Media Consumption and Media Literacy of Residents of the Republic of Crimea in the Context of Information Confrontation

Viktoria Smeyukha [a,*], Ekaterina Shapovalova [b], Veronika Armash [c]

[a] Rostov State Transport University, Russian Federation
[b] Southern Federal University, Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation
[c] V.I. Vernadsky Crimean Federal University, Simferopol, Crimea

Abstract

The study raises problems of perception of information, media consumption in modern conditions of political and economic influence on public opinion through the dissemination of information (disinformation). Residents of the Republic of Crimea are in a special situation – because of an information war is being waged between Russia and Ukraine. Its methods are associated with the spread of fakes about Russia by Ukrainian online media, fakes about Ukraine by Russian media. In times of crisis, journalists in the media and authors in social networks post many different opinions about the same event. However, the same fact is interpreted in completely different ways, depending on how it should be presented. Information chaos makes it difficult to find an objective point of view.

The results of the survey show that the Internet is the main source of information for Crimeans, but they cannot remember what news sites are read (or viewed). At the same time, residents of Crimea criticize the news and media politics but overestimate the ability to detect false information on the Internet; excessive self-confidence gives more opportunities to manipulate public opinion. The article provides suggestions on the forms of teaching media literacy to adult residents of the Crimea.

Keywords: media education, media literacy, critical thinking, fake news, journalism, disinformation.

1. Introduction

Globalization of the digital space have increased the speed and bandwidth of information exchange. Researchers describe the society as a noise civilization because of due to the distribution of a large volume of news through social media (Abaddi et al., 2011; Gálik, 2020). Information flows spread faster in the XXI century than in the XX. Information can be virality (the ability to spread through "infection", like a virus). Information can mislead the audience, as well as change people's views. At the same time, it is impossible to live without information, this is a basis for understanding of the world picture.

In this regard, the urgency of the task associated with studying how people consume information, whether they are able to think critically and whether they understand that social media can spread misinformation increases. Earlier, a study revealed the problem of checking news

* Corresponding author
E-mail addresses: smeyha@yandex.ru (V. Smeyukha), kate-sapr@ya.ru (E. Shapovalova),
nikaarmash@mail.ru (V. Armash)

by journalists. Even professional media professionals find it difficult to navigate the flow of information, since not all fake news is an obvious lie; they are often based on truthful basic information (Shapovalova, 2020).

It seems important to us to form a group of methods that will help increase the level of media literacy in the region, where false information is often distributed in favor of political or other interests.

2. Materials and methods

The methods used in theoretical part of research include the review of scientific and reference literature, comparison, observation and synthesis. A review of researchers' opinions on the problem of media literacy allowed us to formulate several problems and aspects related to the practical application of people's abilities to verify information.

The results of study are based on a sociological survey of residents of the Republic of Crimea. At the present stage, the population of the Republic of Crimea is more than about 2 million people: according to RosInfoStat, "approximately the same number of men and women live on the peninsula, the population of retirement age is 27 %" (RosInfoStat, 2020). The inhabitants of this territory are most affected by the information war, which is carried out in the media, but mainly in social media. The reason is the problem of belonging to the Crimea. Serious disagreements have been permanently active for more than six years between Russia and Ukraine (and the countries that are on sides of the RF and Ukraine) regarding the ownership of the territories of the Crimea.

A sociological study was conducted to identify the media preferences of Crimeans, as well as to identify the competencies of media literacy – identification of information sources, verification of media content and its critical assessment, the ability to compare information from various media sources and verify it. In January-March 2021 a survey was conducted in which 150 people took part (a questionnaire in the form of a personal interview, a random sample, the study was not conducted among employees of mass media, media companies, as well as students receiving professional media education).

The following audience groups were represented among the respondents: from 18 to 25 years – 54 %, from 26 to 35 years – 16 %, from 36 to 45 years – 16 %, from 46 to 55 years – 10 %, older than 55 years – 4 %. The gender characteristics of the respondents are as follows: women – 60 %, men – 40 %. Most of the respondents were for Simferopol – 44 %, but also we interviewed the residents of Sevastopol, Yalta, Yevpatoriya, Bakhchisaray and other settlements. It's worth noting that 80 % of the respondents are people with higher education.

3. Discussion

The audience actively participates in media processes. But there are identified the problems of groups interaction. It is expressed in the inefficient use of media resources, the formation of unethical models of media behavior, low media competence. The issues of the development of media criticism, media education and media literacy began to be raised in scientific circles.

The researchers are concerned that the media use misinformation and their own influence for political struggle and the formation of the opinion needed by the authorities. Users share this information on social networks because they are concerned about problems and believe the media (Vziatysheva, 2020). The literature review allowed us to identify articles criticizing the pro-Kremlin media, which may publish disinformation as an organized manipulation of the public opinion (Grigor, Pantti, 2016; Mejias, Vokulev, 2017; Szostek, 2017). Also the materials about Ukrainian media manipulation were found, the authors of articles explain different ways of disinformation in pro-Ukraine media (Kudryashova, Bergman, 2019; Sapunov, 2016). For example, V. Sapunov believes that a wide range of manipulation tools are used in the media: Overton window, isolation of the addressee, shifting responsibility, language manipulation, direct lies. It is obvious that adult consumers of information from the media (whether pro-Kremlin or pro-Ukrainian) need to be able to reflect manipulation.

The space of social networks creates the effect of democratic dissemination of information, communities of friends and acquaintances contribute to increasing the degree of trust in the material. In fact, the technology of transmitting rumors, unverified facts, information specially prepared for the technology of "word of mouth" is being implemented (Smeyukha, Armash, 2021).

The ability to repel information attacks is associated with the high level of media literacy. In this way *Media Literacy* is customary understood as "*a process or set of skills based on critical*

thinking" and developing the media competence of an individual (Bulger, Davison, 2018; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2018; Gáliková Tolnaiová, 2021; Hobbs et al., 2013; Hobbs, Jensen, 2009; Kačinová, 2019; Vrabec, Bôtošová, 2020).

There is a discussion related to specific features media literacy among adults. The vast majority of the case studies have focused on the access of adults (able-bodied and elderly) to digital technologies and mass media, while critical understanding and creation of media content has been least studied within the traditional aspects of media literacy (Livingstone et al., 2005; Rasi et al., 2019; Vroman et al., 2015).

But there is a group of researches thinks that it is necessary to approach media education for adults in a complex (Courtenay, Truluck, 1997; Moore, 2010). We need to teach not only to navigate the media landscape, but also to be able to analyze texts and visual indicators. "The purpose of media literacy training is to make visible the complexities and subtleties in the media that go beyond the written or spoken word. This goal is bigger than a subject area or a classroom curriculum, and has implications that can be deeply personal for people" (Mehta, Guzmán, 2018). There is a point of view that the development of critical thinking in adults is possible only if training is connected with the functionality of using media in everyday life (Gibby, 2013).

However, there are concerns that the development of skepticism may *negatively affect* the ability to perceive information. There are studies of critical thinking skills that conclude that skepticism is encouraged among students when studying at a university. However, the teachers do not explain what should be treated skeptically. This seems to cause people to sometimes overly criticize hard evidence and treat the news with distrust (Bissonnette, 2021).

At the same time, another study was published that reveals the connection between high media literacy skills, the ability to distinguish facts from opinions with knowledge of the mass media (it is characterized by the authors as an understanding of who owns a particular media and how it can influence the production of content).

Training that would teach people to recognize markers of manipulation and misinformation in the media can be quite effective. However, after studying the materials of the *Learn to Discern* training conducted by *Irex*, we can conclude that it is not suitable for media education of a large number of people. The training consists of several blocks, which involve lessons not only on the principles of media work. The training teaches you to evaluate the written content of sources, to track photos, to identify signs of fake accounts in social networks and videos. In other words, these are detailed lessons that are necessary for students-journalists or people who are professionally engaged in communication. However, it was a group of media-educated people who showed great skills of skepticism (Murrock et al., 2018).

The skepticism that people can develop during media literacy lessons *is* closely *related to* the process of forming *the ability to navigate* in the digital environment, *analyze* information and *identify signs of fake news*. The new media reality implies an increase in the number of skeptical people. We assume that the principle of "*trust, but check*" will form the basis of media education of the adult population.

Analysts cite figures showing that people do not have enough critical thinking skills. According to the data of the research company *Zircon*, which studies the digital literacy of Russians, the activity of the population in the digital environment is becoming more conscious, the level of critical thinking is growing. In 2016 this organization showed that the Crimeans can't demonstrate a high level of media competence of the population, at the same time, respondents who participated in the survey showed high results in demonstrating the skills to "effectively search and find the necessary information", "to verify and critically evaluate information using alternative sources of information" (Zadorin et al., 2018). Experts made the conclusion that:

• not everyone is able to recognize which information from the Internet is trustworthy;

• a minority of citizens are interested in whose interests this media represents, who is behind it, in order to evaluate information from newspapers, magazines, TV, radio.

That study was conducted five years ago, so in order to clarify the level of media education of Crimean residents, it was necessary to make a survey.

4. Results

A popular channel for obtaining information from residents of the Crimea is the Internet. Some people say that they have watched TV, listen to radio shows. Their relatives, friends and

acquaintances can be the source of the news information too. The respondents did not indicate the printed press such a source of information (Figure 1).
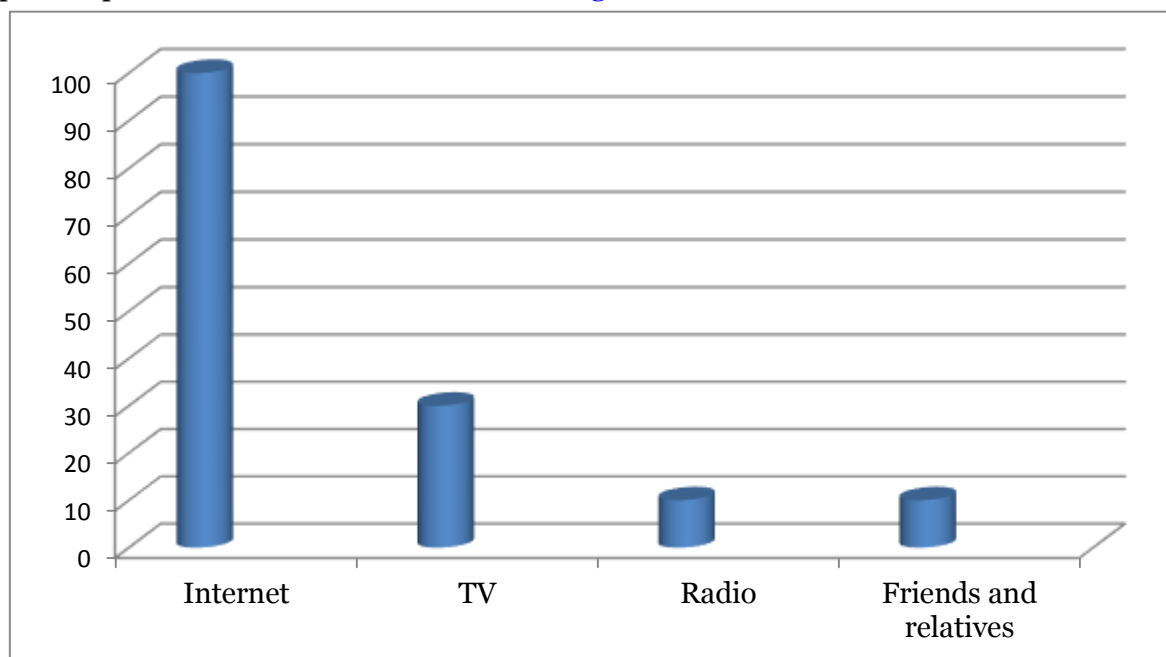

Fig. 1. Sources of obtaining news information from residents of the Crimea (respondents' answers)

The detailed analysis of the media resources from which respondents receive news information showed that 24 % of respondents are not interested in news.

Despite the fact that, according to the survey, the most popular information resource for Crimeans is the Internet, in the answers to the question "Specify the names of news programs (television channels, radio stations, newspapers, magazines, news sites, portals) that you regularly watch, listen to, read", respondents most often remembered television channels. Communication with a number of respondents based on the results of questionnaires revealed the reason for this – the audience does not always remember the names of Internet sites where they get acquainted with information. This conclusion correlates with the fact that 14 % of respondents indicated "Internet" in the answer, without specifying the names of resources (Table 1).

Table 1. The names of the mass media that the residents of the Crimea could remember as permanent sources of information

Mass media		Respondents (%)
TV	Russia 24	28
	Perviy	21
	Russia 1	7
	Pyatnitsa	7
	Zvezda	3
	Mir	3
	OTR	3
	Krym 24	14
	Perviy Krymski	3
	Kultura	3
	Ren-TV	3
	Dozhd	3
	Internet (without detailing)	14
	Yandex.Novosti	14
	VKontakte (Podslushano Symferopol, Lentach)	14
	Krym.news	3
	Kommersant	3

Internet	Krymskaya Pravda	3
	Instagram	7
	Meduza	3
	RIA Novosti	3
	RBC	3
	Pikabu	3
	YouTube	14
	Krymskie Izvestia	3
Radio	Mayak	3
	Evropa Plus	3
	Svoboda	3

Crimeans are most interested in news of a political (35 %), economic (17 %) and cultural nature (17 %) (Figure 2).
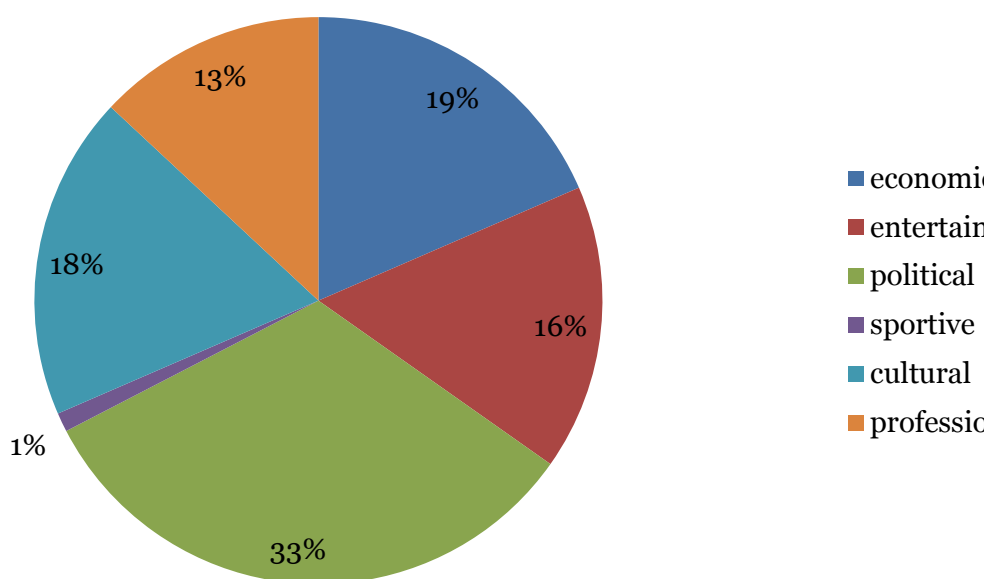

Fig. 2. Directions of news information of interest to Crimeans

More than half of the respondents do not trust the information received from the media (52 %). 30 % of respondents have no doubts about this information. 18 % found it difficult to answer (Figure 3).
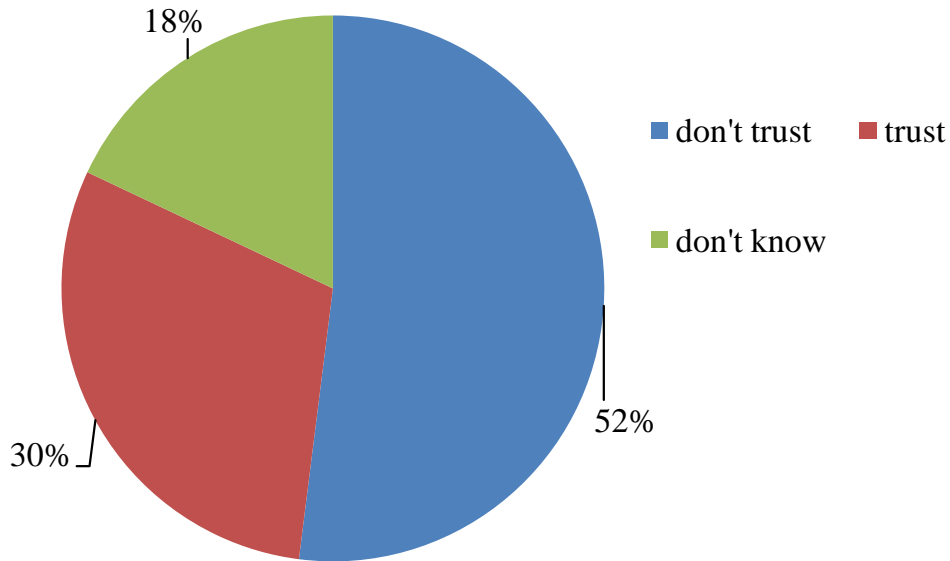
Fig. 3. The ratio of people who do not believe information from the media

The audience does not trust the information published in social networks. 54 % of respondents stated this, 16 % were undecided with the answer. 30 % of respondents treat the information in social networks as reliable (Figure 4).
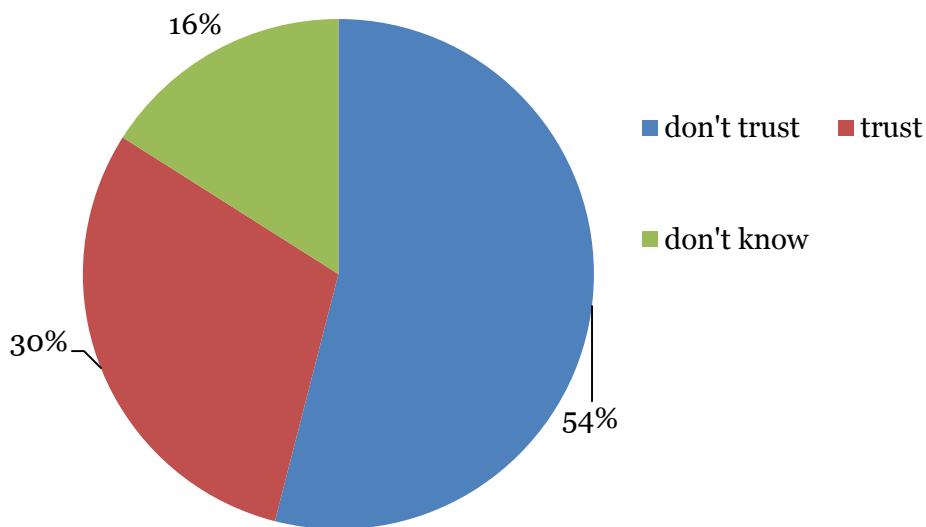

Fig. 4. Distribution of answers to the question "Do you trust the information received from the social networks?"

According to the residents of the Crimea, modern news content does not realize the classic journalistic functions (informational, educational, integrative, socializing). The audience is sure that the news distracts them from the most important events (32 %), entertains (32 %) and manipulates the population (32 %). Only 6 % of respondents believe that news information helps to get an idea of the most important events in the world, 4 % agree that news helps an individual to build his behavior in accordance with the described changes in society.

News information cannot implement the most classical journalistic functions due to the politicization and commercialization. The publications reflect the policy of the institution of power,

on the other hand, they strive to increase the rating, which explains the publication of information with entertaining and sensational content. Crimeans criticize media and social network news channels because there are a lot of political information (40 %), criminal (40 %), entertainment (14 %), unnecessary information (20 %). Also, during the survey, respondents noted the following disadvantages of news broadcasting: "a lot of unreliable information", "a lot of advertising", "a lot of unnecessary information about the coronavirus", "a lot of image information", "a lot of attention is paid to details of a criminal nature".

At the same time, more than half of the respondents (60 %) believe that news information contributes to regulating the life of society, 26 % of respondents are sure that news is a tool of political management, and for 6 % news is a commodity whose production brings profit to media publishers.

The key issue was the assessment by the residents of the Crimea of their own media literacy. 62 % of Crimeans believe that they can independently determine whether the information is false or reliable (Figure 5).
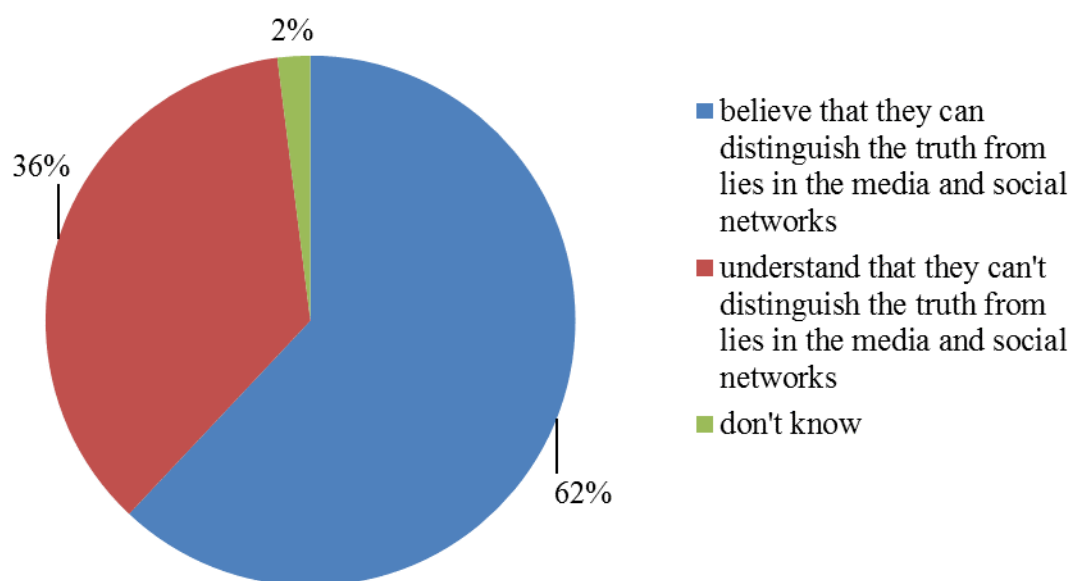

Fig. 5. The assessment by the residents of the Crimea of their own media literacy

The respondents highly appreciated their skills in the process of verifying information and its critical evaluation.

As for the audience's self-determination of its media competence, in particular, the identification and recognition of false information, it is possible that respondents may voice incorrect information in order to increase their own self-esteem.

This correlates with the conclusions of researchers presented earlier: respondents do not understand that they cannot identify false information in the news.

The authors of the study associate the problems of low media competence of the audience with a low level of media literacy; also, the ability to identify unreliable information depends on the general level of education, the characteristics of media consumption (for example, the use of several media channels makes it possible to compare information; in our study, respondents did not name more than three media names), as well as age – the younger the audience, the more critical it is to the information received.

5. Conclusion

Thus, the residents of the Crimea, who have been living in an information war for more than seven years, *do not show high media literacy skills*. Their confidence that they can calculate false news is associated with adapting to life in a complex information field. *They adapt*: they unnecessarily criticize the media and the political agenda, choose neutral sources of information

(for example, they watch only cultural news), develop their own ways to relieve emotional stress, increase communication with friends on exciting topics (with criticism of all news).

Further research would like to explore ways to improve the media literacy of Crimeans. It is necessary to offer the audience simple and accessible ways to explain the need to verify the source of information.

Promising areas for developing:

• studying the impact of social advertising, which will explain what will reduce panic in the situation and improve communication and understanding of the source's interest in spreading specific information;

• clarify how effective is gamification for teaching media literacy to Crimeans.

We can offer several variants of games to increase media skills. Firstly, users of social networks can earn "points" or other bonuses by engaging in such self-regulation of the network. Another variant of the game can be a test in social networks, which would ask the user to remember on which page in the social network he read this or that news (according to the results of the test, points would be awarded for attentiveness and memory). The goal of the game is to increase the memorization of the source of information.

In general, the gamification method will be effective if users will help algorithms fight disinformation and increase the attention of the population to news sources. However, this approach will require the transformation and introduction of new information verification functions from the owners of social network resources. Only the interaction of researchers and digital business owners will help to increase the level of media literacy and the ability of adults to think critically when reading news from the Internet and various social networks.

References

Abaddi et al., 2011 – *Abaddi, A.E, Backstrom, L., Chakrabarti, S., Jaimes, A., Leskovec, J., Tomkins, A.* (2011). Social media: source of information or bunch of noise. *WWW '11: Proceedings of the 20th international conference companion on World wide web*: 327-328.

Bissonnette, 2021 – *Bissonnette, M., Chastenay, P., Francoeur, C.* (2021). Exploring adolescents' critical thinking aptitudes when reading about science in the news. *Journal of Media Literacy Education.* 13(1): 1-13.

Bulger, Davison, 2018 – *Bulger, M., Davison, P.* (2018). The Promises, Challenges, and Futures of Media Literacy. *Journal of Media Literacy Education.* 10(1): 1-21.

Courtenay, Truluck, 1997 – *Courtenay, B.C., Truluck, J.* (1997). The meaning of life and older learners: addressing the fundamental issue through critical thinking and teaching. *Educational Gerontology.* 23(2): 175-195.

Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2018 – *Fedorov, A., Levitskaya, A.* (2018). Mass media literacy education in modern Russia. *Media education (Mediaobrazovanie).* 2: 6-18.

Gálik, 2020 – *Gálik, S.* (2020). Thinking in the network. *Central European Journal of Communication.* 27(3): 446-459. doi: 10.51480/1899-5101.13.3(27).9

Gáliková Tolnaiová, 2021 – *Gáliková Tolnaiová, S.* (2021). On perspectives of teacher training and understanding of their digital competencies as determinants of digital education. *Media Literacy and Academic Research.* 4(1): 118-133.

Gibby, 2013 – *Gibby, C.* (2013). Critical Thinking in Adult Learners. *ARECLS,* 10: 147-176.

Grigor, Pantti, 2016 – *Grigor, I., Pantti, M.* (2016). Fake News: The narrative battle over the Ukrainian conflict. *Journalism Practice.* 10(7): 891-901.

Hobbs et al., 2013 – *Hobbs, R., Donnelly, K., Friesem, J., Moen, M.* (2013). Learning to engage: how positive attitudes about the news, media literacy, and video production contribute to adolescent civic engagement. *Educational Media International.* 50(4): 231-246.

Hobbs, Jensen, 2009 – *Hobbs, R., Jensen, A.* (2009). The Past, present, and future of media literacy education. *The Journal of Media Literacy Education.* 1: 1-11.

Kačinová, 2019 – *Kačinová, V.* (2019). From a reductionist to a holistic model of digital competence and media education. *Communication Today.* 10(2): 16-27.

Kudryashova, Bergman, 2019 – *Kudryashova, E.V., Bergman, Yu.E.* (2019). Informacionnoe protivoborstvo Rossii i Ukrainy (na primere sovremennogo politicheskogo konflikta) [Information confrontation between Russia and Ukraine (on the example of a modern political conflict)]. *Kaspijski region: politika, economica, cultura – The Caspian region: politics, economy, culture.* 1(58): 99-103. [in Russian]

Livingstone et al., 2005 – *Livingstone, S., Van Couvering, E.J., Thumim, N.* (2005). Adult media literacy. A review of the literature. *London: Ofcom.* [Electronic resource]. URL: https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/4155054.pdf

Mehta, Guzmán, 2018 – *Mehta, R., Guzmán, L.D.* (2018). Fake or Visual Trickery? Understanding the quantitative visual rhetoric in the news. *Journal of Media Literacy Education.* 10(2): 104-122.

Mejias, Vokulev, 2017 – *Mejias, U.A., Vokuev, N.E.* (2017). Disinformation and the media: the case of Russia and Ukraine. *Media, Culture & Society.* 39(7): 1027-1043.

Moore, 2010 – *Moore, K.* (2010). The Three-Part harmony of adult learning, critical thinking, and decision-making. *Journal of Adult Education.* 39(1): 1-10.

Murrock et al., 2018 – *Murrock, E., Amulya, J., Druckman, M., Liubyva, T.* (2018). Winning the war on state-sponsored propaganda: results from an impact study of a Ukrainian news media and information literacy program. *Journal of Media Literacy Education.* 10(2): 53-85.

Rasi et al., 2019 – *Rasi, P., Vuojärvi, H., Ruokamo, H.* (2019). Media literacy education for all ages. *Journal of Media Literacy Education.* 11(2): 1-19.

RosInfoStat, 2020 – RosInfoStat (2020). Naselenie Kryma po dannym Rosstat [The population of the Crimea according to Rosstat]. [Electronic resource]. URL: https://ros infostat.ru/naselenie-kryma-po-dannym-rosstat/ [in Russian]

Sapunov, 2016 – *Sapunov, V.I.* (2016). Nekotorye metody sovremennoj ukrainskoj mediapropagandy v informacionnoj vojne protiv Rossii [Some methods of modern propaganda of the Ukrainian mass media in the information war against Russia]. *Vestnik VGU. Seriya: Filologiya, Zhurnalistika.* 2: 141-143. [in Russian]

Shapovalova, 2020. – *Shapovalova, E.* (2020). Improving media education as a way to combat fake news. *Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie).* 60(4): 730-735.

Smeyukha, Armash, 2021 – *Smeyukha V., Armash V.* (2021). Nedostovernaya informaciya kak tendenciya razvitiya mediaprostranstva [Unreliable information as a trend in the development of the mediaspace]. *Zhurnalistika – Mediaobrazovanie – Nastavnichestvo.* Pp. 392-396. [in Russian]

Szostek, 2017 – *Szostek, J.* (2017). The Power and limits of Russia's strategic narrative in Ukraine: the role of linkage. *Perspectives on Politics.* 15(2): 379-395.

Vrabec, Bôtošová, 2020 – *Vrabec, N., Bôtošová, L.,* (2020). The Concept of learning-by-doing in the context of media education and school quality assessment. *Communication Today.* 11(1): 140-148.

Vroman et al., 2015 – *Vroman, K.G., Arthanat, S., Lysack, C.* (2015). Who over 65 is online? Older adults' dispositions toward information communication technology. *Computers in Human Behavior.* 43: 156-166.

Vziatysheva, 2020 – *Vziatysheva, V.* (2020). How fake news spreads online? *International Journal of Media and Information Literacy.* 5(2): 217-226.

Zadorin et al., 2018 – *Zadorin, I.V., Malseva, D.V., Shubina, L.V.* (2018). Uroven' mediagramotnosti naseleniya v regionah Rossii: sravnitel'nyj analiz. [The level of media literacy of the population in the regions of Russia: comparative analysis]. *Kommunikaciya. Media. Dizajn.* 2(4): 123-141. [in Russian]