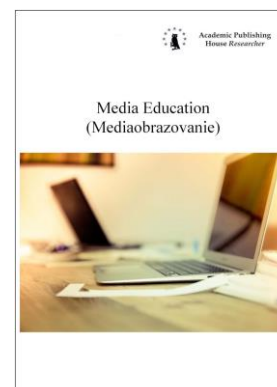




Published in the Slovak Republic  
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)  
Has been issued since 2005  
ISSN 1994-4160  
E-ISSN 2729-8132  
2021. 17(3): 476-484

DOI: 10.13187/me.2021.3.476  
[www.ejournal53.com](http://www.ejournal53.com)



## **The Implementation of the Civil Rights of Russians to Participate in Participatory Budgeting is Threatened by a Low Level of Media Literacy**

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### **Abstract**

The first part of the article highlights the need for further development of media education in Russia, which is related to the role of media education in the formation of human capital and the implementation of civil rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Russian Federation. The section emphasizes that the implementation of the rights of Russian citizens in public finance management is inextricably linked with the level of digital literacy of the citizens themselves. The second part of the article describes the methods used in conducting the study, emphasizing the role of analysis and synthesis of information obtained from the publications of modern authors on the problem, the reports of Rosstat, official sources of Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Communications of the Russian Federation and Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation. The third part of the article presents the results of the analysis of different authors' research of an assessing the digital literacy of Russians. The main conclusion drawn from the results of the analysis is the need to increase the digital literacy of Russians as an important condition, without which the further development of participatory budgeting in Russia is impossible. At the same time, the mass media have an important role to play in raising Russians' digital literacy and political activism, as demonstrated by the research of numerous scholars in the field of effective communication in solving social and political problems. The fourth part of the article contains the author's recommendations for improving the public administration of digital literacy of Russians. The importance of improving the training of specialists in public and municipal administration is emphasized here. To improve the quality of public administration and municipal management professionals, it is proposed to expand the range of professional competences to include competences that promote the acquisition of skills: to provide and receive public services; to enable the future professional to participate in solving public problems; to adapt communication strategies to specific audiences, taking into account cultural and age differences; to prevent health risks and threats to physical and psychological well-being through the use of digital technologies. The fifth part of the article summarizes the main results of the study.

**Keywords:** media education, participatory budgeting, digital literacy, educational standards, professional competence.

### **1. Introduction**

Media education is seen as the ability to create knowledge from visual and verbal symbols that we perceive every day from television, advertising, film and digital media ([Adams, Hamm,](#)

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2015: 132). Media education today is an opportunity for normal and productive human activity, a factor of personal development and a condition for the formation of human capital.

The growing level of the needs satisfaction of Russians makes the need for management as important as the need for food or the need for clothing. More and more Russian citizens are seeking to expand their civil rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Russian Federation, including the rights related to participation in the budgetary funds management.

The implementation of civil rights for budget management, which is called participatory budgeting, has long been carried out abroad. In Russia, participatory budgeting is only at the very beginning of its dissemination. Today, it acts as an essential tool in the democratization of public finance management in the Russian Federation and the entire state administration.

In Russia, participatory budgeting has been practiced since 2012. It is one of the most promising and actively developing areas of the project of the Ministry of Finance of Russia "Budget for Citizens" in recent years.

In 2020, the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation developed a methodological tool for participatory budgeting, including methodological recommendations on the planning of budgets expenditure of the constituent entities (local budgets) for the implementation of pilot projects; methodological recommendations for the authorities of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, local authorities and citizens preparing and implementing pilot projects. In addition, in order to implement the provisions of the Concept on Increasing the Efficiency of Budget Expenditure (Government..., 2019), the Ministry of Finance is working to integrate the mechanism of participatory budgeting into the provisions of individual federal projects, national projects and government programmes.

According to the Methodological Recommendations on the preparation and implementation of participatory budgeting practices in the Russian Federation of the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation (Ministry..., 2021), the main elements of the implementation of participatory budgeting in the Russian Federation are:

- initiating projects, including their initiation and public discussion, and submitting them to the consideration of the entity implementing the practice of participatory budgeting;
- review of initiative projects, including technical analysis, refinement and pre-qualification;
- competitive selection and approval of initiative projects for implementation.

As can be seen from the procedure for organizing and carrying out participatory budgeting, each of the steps listed implies the use of media as a condition for organizing the communication process. The provision of direct information and feedback in the communication process is mainly done on the electronic platforms of local or regional governments.

At the end of 2019, the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation published an overview of the current practice of participatory budgeting and selected recommendations on the organization of participatory budgeting for the use of best practices in the work of the executive authorities of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, representatives of project centres for participatory budgeting, organizations and consultants, involved in the implementation of participatory budgeting in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and municipal entities (Ministry..., 2020). For example, a review of the current practice of participatory budgeting indicates that the number of regions in the Russian Federation using participatory budgeting increased to 81 entities in 2019, up from the planned figure of 35.5 per cent. Road infrastructure projects – 15.1 per cent – were traditionally the most sought after in 2019. Next come projects for the comprehensive improvement of public areas: yards – 11.2 per cent, places of mass recreation – 10.7 per cent, the organization of children's playgrounds – 8.0 per cent, and places of mass sport – 6.7 per cent.

As a result of 2019, there was also a significant increase in participatory budgeting at the municipal level, including an increase in the number of practices involving the organization and financing of initiatives exclusively from local budgets. It is clear that participatory budgeting at the municipal level is becoming the main type of participatory budgeting in Russia. This is also the case in most countries of the world, where municipalities are the most interested party in the practice of citizen participation in budgetary decision-making.

In 2020, participatory budgeting in Russia received a new impetus. In particular, the financial authorities of the Kaliningrad Region, the Krasnodar Territory, the Nizhny Novgorod Region, etc. informed about the launch of regional programs. Wide use of participatory budgeting in Russia will allow more efficient use of budget funds. And in the context of a significant shortage

of financial resources, it is necessary to attract resources from enterprises and the population, which will contribute to an early solution of the tasks of social and economic development of the territories of the Russian Federation.

At the same time, it cannot yet be said that participatory budgeting has become firmly embedded in the daily lives of Russians. Among the outstanding problems noted by specialists, the low level of communicative effectiveness of the interaction of state authorities with the population of Russia is particularly noted. In particular, the head of the methodology, analysis and consulting department of "BFT" LLC A.S. Garmasheva (Garmasheva, 2019) states: "Effective implementation of participatory budgeting projects is possible only if there is constant feedback from both the authorities and the population". The explanation for this is the low media literacy of Russians, where the ability to use digital technologies, or digital literacy, plays a key role.

Today, not every Russian uses digital technologies without problems. Currently, Russian digital literacy is only about 27 % (Davydov, 2020). According to the passport of the federal project "Personnel for Digital Economy" (Ministry..., 2017) the achievement of 40 % digital literacy of Russians is planned only by 2024.

## 2. Materials and methods

In preparation of the article published works of modern authors on problems of participatory budgeting and digital literacy of the population in Russia, information materials of the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, Ministry of Digital Economy, Communications and Mass Communications, Ministry of Education and Science, Rosstat Statistical Surveys. Research methods include analysis and synthesis of scientific sources on the research problem, generalization and classification.

## 3. Discussion

In the information age, digitization is a component of human capital. The advent of innovations in digitization makes it necessary to continuously improve digital literacy. As noted in UNESCO materials, lifelong learning enables individuals, communities and peoples to achieve the goals and to benefit from the growing opportunities of an ever-evolving global environment for the common good not only of some, but all people. It helps the people, institutions and organizations in which they work to solve technological, economic and social problems, correct shortcomings and improve the well-being of everyone (Wilson et al., 2018).

How to estimate the digital literacy of Russians today? Studies show that just over a quarter of Russians had a high level of digital literacy. At the same time, most Russians understand the importance of digital literacy in human life and economic management. For example, about 65 % of Russians understand the importance of digital literacy in improving economic governance. One in four of them determines digital literacy as a factor and condition of their personal development (Davydov, 2020).

The general characteristic of digital literacy of Russians can be obtained by NAFI studies of 2020 (NAFI, 2020). NAFI calculated the digital literacy index for Russians in 5 competences: information literacy; communication literacy; digital content creation; digital security; and digital problem-solving skills. At the same time, the index of the competence of Russians in information search was estimated at 59 points on a scale from 0 to 100. The Russians' communication literacy skills were rated at 62 points on a scale from 0 to 100. The competence of Russians in creating digital content was rated at 53 points on a scale from 0 to 100. The Russians' ability to assess risks in the digital space was evaluated at 60 points on a scale of 0 to 100.

The ability to use mobile applications and computer software for daily tasks was rated at 58 points on a scale of 0 to 100.

The NAFI study found that Russians differed in digital literacy according to their place of residence. The Russians living in the North-West Federal District had the highest digital literacy rate at 64 points (on a scale of 0 to 100), while the North Caucasus Federal District had the lowest at 55 points (on a scale of 0 to 100). In the remaining federal districts, the digital literacy rate ranged from 55 to 59 points (on a scale of 0 to 100). The inhabitants of the cities demonstrated a higher level of competence than the inhabitants of the villages. Competence varied considerably by sex and age. Men had higher skills – 59 points (on a scale of 0 to 100) compared to women – 57 points (on a scale of 0 to 100). The highest level of proficiency was shown by students, that is young people up to 25 years of age (64 points on a scale from 0 to 100).

The level of competence is largely related to the employment and occupation of Russians. The rate of digital literacy was higher among the working population than among the pensioners and the unemployed (61 points and 57 points on a scale of 0 to 100, respectively).

The research of the Analytical Agency of NAFI correlates with the data of other researchers, for example, Russian scientists P.N. Bilenko, V.I. Blinova, M.V. Dulinov (Bilenko et al., 2020), V.I. Kolykhmatov (Kolykhmatov, 2020), T.A. Aymaletdinov, L.R. Baymuratova, O.A. Zaitseva (Aymaletdinov et al., 2019) and others. The main conclusion that emerges from the research data is the need to increase Russians' digital literacy, an important condition without which it is impossible to develop participatory budgeting in Russia. This includes the exercise of civil rights related to participation in the management of public finances.

The mass media should play a major role in addressing the issues of digital literacy and political activism among Russians. According to F. Wilson (Wilson, 1992: 883-904), the media are an important tool for the strategic management of human resources in the state. This view is supported by a recent study by J. Milojevich (Milojevich, 2018: 831-855), who concludes that the media provide a framework for the transmission of information to the public and that this framework may have a different impact on public opinion depending on the way they are combined with human values and deep-rooted cultural norms.

A free press is one of the most important pillars of lasting democracy. On the one hand, as A. De Albuquerque (De Albuquerque, 2019: 906-923) notes, "a free press naturally acts as an agent of accountability, protecting interests of ordinary citizens from government corruption and political abuse". On the other hand, a free press should help government agencies to implement progressive changes in public administration. The studies of many authors, for example, J.S. Fu (Fu, 2019: 101776) on the participation of non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations in the solution of global problems are eloquent testimony to this.

There are still many problems in forming public opinion in Russia. One is the commercialization of the media. But this fact is noted by many researchers not only in Russia, but also abroad in the developed democracies. For example, studies by B. Guðmundsson confirm this in particular (Guðmundsson, Kristinsson 2019: 1684-1703). Other problems include the poor orientation of media information on the specificities of geography, multi-ethnicity and the gender and age characteristics of information users. But even now, the formation of the media space creates an opportunity for the development of media and political literacy in the most remote corners of Russia. This, in particular, is indicated by recent studies by O. Dovbysh, who notes, although insignificant, but qualitative changes in the formation of media systems in the Russian province (Dovbysh, 2020).

In the context of multicultural differences in Russia, it is important to take into account cultural specificities, which have been proven with respect to the perception of information and are well described, for example, in recent studies by H. Vandenberghe (Vandenberghe et al., 2020: 227-243). In studies on the effectiveness of the communication process, it is very important to follow ethical standards, which, according to C.S.B. Ngai, S. Einwiller, R.G. Singh (Ngai et al., 2020: 101813), promotes trust or mistrust of information on the part of recipients.

The role of the media in shaping the demand for digital media literacy must be strengthened, also taking into account the gender identity of citizens. The phenomenon of lower digital literacy among women is observed worldwide. As noted by F. Wilson as early as 1992 (Wilson, 1992: 883-904), the problem of pipeline reduction for women in computer science is a well-known and documented phenomenon when the ratio of women to men employed in computer science declines sharply from early student years to working years. Recent studies, for example, studies by B. Lyons, V. Mérola, J. Reifler, F. Stoeckel (Lyons et al., 2020: 469-492) on the influence of politics on the verification of facts disseminated in the world, or, for example, studies by H. Vandenberghe, L. D'haenens, B. Van Gorp (Vandenberghe et al., 2020: 227-243) on the representation of women in news content, do not deny the lower digital literacy of women today, after nearly thirty years of digitalization of society!

Special attention should be paid to the need to participate in the solution of state tasks for young people, who are the most inactive of the Russian civilian population. With a high level of digital literacy compared to older generations, young people are still politically inactive. Researchers around the world have noted the great passivity of young people in political processes. A similar situation exists even in a democratic country like the United States, as noted in studies by T. Diehl, M. Barnidge, H. Gil De Zúñiga (Diehl, et al., 2019: 428-451). For this age group, effective



motivation is needed in media communication. According to R. Palmer, B. Toff ([Palmer, Toff, 2020: 1634-1653](#)) when forming a motivation, the internal part of the motivation must be dictated by the values and principles, norms and beliefs of the individual, which constitute the core of his identity, and the external part is aimed at achieving a result.

The low level of activity of young people in the political transition in Russia makes it necessary to use popular digital media to create the need to participate in political processes. An important point, according to Gainous, J.P. Abbott, K.M. Wagner ([Gainous et al., 2020](#)), is the creation of an opportunity for the active participation of young people in discussions. Passive use of digital media refers to the act of simply reading and observing political information in a user feed. Active use, as highlighted by Gainous, J.P. Abbott, K.M. Wagner ([Gainous et al., 2020](#)), signifies a conscious decision to share information, comment, challenge, verify facts or engage in related activities.

This practice of communicating between content and communicators can also contribute to a more effective formation of the need for participation in public tasks by politically inactive citizens in older age groups, where there are biases against digital communication, including in social media described for example, in the study. B. Lyons, V. Mérola, J. Reifler, F. Stoeckel ([Lyons et al., 2020: 469-491](#)). Broad representation in the media landscape of the problems of increasing digital literacy of Russians and their more active participation in the solution of state problems, taking into account geography, multi-ethnicity, gender and age characteristics of information users should ultimately contribute to solving the problems of digital literacy and the realization of the rights of Russians in public administration. But in order to achieve the highest possible result, it is also necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of political means of communication, a qualitative assessment of the communication process, as noted in the studies of M. Powers, S. Vera-Zambrano ([Powers, Vera-Zambrano, 2018:143-160](#)).

#### 4. Results

Considering the increase in the level of digital literacy of Russians as a condition for the development of participatory budgeting in the Russian Federation, the natural question arises: What needs to be done to do this? What needs to be addressed first? Who should be in charge of managing citizens' digital literacy of?

It is clear that increasing Russians' digital literacy to meet state challenges is a matter for the state itself. In doing so, the solution to the problem must encompass a wide range of tasks. Given this, the tasks to be accomplished should be divided into stages. The first step should be to address the challenges of increasing digital literacy, including:

1. Objectives of developing social projects in the field of digital literacy (courses, computer programs), including for older persons.
2. Objectives of professional development and further training of teachers and teachers of educational organizations.
3. Challenges in expanding information technology education.
4. Increasing the number of general education establishments providing in-depth study of information technology.
5. Objectives of increasing the number of competences in educational standards of specialists in public and municipal administration.

It is only after the implementation of the first phase, which should lead to a significant increase in digital literacy among the population, that the second phase of broad citizen participation in budget management can be implemented. Of course, it should be noted that some of the above-mentioned areas of the first phase are already being implemented within the framework of the "Strategy for the Development of the Information Technology Sector in the Russian Federation for 2014-2020 and Horizon until 2025" ([Ministry... 2013](#)). This applies to the development of social projects in the field of digital literacy, enhancing the professional training of teachers and instructors in educational establishments by expanding the scope of information technology teaching and increasing the number of general educational organizations providing in-depth study of information technology. However, the task of increasing the competence of specialists in public and municipal administration remains to be covered. Although this is also a public task.

Research on the level of digital literacy of public and municipal employees ([Sitdikov, 2020](#)) shows that at present the level of digital literacy of state and municipal employees is not much

higher than the Russian average. It is therefore clear that there is a need to improve the quality of teaching state and municipal officials the basics of digital literacy in the context of training programmes. The current practice of training state and municipal employees is not yet sufficiently active. Thus, according to the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation (Ministry..., 2021), in 2020 the practice of conducting regional information and training measures for participatory budgeting practices with the support of the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation continued. Previously planned events in the regions of the Russian Federation were held using online platforms to organize conferences in video format in connection with the current epidemiological situation. More than 2.200 representatives of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and municipalities, as well as representatives of the expert community, took part in 10 online and offline training events.

Taking into account that the number of public and municipal employees in the Russian Federation at the beginning of 2020 was 21580000 (Rosstat, 2021), the number of public and municipal employees who underwent the corresponding advanced training in participatory budgeting in the digital environment was only 0.1%.

The training programs for students – future public and municipal employees – need to be improved. Analysis of the state standard for the training of public and municipal employees at the bachelor's level (Ministry..., 2014) shows that there are only three competences related to the development of digital literacy among future specialists. The competences include: the ability to apply information and communication technologies in professional activities with a vision of their relationships and use perspectives (PC-8); the ability to conduct business communications, public speaking, negotiation, meetings, business correspondence and electronic communications (OPC-4); the ability to address standard professional tasks based on an information and bibliographic culture, using information and communication technologies and taking into account basic information security requirements (OPC-6). At the same time, these competences are described vaguely and do not allow to obtain an idea of the existence of the necessary skills.

For the basis for the development of competences in the educational standard of specialty 38.03.04 “Public and Municipal Administration (bachelor's level)” it is proposed to use the recommended competences of the European Union as set by DigComp 2.0: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (Vuorikari et al., 2016). Below is a table of how the recommended competencies correspond to the DigComp competency criteria.

**Table 1.** Recommended competences for an educational standard for higher education in the field of training 38.03.04 “Public and Municipal Administration (bachelor's level)”

Existing professional competences	Additional professional competences
1. The ability to apply information and communication technologies in professional activities with a vision of their relationships and use perspectives (PC-8).	1. The ability to create and update personal search strategies for professional tasks and personal growth.
2. The ability to conduct business communications, public speaking, negotiation, meetings, business correspondence and electronic communications (OPC-4).	2. The ability to participate in society through the use of public and private digital services.
3. The ability to address standard professional tasks based on an information and bibliographic culture, using information and communication technologies and taking into account basic information security requirements (OPC-6).	3. The ability to adapt communication strategies to specific audiences and to understand cultural and generational diversity in the digital environment.
	4. The ability to prevent health risks and threats to physical and psychological well-being when using digital technologies.

	5. The ability to participate individually and collectively in cognitive processing to understand and solve conceptual problems and problem situations in the digital environment.
	6. The ability to manage a digital identity to create and manage one or more digital identities in order to protect one's own reputation.

As the table shows, it is recommended to include some competences in the education standard for higher education in the field of training 38.03.04 “Public and Municipal Administration (bachelor’s level)”. These competences should make it possible to eliminate certain gaps in the digital education of public and municipal officials and promote the development of skills and abilities to create and update personal search strategies for the vocational tasks and personal development of learners in the area of the provision and receipt of public services and participation in solving public problems; in adapting communication strategies to specific audiences, taking into account cultural and age differences; in the area of prevention of health risks and threats to physical and psychological well-being through the use of digital technologies; in the area of cognitive information processing to understand and solve conceptual problems and problem situations in the digital environment; in the field of digital identity management, in order to be able to protect one’s own reputation or that of other users.

## 5. Conclusion

The study of the current practice of participatory budgeting and the conditions for its further development demonstrates the need to improve the state administration of media education for citizens of the Russian Federation. The ability of citizens to participate widely in the management of public finances is constrained by the lack of knowledge and skills of Russians in the field of digital media technology. The level of digital literacy among Russians is still low, as evidenced by numerous studies.

Media should play an important role in shaping Russians' digital literacy needs and broad participation in political processes. The transmission of information must be based on scientific recommendations, taking into account the geographical, multi-ethnic, ethical, sexual and age characteristics of the recipients of the information.

The identified problem requires the implementation of several stages and the solution of a wide range of tasks. Many of the challenges of improving Russians' digital literacy are already being addressed through state projects. At the same time, a special approach is required to improve digital literacy among specialists in public and municipal administration, who organize and coordinate participatory budgeting in the regions and municipalities of the Russian Federation.

The analysis of the list of existing competencies of Federal State Standard 38.03.04 “Public and Municipal Administration (bachelor’s level)” demonstrates their vagueness and limitations in obtaining the necessary level of digital literacy in accordance with international standards.

In order to improve the quality of media education for students of specialty 38.03.04 “Public and Municipal Administration (bachelor’s level)” it is proposed to expand the list of professional competences, to include competences that contribute to the knowledge and skills of students in the creation and updating personal search strategies for the solution of professional tasks and personal growth of learners, provision and delivery of public services, participation in the solution of public problems, adaptation of communication strategies to specific audiences, taking into account cultural and age differences, prevention of health risks and threats to physical and psychological well-being in the use of digital technologies, cognitive processing of information to understand and solve conceptual problems and problem situations in the digital environment, management of digital identification to enable them to protect their own reputation or that of other users.

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