual time span. Each of them was causally linked to major economic, social and existential changes. Each of them was a step forward in facilitating the life of the individual. After the Fourth industrial revolution, it becomes clear that this time frame is shrinking and that it is increasingly likely that such technological revolutions will occur much more frequently, even two or three in an average human life.

Social media has become a new virtual home and a new environment in which each individual builds their world and their digital friends and like-minded people. That tension, that high voltage that is created by the constant need to "enter" in our home every day, creates a new part of all of us - our new identity. This ubiquity online, through the active reception of notifications and information and the instinct to respond to them, at least with our attention, has created the new phenomenon of *being at the moment*.

„We tend to exist in a distracted present, where forces on the periphery are magnified, and those immediately before us are ignored. Our ability to create a plan — much less follow through on it — is undermined by our need to improvise our way through any number of external impacts that stand to derail us at any moment.

Instead of finding a stable foothold in the here and now, we end up reacting to the ever-present assault of simultaneous impulses and commands (Rushkoff, 2013: 4). This research confirmed that the most popular social platform for Macedonian high school students (aged between 15-19) is Instagram.

What social media platform in your daily communication do you use the most?

Platform	Count	Percentage
Instagram	1100	87,7%
Snapchat	71	5,6%
Facebook	23	1,8%
Twitter	16	1,3%
Tik Tok	46	3,6%

Exhibit 4: The most popular social media platform

This research was focused not only on the forms of communication but also on the context that produces language transformation. One of the questions concerned the degree of online active communication of high school students. So, to the question: In how many conversation groups (chat groups) you are included during the day? - more than half of the respondents confirmed that they are active in more than three groups every day. As many as 33.3% (n = 1265) of the respondents are active in even more than five chat groups. Only 9, 3% communicate in one chat group per day.

In how many conversation groups (chat groups) are you involved during the day?

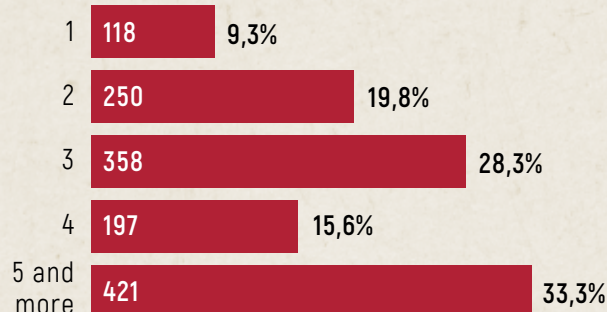|	Count	Percentage
1	118	9,3%
2	250	19,8%
3	358	28,3%
4	197	15,6%
5 and more	421	33,3%

Exhibit 5: Number of active participations in chat group during the day

This data confirms that the students' language skills are in intensive development. To communicate in several chat groups at the same time, means to be involved in using several language characters in parallel and different communication patterns. Each application and intern communication requires its own language rules, signs, codes, and meanings. Although written communication in these groups includes language that is non-standard.

The use of these linguistic signs does not reduce their literacy, because "children can not make variations with symbols, numbers and letters, if they do not have basic literacy" (Crystal, 2011. p.16).

The language of communication accumulates the values of a community and reflects personal, family and social components and conveys forms of socially and culturally acquired language patterns. We should be aware that modern communication is a mixed system of codes that are constantly changing, and this makes online communication a complex linguistic network. Gen Z young people (high school students) are active participants in a massive communication circle. They are constantly online, included in interactions as creators, editors, receivers and senders of information.

The examples obtained with this research confirm the generational linguistic gap between the members of this generation (Generation Z) and the generations that previously had their own written language code. If all the examples of new language signs and words are summarized, it is almost certain that new language material has already been created for the lexicon of social media.

The following examples are the most common:

Word / sign	Meaning
Wyd	what are you doing
tbh	to be honest
Aight	all right
Gm	good morning
Idk	i do not know
Lol	laugh out loud
Ngl	not gonna lie
Nmv	never mind
pls	please
Rn	right now
Bff	best friend forever
Brb	be right back
Lmao	laughing my ass off
Ig	i guess
Gtg	got to go
Hyd	how you doing
Wut	what
Idc	I do not care

Exhibit 6: Table of the most popular chat-words

In addition to this language code, Generation Z also uses visual signs - emojis. They are a substitute for non-verbal signs and signify inner experiences that graphically written language cannot convey.

What is certain is that all previously stated research findings confirm that Generation Z is not just a new social and social community. They are a new, authentic language group. Their communication is more and more separated from the communication of their predecessors and creates a linguistic and thus a social gap with the other generations. This is not only a question of problems in understanding their language forms, here it is a question of a new culture of interaction, full of symbols and codes that are unreadable and unknown to others.

There are many other components that make up social media communication. Many researchers are debating this transformation of language. They are guided by two different theses. Some are on the side of change (that is a reality), while others are opponents of that acceptance.

„Are email, instant messaging (IM), and text messaging on cell phones degrading the language? This question surfaces in debates among language professionals and, perhaps more important, among parents and their teenage offspring. If some traditionalists are correct, we must take swift action now, before these children are reduced to marginal literacy.

But if those celebrating linguistic innovation are correct, adults should get out of the way of normal language change. Families and educational purists have an obvious stake in the outcome of this controversy, but so, too, do the makers and marketers of computer-based software and devices–from IM platforms to predictive text programs for cell phones." (Baron, 2005. p.29)

Gen Z's most popular online habit is posting stories on social media. This social media activity has also become a form of communication. On the one hand, the subject conveys a mes

sage through a story (short video or photo), and on the other - receives feedback in the form of emojis, words and other types of signs-symbols). This form of communication is not verbal, but is a combination of several codes: language code - words, artistic code - photography, music and symbols to enhance the story, as well as aesthetic code - filters to beautify the subject of the message and the background of the story.

4) DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Education must not lose its function. The school should prepare the future citizens, today Generation Z and younger, to participate in the new culture of living, aware of the mechanism of algorithms, background infrastructure and all computer-mediated communication. How to prepare curricula that will be based on the interdisciplinarity of contents and a completely new concept of the classroom, when the creators of educational policies are themselves the product of a past educational concept?

Our future is happening now, and it has begun its rapid pace of change with the Covid pandemic. Covid circumstances set new conditions and transformed the overall life of the people. On the one hand, it has brought inequality and a different approach to education and technology, but on the other hand, it has opened up new ideas for redefining education, knowledge and literacy. The main question is, what are the goals of education and what kind of literacy is needed by the generations trapped in the matrix of new technology? For them, devices are windows to the world and the experiences with the machine build their worldview.

If the results of this research are summarized and if we take into account the overall transformation of life under the influence of technology, it is already certain that education is facing the most difficult challenge in the history of mankind. Social media has become a dominant force in creating and managing culture. It is a time for a different type of literacy. New literacy means a broader concept, a set of reading, comprehension and digital literacy skills. Contemporary education and students need multiple literacies that "include the varied forms of text as well as the cultural identities expressed during communication, known as discourse" (Sheridan-Thomas, 2007. p.121). Sociolinguists discuss discourse, semiotics and other terms relating to the use of symbols to convey meaning with and emphasize culture and the role it plays (Gee, 1996).

The development of technology has brought to humanity a set of tools for a better life and access to the incredible ocean of resources. But at the same time, the communication process in that circle created problems in the creation and management of information. Also, today, the big question is the ethics and ethical use of data from big companies like Google, Amazon, Facebook and many others.

All of this is important and should be an integral part of educational curricula. Awareness of the existence of mechanisms for manipulation, disinformation and propaganda is a new threat in the daily life of digital nomads. Young people "travel" daily through several zones (linguistic, informatic, virtual), which opens a great chance to be a target and a means of manipulation. The OECD report notes that the risk of life online:

"Algorithms that sort us into groups of like-minded individuals create social media echo chambers that amplify our views and leave us insulated from opposing arguments that may alter our beliefs. These virtual bubbles homogenize opinions and polarise our societies; and they can have a significant – and adverse – impact on democratic processes." (OECD report, 2021.p.15)

Knowledge about media, the development of critical thinking, linguistics and digital and information literacy are the basic principles of future education. Every student has to be aware of their own authentic life and identity and cautious in the digital society and virtual identities on social media.

The penetration of AI in all spheres initiates the need for changes and transformation of education and learning concepts. The last innovation, the so-called ChatGPT confirms, among other things, that the Internet has grown into a global database that, with the help of artificial intelligence, creates its own connections and creates ready-made patterns. All this leads us to the conclusion that we are faced with the historically greatest transformation of education, during which the question of what is actually "knowledge" and how to approach the new generations in the educational process is being redefined. What to evaluate? The creativity, the argumentation of the statements, the innovation, the authenticity of the conclusions that the student draws after researching on the Internet, the critical opinion, the original views. Or all together?

It is clear that we first need to change the way we teach. Classic pedagogy is going down in history and teachers have to adapt to the changes. It is already obvious that after the expansion of social media and the hyperproduction of information, databases and various forms of communication, the transformation of the school is inevitable. The ways of imparting knowledge, the way in which students will navigate through the media world and manage that entire information universe - should be an imperative of education.

The main goal of the new educational concept is to prepare the student for the safe and reliable use of technology, for ethical communication on social media, for the use of technology for creating innovative products, for the creative connection of science and art, etc. Due to the emergence and easy availability of artificial intelligence tools, writing and research as basic skills for intellectual and further professional development are under threat of misuse and undermining of academic potential. In such a spectrum of data, the need for "soft skills" and humanization of the generation that grows and is shaped in a technologically developed time and with social media mechanisms that manage their styles, choices, way of thinking, dressing, culture in general is already visible.

AI has become the new force that will make tectonic shifts in educational concepts. This is that historical moment of an educational revolution, which is not created by man, but by machines and computers. With the simplicity with which large databases from all fields are reached, with new innovative platforms, such as the last one (ChatGPT), it is likely that conditions are being imposed for the so-called "verbalization" of education and for practices that will initiate individual originality, dialogue, individual approach to the student, teamwork, projects that will be connected to immediate social, societal and scientific issues and dilemmas.

An education that will include the learner himself, who will use technology and data as support to create original educational products. It is certain that education based on the use of technology is increasingly under the threat of creating a false and unrealistic assessment of the personal achievements of students. Applications that solve math problems, platforms that write essays and research on their own, using data that is unverified or incorrect - these are just a few of the challenges for every teacher. Education, in a race with the technology and tools of artificial intelligence, has only one choice in three steps - to adapt, integrate and transform! The future that we expected to meet in fifty or a hundred years is fast approaching us now. Let's hope we find a way to be a part of it!
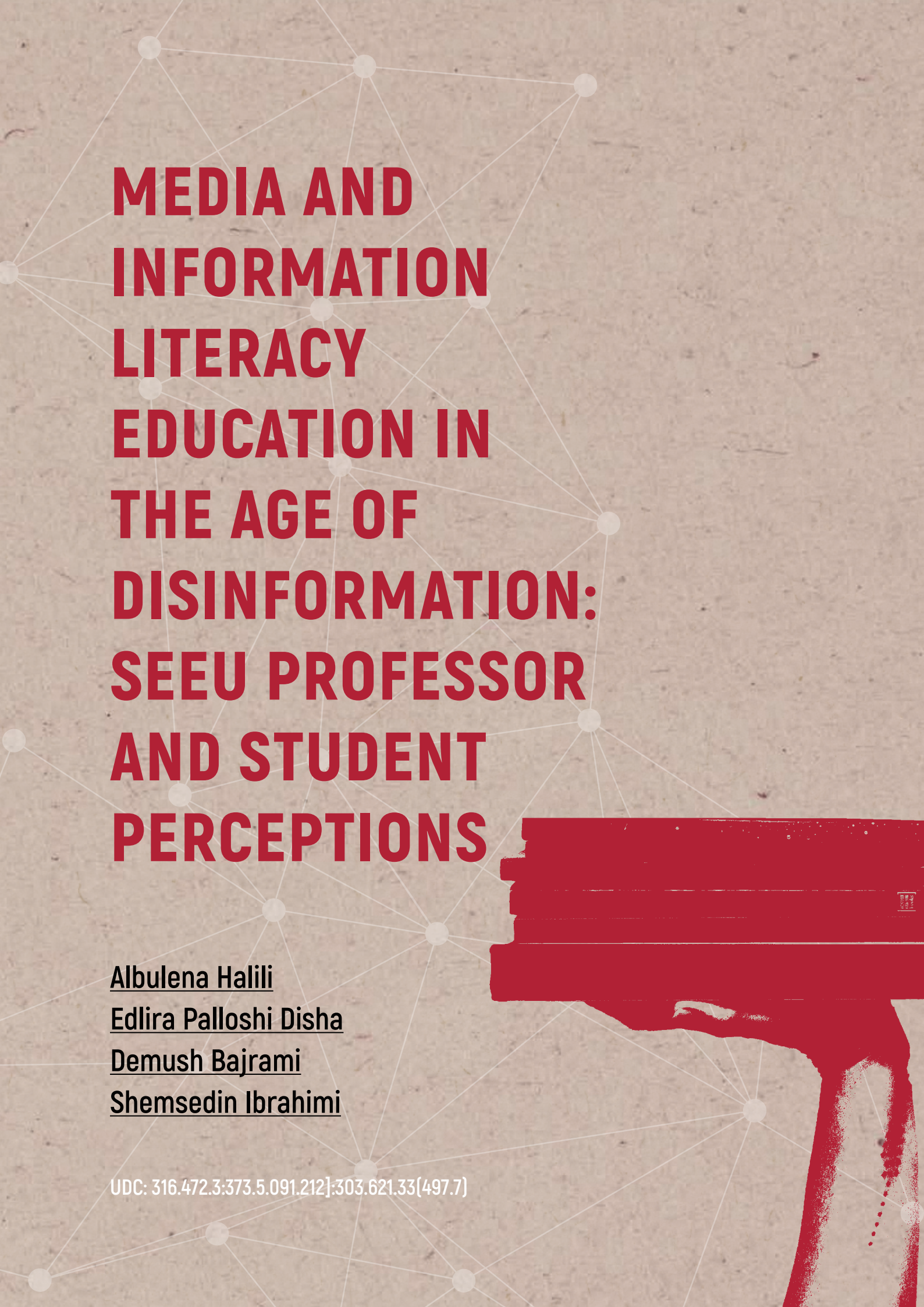
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TAMARA KJUPEVA

Tamara Kjupeva is a long-time researcher in the field of education and communication. Professor, Ph.D. in Philology since 2010, author of dozens of professional works and books ("Creative teaching and text" and "Pedagogical communication"). In 2018, she completed a study stay in the USA, as part of the SUSI program. She has been a longtime associate at the Institute of Communication Studies, the newspaper "Medium" and the Macedonian Institute for Media. She is also a mentor for practical teaching of students from the Faculty of Philology "Blaže Koneski" - Skopje.

MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF DISINFORMATION: SEEU PROFESSOR AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

Albulena Halili
Edlira Palloshi Disha
Demush Bajrami
Shemsedin Ibrahimi

ABSTRACT

We are living in the disinformation age or in that of a revolution in propaganda, which gives rise to fragile democracies, vulnerable citizens, less capable deliberations, new forms of subversion, misuse of information by third parties etc. North Macedonia is a highly fragmented and polarized society, which gives space to the impact of malign actors for achieving their geopolitical goals such as to destabilize, weaken ties with the West or just increase their presence. Resilience, thus, has become the shield of contemporary information warfare. Media and Information Literacy education through the development of critical thinking in the young generation is a conditio sine qua non for building resilience to disinformation. This study argues that universities as agents of change have the mission to lead the process of building societal resilience through Media and Information Literacy education. In this paper the researchers from the Media Literacy and Disinformation Research Cluster at Max van der Stoel Institute (MVDSI), South East European University (SEEU) through a mixed-method–approach based on both qualitative and quantitative methods, examine the perceptions of SEEU academic staff members and students regarding Media and Information Literacy education at the university level. Data from the staff questionnaire (n=45) suggest that the majority of academic staff members across all SEEU faculties and institutes perceive Media and Information Literacy education as one of the ways to make youth resilient to disinformation. Moreover, the student questionnaire (n=105) revealed similar results. SEEU students stated their desire for the introduction of Media and Information Literacy as an elective course in their curricula, as one of the best ways to become resilient to disinformation on the internet. Ways and modalities of implementation and course content remain objects of exploration.

Keywords: disinformation, resilience, Media and Information Literacy education, SEEU.

1) INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, access to information is closer to us than ever before. The internet and social media have made it easier for individuals to access and share information where the individual could also be the creator of the message. The overload of information available online has also led to an increase in disinformation and misinformation. The spread of false and misleading information has brought the necessity to speak for media and information literacy education as a tool to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge to critically evaluate the information they consume.

Living in an era of information overload it has become difficult to distinguish the truth from the untruth each day. The amount of content that users produce every second is so tremendous that, as a society, we are constantly bombarded with new information, the veracity of which is often highly questionable (O'Shaughnessy, 2020). Hence, misinformation and disinformation find a suitable environment for testing their impact. Disinformation is the intended message to deceive and manipulate, whereas misinformation is the unintentional spread of false or inaccurate information. Misinformation could be a derivative of disinformation, but disinformation could never be a consequence of misinformation. However, both leave considerable implications in society. The disinformation age imposes new mechanisms that we must follow to be protected. Disinformation intends to cause disunity and uncertainty and interrupt the progressive development of one country. Woolley and Joseph (2020) have defined disinformation from the intent's perspective as a broad term usually referring to the "purposeful use of non-rational argument to undermine a political ideal, inflame social division, or engender political cynicism". The deficit in digital media literacy has been identified as a critical factor explaining widespread belief in online misinformation (Brisola & Doyle, 2019). We will not delve into the reasons for these activities, but we will try to rationalize why Media and Information Literacy is a must nowadays.

Media and Information Literacy (MIL) education is a process that enables individuals to access, analyze, evaluate and reflect on information faced. This process has become an essential life skill to navigate in the digital age. MIL education also engages in knowing how to critically evaluate the information that is shared and how to use it to make informed decisions through accessing digital technology. The importance of MIL education has been recognized by many stakeholders, including governments, educators, and international organizations, who have been working to promote MIL education as an essential life skill for citizens. UNESCO defines MIL as "the knowledge and skills required to find, analyze, critically evaluate and generate information in various media and contexts." and emphasizes that MIL education is crucial for "promoting a culture of peace and sustainable development" (Singh et. al., 2015). An already accepted definition for Media literacy is that "Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create media in all its forms" (Pernisco, 2020).

Democratic countries worldwide attach great importance to media education in school curricula. Among primary and secondary schools, universities play a crucial role in developing specific curricula for establishing youth professionals ready to face new technological challenges in the information space. Adding to this, the responsibility of the universities to foster a culture of critical thinking through MIL that will help to combat disinformation and contribute to broader resilience. A society that is media and information literate "fosters the development of free, independent and pluralistic media and open information systems" (UNESCO, 2011, p. 20).

Based on the multiple country reports for malign foreign influences, no state can be entirely resilient to disinformation. However, the level of susceptibility varies on the state's internal factors and its geostrategic orientation. According to the

GLOBSEC Vulnerability Index 2021 Report, North Macedonia was classified as the most resilient of the Western Balkan countries examined by the Index, with a score of 40/100. Its society, however, finds itself polarized into antagonistic political camps and remains vulnerable (GLOBSEC, 2021). This vulnerability is present due to various factors, the most important of which are: the EU accession fatigue and pro-Russian attitudes due to its Slavic population. Other internal factors that make the society susceptible to disinformation are: the multiethnic character of society, which has not been reflected fully into the functioning of the state, the multi religious character of the society which gives space to foreign actors, mostly states to interfere through various ways and methods, two strict lines that divide the political landscape: the ethnic line and the ideological line being more present at the Macedonian political camp, and which often merges with the geostrategic alignments.

Despite the recognition of the importance of MIL education, there is a need for more research to understand the stakeholders' viewpoints of MIL education in higher education institutions as an indisputable condition for the successful implementation of the MIL education. Bajrami et. al, (2022) study for introducing Media and Information Literacy in South East European University (SEEU) in North Macedonia, identified that future research should include a wider group of SEEU professors and students, as well as 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. Also, the need for a qualitative research approach in order to clearly identify the opinion of the professors and students for a MIL course was highlighted. The current study tries to complement the gaps identified in the previous research.

Thus, this research paper aims to explore the perceptions of professors and students on the necessity and implementation of MIL education in the age of disinformation. The study will focus on professors' and students' perceptions of MIL education at South East European University and its

importance in the age of disinformation. The research will also explore their opinion on addressing the information disorder phenomenon through introducing the new course for Media and Information Literacy.

This research has been organized as a part of the project activities *'SEEU Students 5.0: Media and Information Literacy in the Age of Disinformation'*, implemented by Max van der Stoel Institute at South East European University and within the framework of the project YouThink that is led by IREX and funded by USAID. The aim of this project was to develop and enhance media literacy and information skills among South East European University students through formal education, hence introducing Media and Information Literacy as an elective course for students of every faculty at South East European University. The outcome of the need assessment with key stakeholders (SEEU students, staff, management) as one of the project activities was foreseen to be - getting accurate feedback about the perception and attitudes of the students, staff, and stakeholders regarding the introduction of the Media and Information Literacy course at the university curricula.

The findings of this study provide valuable insights for MIL education in South East European University and help increase a consensus for implementing MIL in all higher education institutions in North Macedonia. The research will also provide insights into the opinion of professors and students on the need to build societal resilience through MIL. The findings of this study will particularly be useful for educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders in the field of MIL education, but also in the higher education field in general.

2) METHODOLOGY

The research is conducted through a closed survey, adding one additional open question with professors and students at South East European University. The survey is designed to gather data on professors' and students' perceptions of MIL education and its importance in the age of disinformation. The final open question is intended to gather more in-depth information about their opinion on the need for MIL education at SEEU.

A mixed-method–approach based on both qualitative and quantitative methods was employed for this research. Two self-completion questionnaires administering a closed-ended Google Forms web-based survey for South East European students and academic staff, including the management of the South East European University were applied. Both questionnaires were sent through university generic email to undergraduate and graduate students as well as to the SEEU academic staff during the period July-October 2022.

The *Questionnaire for Media and Information Literacy (students)* was distributed to the undergraduate and master students of the South East European University (SEEU) through the group email on October 5, 2022. It was composed of questions starting from general to more specific ones. The questionnaire was completed by 105 out of 1937 BA and 833 MA active students in the 2022/2023 academic year. This represents the sample of 3,8 percent of the total active student number in SEEU.

The *Questionnaire on Media and Information Literacy (SEEU academic staff)* was distributed through a group email to all academic staff of the South East European University (SEEU) on July 8, 2022. Questions, written in the three official languages used at SEEU, Albanian, Macedonian, and English, were organized the same way as for the students - starting from general to specific ones. The target audience of this questionnaire

was all the SEEU academic staff, and their participation is presented in percentage. The questionnaire was completed by the sample of 50 percent respondents out of total SEEU full-time academic staff. Respectively, the questionnaire was answered by 45 out of 89 members of the academic full-time staff at SEEU including the high management of the university.

3) FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Assessing professors' perception on including Media and information literacy course at SEEU

The questionnaire was completed by 45 out of 89 members of the full-time SEEU academic staff and its management. The majority of respondents were from the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication with 28.3% which is a very important indicator for this study for the reason that the majority of the professors who are part of this faculty will be lecturers in this subject and future subjects in the field of MIL education. 6.6% of the respondents have high positions in the management of SEEU which is an important indicator for the support of MIL education in SEEU, as well as for maintaining the sustainability of it in the future. The same is true for the percentage of faculty management which is 13%. Their participation and support is also vital for the implementation of this initiative in all the respective faculties. The lowest number among the SEEU faculty members are those from the Faculty of Contemporary Sciences and Technologies, which is interpreted as something normal, given their professional expertise in the field of digital literacy in particular. The visual composition of the respondents is shown in the chart below (Figure 1):
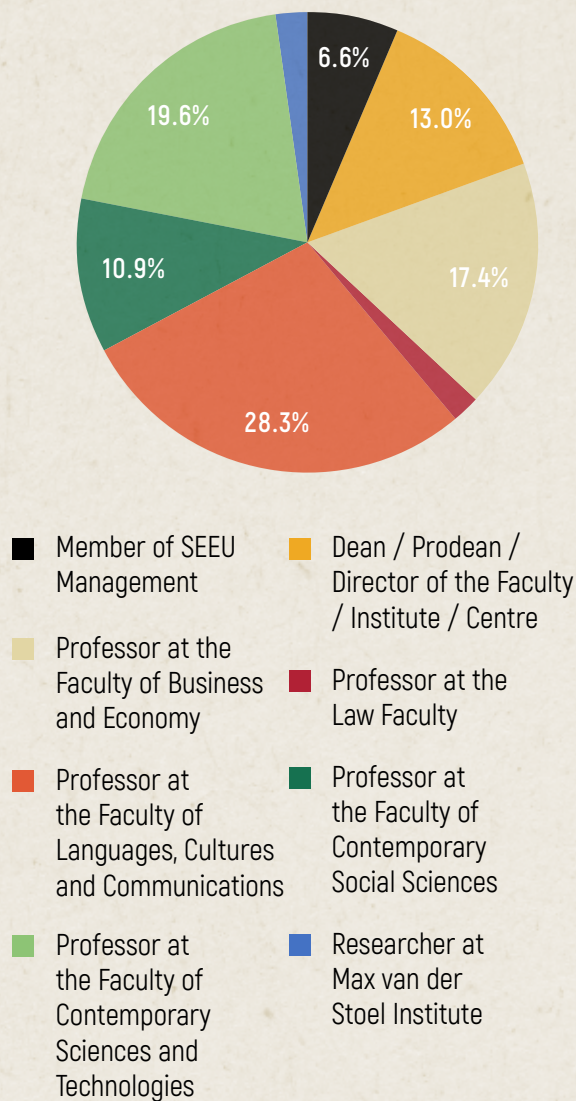
Legend:
- Member of SEEU Management
- Dean / Prodean / Director of the Faculty / Institute / Centre
- Professor at the Faculty of Business and Economy
- Professor at the Law Faculty
- Professor at the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communications
- Professor at the Faculty of Contemporary Social Sciences
- Professor at the Faculty of Contemporary Sciences and Technologies
- Researcher at Max van der Stoel Institute

Figure 1. Composition of the respondents' positions

The academic staff of SEEU have been asked about their perception of students' time-frequency in social networks. 97.8% of them think that their students spend too much time on social networks, while only 2.2% have stated that they do not know. No answer with 'No' was recorded.

The majority of SEEU academic staff, 57.8% perceive that students do not have the necessary skills to face various manipulations in social networks. Only 15.6% of them think that students are equipped with the skills that make them resilient to various online manipulations. Being aware that manipulations on the internet are present and unavoidable, they do not think that the students should not spend much time on the internet, but on the contrary, their advice is that they should not believe everything they read on social networks, but rather approach the information found there critically. The percentage of professors who think this way is 84.4.

The overall perception on the presence and frequency of fake news on the internet is almost unanimous. To investigate their perception of the frequency of fake news in social media, the question about how much manipulative information is circulating on social networks was added to the survey. 93,3% of the professors think that fake news is present often on the internet, and only 6.7% think that fake news is found on the internet occasionally.

The academic staff in higher percentage, 91.1% think that our university should undertake actions to make students more vigilant to the threats on the internet. In the question 'What do you think that students need in order to become resilient to threats on the internet?' they were given more than one possible option to evaluate their opinion of students' needs for becoming more resilient to threats on the internet, with the possibility to add additional options. Three of the options given were sufficiently selected. However, two of them considered adding their additional options to this question. The majority of the responses, 32 or 71,1% indicated that according to them students need critical skills to access the internet. 18 or 40% of the respondents answered that students need better digital skills. Higher was the number of professors who think that students need skills for detection of fake news with 25 or 55.6% of the total respondents. The additional options added by the professors by their choice were that students need: regular trainings for digital literacy and that they need to use critical thinking skills.

What do you think students need in order to become resilient to threats on the internet? (You can choose more than one option)

Better digital skills	18
Skills for detection of fake news	25
Critical skills for internet access	32
Regular trainings for digital literacy	1
They need to use critical thinking skills whenever necessary.	1

Figure 2. Professors' perceptions on the ways of building students' resilience

The Likert scale was employed to measure the respondents' approach to adding the Media and Information Literacy course to the university curricula. The majority of the respondents (46.6%) from whom 44.4% agreed completely and 42.2% simply agreed that the course should be added to the university curricula as one of the ways to make youth more resilient to disinformation. None of the respondents disagreed or completely disagreed.

- Completely agree (44.4%)
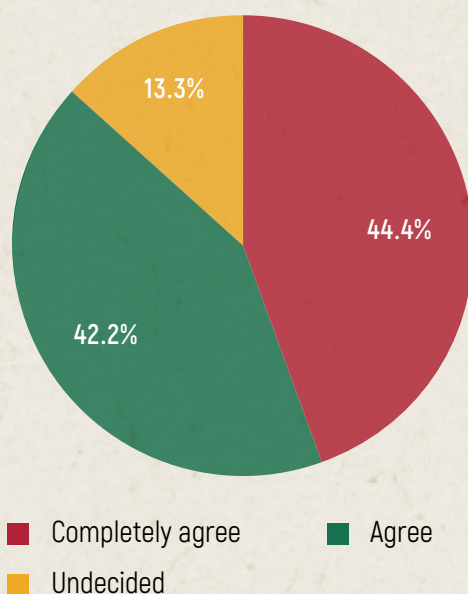- Agree (42.2%)
- Undecided (13.3%)

Figure 3. Professors' perceptions on introducing MIL as a subject at the university curricula

To concretize the question about the professors' attitude on introduction of MIL, the respondents were asked if they think SEEU is the university that should precede this challenge for young people and offer elective courses such as Media and Information Literacy. The majority of the respondents completely agreed that the course should be added to the SEEU university curricula, and none of the respondents disagreed or completely disagreed.

- Completely agree (66.7%)
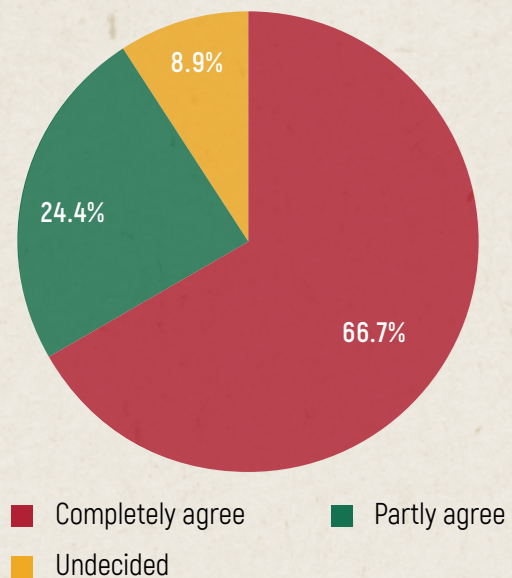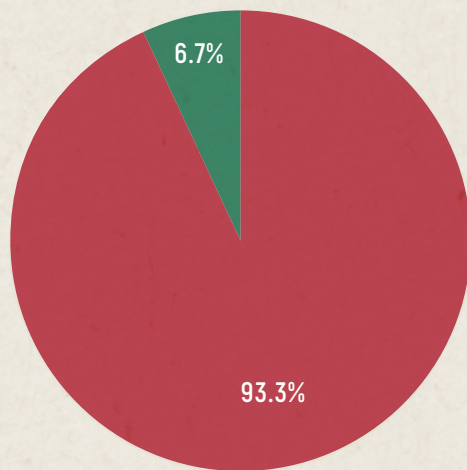- Partly agree (24.4%)
- Undecided (8.9%)

Figure 4. Professors' perceptions on SEEU preceding the introduction of MIL education

The overall finding is that 93.3 percent of the SEEU academic staff who participated in the survey would support the initiative of introducing MIL as a subject in university curricula, with none of the respondents having 'No' as an answer.

Figure 5. SEEU professors' support for MIL education initiative

Yes — 93.3%
I don't know — 6.7%

Assessing students' perception for including Media and Information Literacy course at SEEU

The *Questionnaire for Media and Information Literacy (students)* was distributed to the undergraduate and master students of the South East European University (SEEU) through the group email. The questionnaire was organized starting with general to specific questions. The questionnaire was completed by 105 out of 1937 BA and 833 MA active students in the 2022/2023 academic year. The questionnaire was completed by 58 % females and 40 % males whereas 2 % didn't want to declare their gender. The questionnaire was completed mostly by the undergraduate students, 87.6 percent, and by fewer master students, 12.4 percent. Students of five SEEU faculties answered the questionnaire. The chart below (Figure 6) shows their representation in percentage. At a higher rate, the students from the Faculty of Contemporary Sciences and Technologies answered the questionnaire (42.9 %), followed by the students from the LAW Faculty.
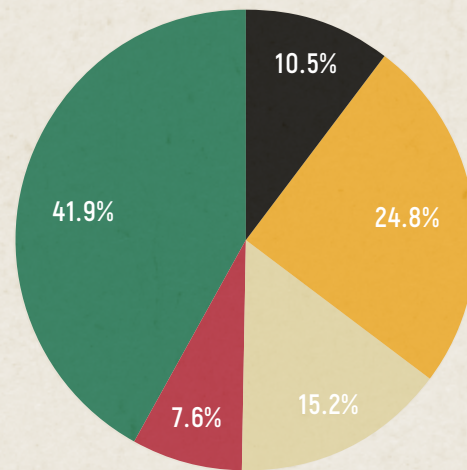
Faculty of Contemporary Social Sciences — 10.5%
LAW Faculty — 24.8%
Faculty of Business and Economics — 15.2%
Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication — 7.6%
Faculty of Contemporary Sciences and Technologies — 41.9%

Figure 6. SEEU students' faculty representation

As expected, most of the students spend a lot of time on the internet daily, 2-7 hours a day is an option that was selected by 71.4 % of the respondents. Even though, most of the students 88.6 % think that there is often fake news on the internet. None of the students think that fake news is seldom or never on the internet, and only 11.4 % think that there are sometimes fake news on the internet.

Most of the students are confident that they have the necessary skills to deal with different manipulations on the internet presented in 64.8 %. Only 5.7 % think that they don't have the necessary skills to face the manipulations on the internet and 27.5 % don't know if they have the necessary skills. However, students expressed their perception about the need for being resilient to online threats and at a higher rate students think they need skills for identifying relevant sources on the internet, followed by skills for fake news detection and better digital skills and critical ability to access the internet in order to become resilient (see Figure 7 for results).

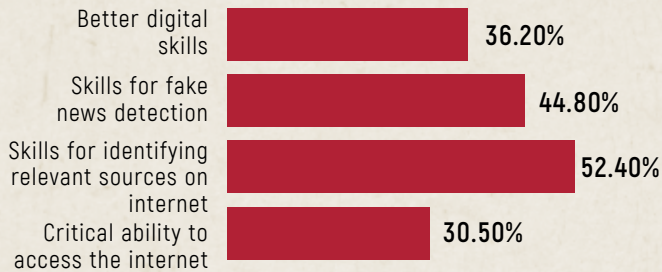**What do you think you need to be resilient to online threats? (You can select more than one option)**

Better digital skills	36.20%
Skills for fake news detection	44.80%
Skills for identifying relevant sources on internet	52.40%
Critical ability to access the internet	30.50%

Figure 7. Students' perception for the need for resilience to online threats

For assessing their opinion if they would like to have the opportunity to develop skills to critically access the internet during their studies, the next question was included. 70 % of the students would like to have such an opportunity (see Figure 8).

Would you like to have the opportunity to develop skills to critical access internet during your studies?

- Yes
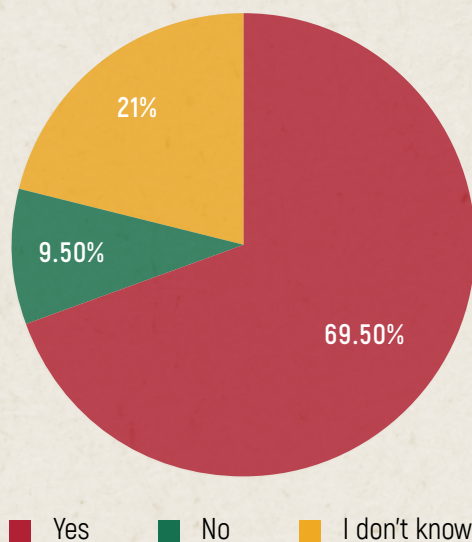- No
- I don't know

21%
9.50%
69.50%

Figure 8. Students' perception for developing skills to critically access the internet

Moreover, 70.5 % of the students think that our university should do something to make students aware of these online threats. One of the ways to make students resilient to disinformation is to include the course in Media and Information Literacy in the university curricula. Most of the students agree with this and only 6.7 % do not agree (see Figure 9 for more detailed results).

Do you think that one of the ways to make you resilient to disinformation is to include the course of MIL in university curricula?

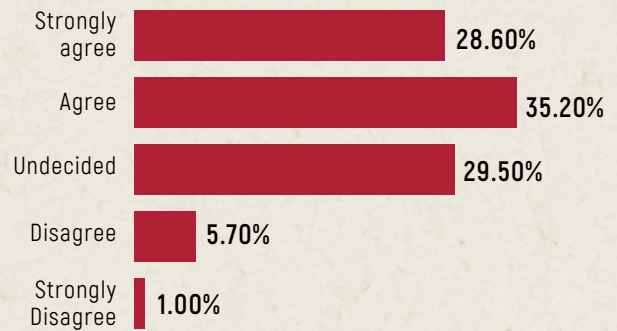|	
Strongly agree	28.60%
Agree	35.20%
Undecided	29.50%
Disagree	5.70%
Strongly Disagree	1.00%

Figure 9. Students' perceptions for introducing MIL in University

The final close-ended question wants to assess student preference for choosing the course of Media and Information Literacy as an elective course when offered in the future. 55.2 % of the students would choose Media and Information Literacy as an elective course if offered in their respective faculty (Figure 10).

Would you choose Media and Information Literacy as an elective course in the faculty you are studying at?
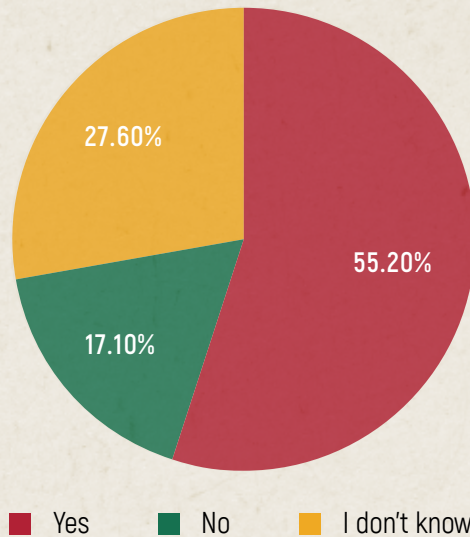

Figure 10. Students' perception for choosing MIL as an elective course

SEEU professors' and students' opinions for the Media and Information Literacy course

The consultative Questionnaire for the SEEU academic staff, and the Questionnaire for the SEEU students included one open question as a form of a qualitative assessment of their opinion on introducing the Media and Information Literacy course to the university curricula. In the section of 'Additional Comments', below we present some of the most relevant views of the academic staff:

'I think it is an extraordinary idea and of mutual benefit for all, especially for cultural diversity.'

'Every innovation for raising the awareness of the new generations as well as their preparation I consider valuable!'

'Media Education should be a mandatory course in the University.'

'I think the youth should be educated to select the information in social networks.'

'The subject is quite delicate, and this subject or at least one subject chapter should be processed in the first-year programs as soon as possible.'

Students were also very keen on giving their opinions about the relevance of becoming resilient through introducing this course in their curricula. Some of their views are presented below:

'I would choose it as an elective course, but we at the Faculty of Contemporary Sciences and Technologies have many hours a week, and now to add an extra hour is a bit too much.'

'Fake Internet news represents a great threat to the development of the critical opinion of students and professors. Anyone could fall for it at the risk of developing the wrong concept or point of view of how things work. Media and information literacy is a good way to reduce that risk.'

'Instead of using random blogs and social media for every bit of information people have to read full books and real studies if they want an unbiased opinion for the questions they have. A course that teaches how to properly read books and enjoy reading them would be far more effective in helping students learn how to gather information from the source as opposed to the secondhand biased information found online. Reading a book can help you form your own individualistic opinions on certain topics whereas with media you'll simply get recommended one side of the story which the algorithm will keep feeding you, and this will make it unable to leave the loop of disinformation and falsehood because you're not exposed to real dense information that benefits you but rather short, incomplete headlines written by people who want to make money and who are incompetent to make the claims they make. A course based on the Mortimer J. Adler book

called How to Read a Book could be of help to students throughout their life and during their academic careers...'

'It's worth it because now life hits us with news everywhere, like on the phone, on the TV, like in the rumors in our life, every day we are surrounded by a lot of fake news. I have come across this month and heard about many people who think they are earning from the phone by working online and then they are asked for some personal data that everyone sends to withdraw their money and that information is sold on the "dark web"...I think that fake news has affected our lives. We also need to know how much we should trust the internet.'

Future research

Ways and modalities of MIL education implementation and course content remain objects of exploration in future research which could take place after the first year of the implementation of MIL education in South East European University, but not only. Comparative research with the implementation of MIL education in other higher education institutions in North Macedonia would be of an added value to future collaborative research in the field.

4) CONCLUSIONS

Universities are promoters of the changes that take place in every society, particularly of innovative ideas, which are often characterized as revolutionary. They are the models that are followed and that create behavioral trends in society. Universities have the right infrastructure, enthusiasm, and suitable environments to generate, but also implement concrete solutions, which are much easier to implement in the community. They are the main accelerators of many social changes and drafters of many policies that have been im-

plemented and are currently implemented in certain countries, but also globally. Having said this, living in the disinformation age, the role of the universities becomes more crucial in educating a generation who is professionally equipped to face information challenges as well as to promote critical thinking in each step as a democratic value of a resilient society. Media and Information Literacy nowadays represents an essential life skill to evaluate information critically and to be able to make informed decisions.

South East European University is perceived by its students and staff as a unique academic and scientific environment, because it incorporates interdisciplinary study programs, local and international background frameworks, scientific and research institutes, and students coming from the Southeast European region and beyond. This environment transforms the institution into an important factor in dealing with important topics that have an impact on society. For some time now, SEEU has proven itself as a model for the implementation of new trends in higher education and it has been a pioneer of many initiatives in the field of higher education. MIL being one of them. Since 2019 SEEU, through its research institute Max van der Stoel has established the Media Literacy and Disinformation Research Cluster under the Social Sciences Group conducting research projects on this interdisciplinary field. The cluster has also been the promoter of the idea of Media Information Literacy education as a way of building resilient students able to fight disinformation.

This research has justified the initiative for the introduction of Media and Information Literacy as an elective course for students of every faculty at South East European University and showed the significance of introducing this course through SEEU professors' and students' perceptions.

Data from the staff questionnaire (n=45) suggest that the majority of academic staff members across all SEEU faculties and institutes perceive Media and Information Literacy education as one of the ways to make youth resilient to disinforma-

tion. Moreover, the student questionnaire (n=105) revealed similar results. SEEU students stated their desire for the introduction of Media and Information Literacy as an elective course in their curricula, as one of the best ways to become resilient to disinformation on the internet.

From the findings and results from both questionnaires as well as their opinions stated in the open section one can conclude that there is a suitable environment for the implementation of the MIL in the SEEU curricula. Majority of students stated their desire for the introduction of Media Literacy and Information as an elective course in their curricula, as one of the best ways to become resilient to disinformation on the internet. The results from the questionnaire with the SEEU academic staff supported students' perceptions regarding their need to develop skills that will help them to deal with different manipulations on the internet as a way to become resilient to online threats. Moreover, the participation and their supportive attitudes of the staff management of SEEU is an important indicator for ensuring the successful implementation of the MIL education in SEEU as well as its long-term sustainability in the future.

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ALBULENA HALILI

Albulena Halili is a Research Associate at Max van der Stoel Institute, South East European University. She leads Media Literacy & Disinformation Research Cluster. Also, she is coordinator of Fakespotting, an Erasmus+ project on digital and information literacy, as well as the project SEE U students 5.0: Media and Information Literacy in the age of Disinformation funded by USAID and implemented by IREX. Her research interest is focused in international relations, more specifically transatlantic relations, security, hybrid warfare, disinformation war, foreign policy, geopolitics of the Balkans et al.

EDLIRA PALLOSHI DISHA

Edlira Palloshi Disha is a Research Assistant at Max van der Stoel Institute. She is a researcher at the Erasmus+ project 'Fakespotting' and a member of the Media Literacy & Disinformation Research Cluster. She also serves as Deputy/Managing Editor at the university journal SEEU Review, published by De Gruyter. She has defended her master thesis on disinformation as a tool in political campaigns in North Macedonia. Currently, she is a Ph.D. student in the Media and Communication program at the Faculty of Languages, Cultures, and Communication, SEEU. Palloshi Disha has years of experience in media monitoring and analysis, in research projects, especially for political pluralism and political-party representation during elections.

DEMUSH BAJRAMI

Demush Bajrami is an Associate Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Languages, Culture and Communication at South East European University, North Macedonia. He received a doctorate in Social Sciences, with the dissertation: "The role of social media in politics". His field of interests include: political sciences, communication and mass media. He is also a Senior Researcher at the Media Literacy & Disinformation Research Cluster, MVDSI, SEEU.

SHEMSEDIN IBRAHIMI

Shemsedin Ibrahimi is a researcher at the Erasmus+ project 'Fakespotting' and member of the Media Literacy & Disinformation Research Cluster within the Max van der Stoel Institute at South East European University. Ibrahimi has graduated in Journalism from the University of Tirana. In the period 2000-2004 he was the coordinator of the Association of Journalists of Macedonia for the region of Northwest Macedonia. He currently works in the Public Relations Office at the South East European University in Tetovo. His interests are online media and the activity of the media in the framework of respecting the standards of professional journalism. During his work as an investigative journalist, in addition to daily news, he also wrote reports, comments, and research articles.

IMPLEMENTATION OF MEDIA LITERACY IN PRIMARY SCHOOL CLASSES - A NEW MODEL OF EDUCATION

MSc Violeta Stevanovska
PhD Gabriela Durcevska Georgieva
Gordana Anastasova

ABSTRACT

The modern way of life, rapid changes and modern lifestyles impose the need to implement changes in education as well. The changes start first with the youngest students (primary grades) through a change in their awareness and way of thinking. We cannot ignore the fact that every student has free access to all information through their smart devices, but the art of teachers, as well as challenge of today's living, is how to make students literate in the area of media literacy and use all that technology in the direction of the progress of the teaching process. Contents, forms, methods and strategies of work are needed that will increase students' motivation for learning and acquiring permanent knowledge, which are the basis for raising the level of critical thinking. The meaning of media literacy is theoretically explained in this paper and supported by empirical data obtained through a survey of a target group - primary school teachers form I-V grade. This paper deals with the issue of the implementation of media literacy and its impact on developing critical thinking among students. Through empirical research of the opinion of primary school teachers in the Macedonia. This data is the basis for creating a proposed model of education for media literacy that encourages positive changes in teaching and society in general.

Keywords: media literacy, primary school education, critical thinking, change, teaching process

1) INTRODUCTION

Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media. It involves understanding the ways in which media can influence people and being able to critically evaluate the messages being presented. This includes being able to identify the source of the media, its purpose, and any biases it may contain. It also involves understanding the techniques used to create media, such as framing, camera angles, and sounds effects, and being able to analyze effects. media literacy is important because media plys a signuficant role in shaping people's view and understanding of the world. It is also important because media is increasingly being used to manipulate people and spread misinformation. By being media literate, individuals can become more informed and better equipped to make informed decisions and resist manipulation.

When we talk about teaching media literacy in primary school, we need to have apropriate approach because it is needed to prepare students for future and develop its critical thinking. Teaching media literacy in primary education is important because it helps children to develop critical thinking skills and become more informed and discerning media consumers. It can also help them to become more media literate adults, who are better equipped to navigate the increasingly complex media lanscape.

There are number od ways to teach media literacy in primary education, including: Discussing media with students: Teachers can facilitate discussion about media and encourage students to ask questions and express treir thoughts and experiences, analysing media together or leading students in analyzing media, including identifying the source, purpose, and any biases present in media, teaching about media techniques- teachers can help students to undrestand the techniques used in media production, such as framing, camera angles and sound effects, and

how they can influence the way a message is conveyed. The important point is also encouraging media creation i.e giving sudents the opportunity to create their own media, whether it be though writting, photography, or video, can help them to better understand the process and techniques involved in media production. Also, it should be mentioned providing a diverse range of media: Exposing students to a diverse range of media, including different types of media (e.g. print, audio, video) and sources, can help them to develop a more nuanced understanding of the media landscape.

Also, we need to educate teachers as well and help them to understant media literacy as important point of view in new era.

2) LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to cover the essence of media literacy and its importance in primary education, it is necessary to highlight definitions and different points of view of experts who work in the field of media literacy. Media literacy skills are defined as the abilities to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication (National Association for Media Literacy Education, 2010). Traditionally, the teaching of these skills was relegated to the K-12 classroom, but more recently, some scholars have noted that parental involvement in their children's media consumption can greatly contribute to their developing media literacy skills (Duerager & Livingstone, 2012). As such, Mendoza (2009) reviewed the parental mediation literature as based in the television literature to determine how it might map onto the media literacy framework. She reported that coviewing was the most common form of parental mediation but did not find that watching content

with a child promoted media literacy, which may reflect that the majority of parents who co-view do not discuss the content with their children. Thus, the opportunity to learn critical thinking skills through analyzing content is minimized. Indeed, a parent's coviewing of a show may act as a "silent" endorsement of the content, even if it is inappropriate for a child. Mendoza further reported that active mediation would be the most effective way for parents to get involved in teaching their children media literacy. However, more research is needed to determine whether the forms in which parents traditionally actively mediate, through sharing values about the content versus inquiry based discussion, which is the kind of pedagogy recommended by scholars of media literacy, can effectively teach critical thinking skills. Media Literacy is a 21st century approach to education. It provides a framework to acess, evaluate, and create messages in a variety of forms- form print to video to the Internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the rool of the media in society as well as seesntial skills of inquiary and self expression neccessary for citizens of a democracy (Center for Media Literacy, USA, 2022). Media Literacy teaches readers how to navigate through the overwhelming flood of information found in today's media-saturated world. Drawing from thousands of media research studies, author W. James Potter explores the key components to understanding the fascinating world of mass media. Potter presents numerous examples and facts to help readers understand how the media operate, how they attract attention, and how they influence the public. (W. James Potter, Media Literacy, 9th Edition, 2019).

3) RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Media literacy is an area that is quite current and challenging at this time, and this is due to the rapid progress in technology, which has forced more frequent use of technology in everyday life. This, in turn, imposed the need for the implementation of the concept of media literacy in elementary schools as well, from where all that guidance, education and acquisition of experiences by students begins. For the need of the topic whose research object is media literacy in primary schools, a survey was conducted of teachers who teach in grade school. The sample was random and representative, covering 13 municipalities in Macedonia.

The survey was electronic and it provided interesting data regarding media literacy. The survey consisted of 10 questions related to the education, information and necessary preparations of the teachers for the implementation of the middle school literacy classes. The respondents answered by scaling the questions with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest. The results that were obtained are quite interesting and the model for media literacy in primary schools in Macedonia emerges from them. The survey was answered by 120 teachers.

4) FINDINGS/ RESULTS

The survey that was conducted was through an electronic survey and the questions in it were of closed and open type. For the purposes of this pa-

per, 5 questions were taken into account, which are crucial for deriving the conclusions and recommendations regarding the implementation of media literacy in elementary schools.

The primary schools that were part of the survey are: OOU „Gjorgi Sugarev"- Bitola, OOU „Sv. Kliment Ohridski"- Bitola, OOU „Aleksandar Turundzev" s. Kukure~ani, Bitola, OOU „Goce Delcev" - Bitola, OOU „Kole Kaninski" -Bitola, OOU „Krste Petkov Misirkov"- Bistrica, OOU „Goce Delcev"- Konce, Mogila, OOU „Naum Ohridski"- s. Bulacani, OOU „Joakim Krcoski"- Volkovo, OOU „Kiro Gligorov"- Skopje, OOU „26 Juli"- Skopje, OOU „Stiv Naumov"- Skopje, OOU „Draga Stojanovska"- Skopje, OOU, „Krum Tosev"- Skopje, OOU „Ko~o Racin"- Blatec, OOU „25 MAJ"- Cento, OOU, „Sv.Kliril i Metodij"- s. Ku~eviste, OOU „Jasar Bej"- Skopje, OOU „Brakja Miladinovci"- Aerodrom, OOU „Mite Bogoevski"- Resen, OOU „Goce Del~ev"- Resen, OOU „Koco Racin"- Ohrid, OOU „Sv. Kliment Ohridski"- Ohrid, OOU „Hristo Uzunov"- Drugovo, OOU „Nikola Karev"- Kocani, OOU „Brakja Miladinovci"- Probistip, OOU „Ilinden"- Kriva Palanka, OOU „7 Marsi"- Celopek, OOU „Toso Velkov- Pepeto"- Kavadarci, OOU „Marsal Tito"- Strumica, OOU „Aleksandar Zdravkovski"- Jegunovce, OOU „Bratstvo -Miseni"- Tetovo, OOU „Mehmet Derla"- Vrapciste.

Media literacy in elementary schools is implemented through the teaching contents in the Macedonian language. With the new concept and the new Curricula, middle school literacy has been implemented with a greater number of lessons in the curriculum for all grades, with which the first, second, fourth and fifth grades are already implementing the new curricula, while from the next school year the third graders will the work according to the new program. Regarding the implementation of media literacy content, the question of whether the content is appropriate and well thought out for the age of the students is also raised.

The contents are appropriate and well thought out for the age of the students
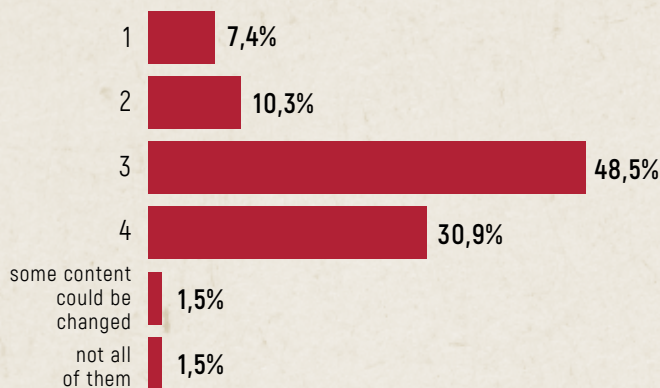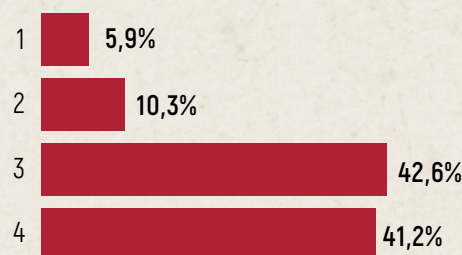

Graphic no.1 Media literacy content

From graphic display no. 1, it can be noted that 48.5% and 30.9% believe that the contents are appropriate for the age of the students and cover what is needed, while only a small part, 1.5% of the respondents think that the contents should be supplemented or modified.

The Graphic no. 2 gives us a clear picture that the greater number of classes for media literacy students leads to raising the level of media literacy as well as the students' awareness of this literacy as well as its advantages and disadvantages. This is confirmed by the high percentage of respondents who answered 3 (42.6%) and 4 (41.2%) to this question. Also, through the third graph, the teachers confirm that through these contents the students master the necessary skills and knowledge.

**The implementation of media literacy classes leads to the raising of the media literacy among students**

Graphic no.2 Media literacy implementation

Through the content, students acquire the necessary knowledge and skills of media literacy

1 — 5,9%
2 — 7,4%
3 — 47,1%
4 — 39,7%
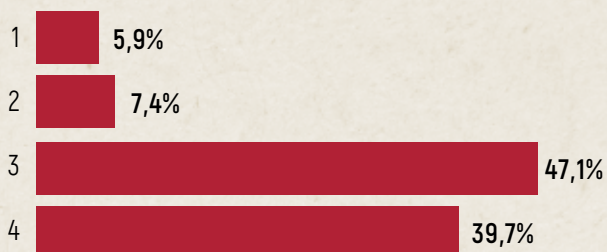
Graphic no.3 Media literacy content and acquiring knowledge od media literacy

The contents of the media literature contribute to the development of critical thinking among students

1 — 4,4%
2 — 10,3%
3 — 52,9%
4 — 33,8%
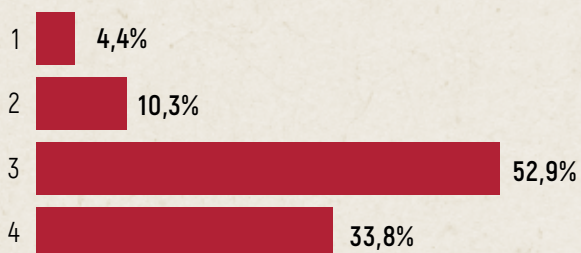
Graphic no.4 Media literacy and development of critical thinking at students

The next question, which is quite significant for the research, shows how much media literacy affects students' critical thinking. According to the opinion of the respondents, the adoption of the content of media literacy greatly affects the development of critical opinion among students (52.9% and 33.8%).

The last two questions were open-ended and related to the examination of teachers' opinions and attitudes regarding their education and the materials they need for the implementation of media literacy classes. Categories were made from their statements, and they are given below.

What kind of education is needed for teachers in the area of media literacy?

► trainings and practical workshops by relevant factors

► educational videos and appropriate materials in the Macedonian language

► trainings for integration with other teaching subjects

► appropriate materials, manuals, and worksheets for students

► education about modern media, computer literacy, digital tools

► special training for creating media content by teachers

► all primary school teachers should be covered and it should be full training with practical workshops, not theory, without counselors from the number where lessons will be practically simulated and the training will not be just two days but several times, which will give us the opportunity and we, as teachers, should realize and provide examples, from which a practicum would emerge

► cooperation with TV houses and journalists

► suitable material through which we will realize the contents of the program and they will be correlated, more practical examples with videos and presentations by teachers and students who will be a suitable example for the students

► training not so much as finding the most suitable contents and activities

► analysis of news of interest to children, bullying on social networks, but properly prepared and previously reviewed

What resources, materials do you need to implement teaching in the area of media literacy?

► videos, platforms, manuals

► we have resources, we lack guidance

► texts that will correspond to the age of the students

► ready educational material for media literacy

► no resources are needed, there are e.g., phone, TV, you just need a detailed analysis of the given content, who or what messages are being sent and the formation, the picture, the text... so that the students see all the information that conveys a message. but first the teachers should have a developed critical opinion about the contents of the media....

► we have the conditions for teaching

► to know how to get the information we need

► children's magazines, children's shows

► internet, video advertisements, printed materials in color.

► internet, IT technology

► manuals, video materials, cooperation with media houses...

From the data from the research that was carried out, it can be determined that in Macedonia there is already an implementation of media literacy in primary schools, and from the opinions and attitudes of the teachers, it can be concluded that the contents that have been implemented are appropriate and they are the basis for the development of critical opinion among students. But what is missing from the teachers and their work is their additional education and appropriate materials that would be useful to them and would help them in the implementation of the lessons. It is of particular importance to mention that they also need education such as trainings, seminars and educational materials in the Macedonian language that would make the lessons and all additional curricular and extracurricular activities more interesting and appropriate.

4) DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Taking into consideration the research, the analysis and the needs that are required for teachers, a model of media literacy implementation emerges. To have positive changes that will lead to a change in the students' way of thinking, it is necessary to strengthen the capacities, that is, to help the teachers to better and more creatively realize the lessons related to media literacy. In this way, we will help them raise critical thinking among students to an even higher level. The model proposed by the authors refers to strengthening the cooperation of the institutions and support of primary school teachers. When we talk about institutionalization, it is necessary to mention the Ministry of Education and Bureau of Education Development, which are directly involved in the process of support and evaluation of the changes that are already happening in education with us.

The model presented in Figure 1 represents the key actors and components that are essential in the process of implementing media literacy that are key to positive changes in primary education.
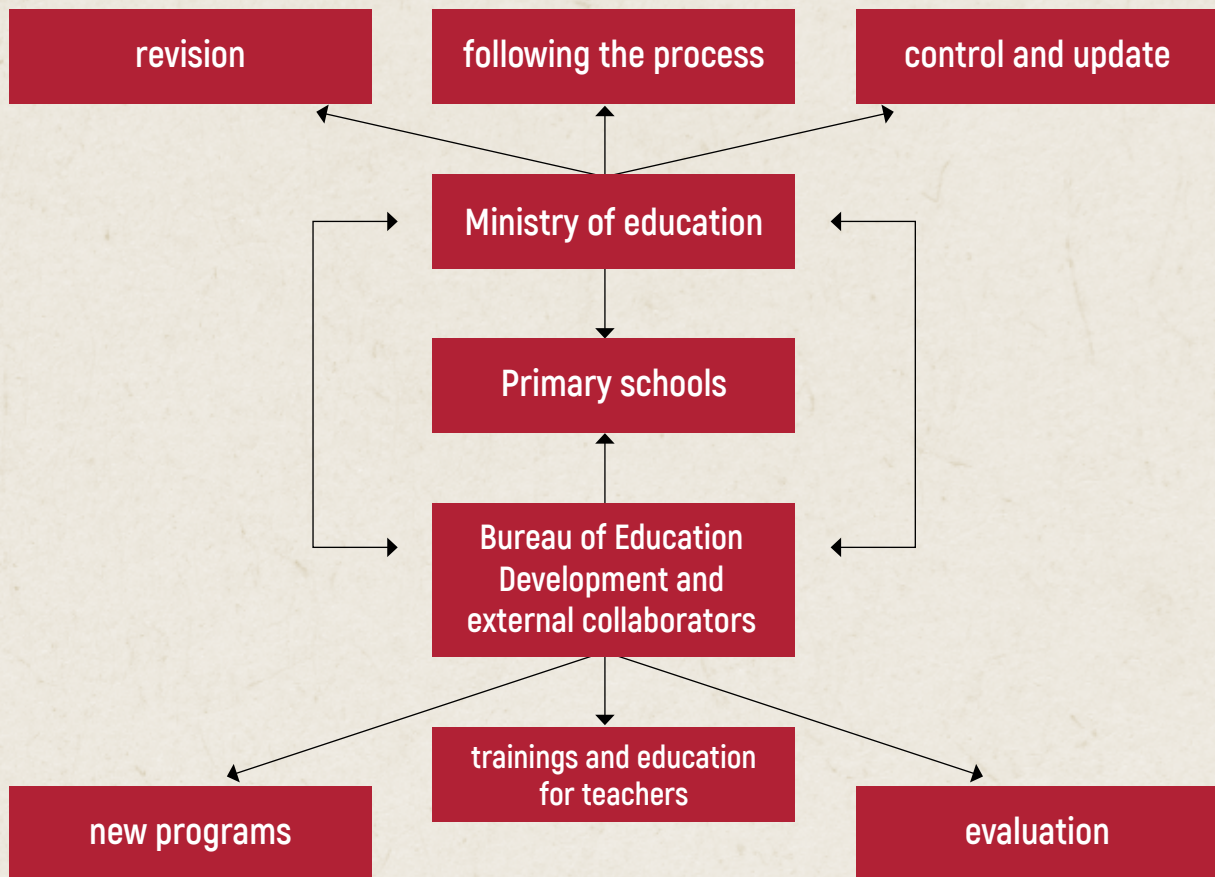
Figure no.1 Model of education for media literacy

As it was pointed out in the previous part of the text, the model presents key actors and components that are crucial in the process of media literacy and its implementation in the process of primary education.

Key actors in this process are the Ministry of Education and the Bureau of Education Development assign again for each of them the components are given. While elementary schools are in the middle and they are the direct beneficiaries, that is, through the implementation of media literacy, they cause the development of students' critical thinking, and thus permanent positive changes among students that are reflected in the improvement of the teaching process and their further development. The Ministry of Education is tasked with monitoring the education process and the implementation of new curricula, further controlling the work in schools and conducting audits, where necessary.

Bureau of Education Development and external collaborators are responsible for the components that refer to the development of new programs in which innovative contents implemented by teachers are implemented. It is also necessary to emphasize the part of further education and training for the teaching staff, which is a key component and to which special attention needs to be paid. This was confirmed by the research itself, that is, the opinion of the teachers. This component refers to the Bureau, but also to external collaborators (institutions, providers, and non-governmental organizations), who are active stakeholders and participants in the process of training and education of primary school teachers. And the last component refers to the evaluation of this entire

process, and this happens through the monitoring of the teachers' work and the implementation of media literacy content in primary schools.

This process has already started with a high level of cooperation between all the mentioned institutions, but it needs to be deepened and improved. The education of the teachers and the constant support in the implementation process will encourage the desired change that will contribute to the development of the critical opinion among the students and encourage their awareness from the earliest years. That is why media literacy is part of the curriculum from the first grade. We hope that the proposed model will stimulate and open a wider field of research that will contribute to the deepening of this problem, a large number of innovations and works that will be in the direction of positive changes in the educational process, through which we directly and indirectly build the future of our country and strengthen our capacities.

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VIOLETA STEVANOVSKA

Violeta Stevanovska graduated from the Faculty of Pedagogy at the University "St. Kliment Ohridski" - Bitola in 2002. She received her master's degree in 2006 on the subject of "Mentoring and professional development of new employees in the school". From 28.12.2017 - 01.09.2021 she worked as a teacher in OU "St. Kliment Ohridski"- Bitola, and after her election, from 01.09.2021 she works as a teacher-mentor in the same school, for which she also submitted an Annual Program for the work of a teacher-mentor in which all work tasks are explained in detail. It is part of the School's Annual Work Program 2021/2022. She is the creator of the outdoor learning strategy and program, which is implemented in the school's Annual Work Program 2021/2022. She is also an external collaborator of the BRO for the development of Macedonian language programs for grades I-V.

GORDANA ANASTASOVA

Gordana Anastasova, since 1996, has been working as a teacher in PPS "Sv. Kliment Ohridski" - Bitola. In 2006, she obtained a diploma and the title of primary school teacher at the Faculty of Education in Bitola. Gordana continues with her career development as the director of PPS "Sv. Kliment Ohridski" - Bitola, from 2017/2022. In addition to the successes in the field of school management, he continues with his professional development, writing professional and scientific papers and participating in working groups for the improvement of teaching practice. She is an external collaborator of the Bureau for the Development of Education and a participant in the preparation of the mathematics programs from I-V grades and is also an external collaborator of the State Examination Center as part of the team for the preparation of the national test in the Macedonian language.
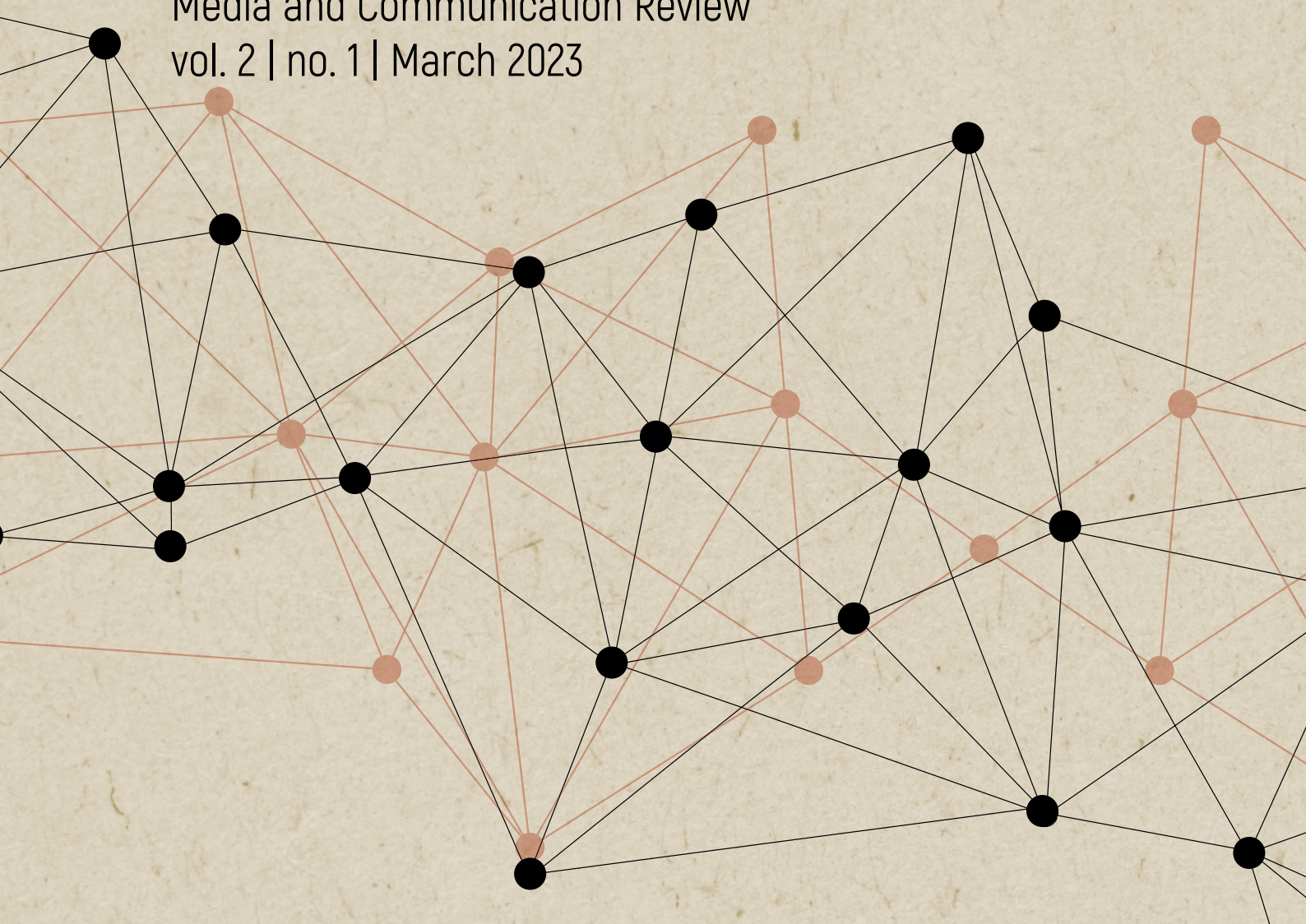
GABRIELA DURCHEVSKA GEORGIEVA

Dr. Gabriela Durchevska Georgieva has worked in the Bureau for Development of Education as an advisor in the department for pre-school and grade teaching, Sector for development of the educational system and development of standards and curricula since 2013. She has 24 years of work experience in the field of preschool education. She defended her doctoral dissertation on the topic "The pedagogue and the promotion of the educational work in the kindergarten" in October 2015 at the Institute of Pedagogy at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje and acquired the title of Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences. She participated in the creation of the Comprehensive Strategy for Education 2018-2025 with an action plan in the area of preschool education as well as in the preparation of instructions and guidelines for the realization of educational work. She has been a consultant and collaborator on several national project activities, international and non-governmental organizations World Bank, UNICEF, Save the Children, Search for Common Ground, MCGO.

KAIROS