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The Main Trends in Media and Information Literacy in the Era of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The article provides an overview of 67 articles published in “International Journal of Media and Information Literacy” in 2021-2022. The articles’ authors are scholars from Algeria, Chile, Czech Republic, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Ukraine, Russia, Slovakia and USA. Main areas of research during the pandemic are identified. Thematic focuses of articles directly related to COVID-19 are analyzed. The main results of research on the impact of the pandemic on the educational system, social relations, business, politics and a number of other areas are summarized. Particular attention is paid to the recommendations formulated by the authors to combat the manifestations and consequences of coronavirus in the field of pedagogy, interpersonal relations, management and working activity. It is concluded that, in general, many authors of articles reacted promptly and adequately to the changed realities. An assumption is made about a possible change in attitude to the complex of knowledge, skills and abilities associated with media and information literacy and expansion of the structure and scope of these types of literacy in future.

Keywords: media, media literacy, information literacy, pandemic, COVID-19, survey, research, tendencies.

1. Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has left an indelible mark on the modern history of humankind. COVID-19 quickly evolved from a purely medical phenomenon into a global social factor, the consequences of which are still being felt in various areas of life – from health and demography to politics and economy.

It seems quite natural that a variety of related aspects urgently requires reflection by the academic community. It should be noted that scholars from various scientific fields are already actively involved in the analysis of the nature, causes, specifics, and consequences of the pandemic. In this sense, I consider it important to look at how all this influenced research in the field of media and information literacy within one of the leading Russian journals. What issues related to the pandemic are being analyzed by specialists in this area? Are there any recommendations for countering detrimental effects of COVID-19? What occupies minds of Russian experts in the field of media and information literacy besides the pandemic itself? The search for answers to these questions is arguably capable of predicting the further development of this sphere of knowledge.

2. Materials and methods

The empirical basis for the analysis was 67 articles published in “International Journal of Media and Information Literacy” in 2021-2022. Along with “Media Education”, this journal is

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justifiably considered one of the best in the field of media and information literacy and is the world. This is confirmed by the fact that “International Journal of Media and Information Literacy” now indexed by Scopus, Q2.

Of course, the purpose of this article is not to present the main content of the works selected. All of them are publicly available on the Internet, so anyone interested in media literacy, education, and information literacy will certainly find there something that is of interest to them. Rather, I will draw attention to some important points that we believe to be especially relevant or controversial at the moment.

3. Discussion and results

Having analyzed the content of selected articles, I consider it necessary to first give a general description of the topics covered in them. After that, I will elaborate on the contexts of the articles and the way pandemic is presented in them.

The articles published in the journal provide insight about the features of media and information literacy research in different countries, such as Algeria, Chile, Czech Republic, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Ukraine, Russia, Slovakia and USA. In my opinion, such a wide geography indicates, firstly, that the journal is in demand in different parts of the world and, secondly, that media literacy related field is becoming more and more relevant and meets the needs of the time.

By the way, analysis of the articles published since 2021 convinces me that the focus of research attention is increasingly shifting towards digital literacy. Five out of seven articles devoted to different varieties of literacy dealt specifically with digital literacy (Byundyugova et al., 2021b; Feijoo et al., 2021; Kamilova, Yap, 2022; Prabhu et al., 2022; Syzonov, 2022), and only two touched upon news literacy (Memon et al., 2021) and financial literacy (Shvahaer et al., 2021). In my opinion, this is quite reasonable: realities of the modern world (i.e. steadily increasing pace of digitalization and penetration of the Internet into people’s daily lives) necessitate scholars analyzing this particular type of literacy. I dare to suggest that in the future the emphasis on digital literacy will become more and more obvious.

Of note, digital component is becoming more and more noticeable in articles devoted to various aspects of literacy within the framework of educational process. Among others, the authors consider perceived risk and the e-service convenience of satisfaction and trust of academic-online users (Ramadania et al., 2021), practical application of the video component of media education in direct and reverse acculturation activities (Slutskiy, 2021), use of visualization in teaching subjects of different ages (Byundyugova et al., 2021a), and development of educational motivation of adults with the help of visual technologies (Byundyugova et al., 2022). Besides, scholars also analyze risk-factors of cyber bullying among secondary school adolescents (Ibrahim, Phuong, 2021), methodology, technology and practice of organizing media education seminars and workshops for teachers on promoting interethnic tolerance in the university student community (Chelysheva, Mikhaleva, 2021), the role of decisions by the European Court of Human Rights in shaping the content of new media literacy education (Plotnikova et al., 2021), multimodal output of university students in a general education English class to explore the application of knowledge processes of multiliteracies (Ugalingan et al., 2022), and implementation of a media educational project in museum pedagogy (Dolgireva et al., 2022).

Large proportion of articles is devoted to literacy in the context of social media use. Facebook and Twitter very often attract attention of researchers. For example, they explore communication strategies of universities through social networking sites (Eger et al., 2021), the online brand image building and user engagement strategies adopted by the Video on Demand Service providers (Srivastav, Rai, 2022b), effectiveness of Twitter in terms of assessing the sentiments of people amidst the #metoo campaign (Syamili, Rekha, 2021), and enhancing information preservation in social media text analytics using advanced and robust pre-processing techniques (Emaduddin et al., 2022).

In the context of our interest, other social media are mentioned less frequently. In particular, scholars investigate the effect of TikTok App on the transmission of cultural values (Dekhil, Sarnou, 2021), the process of re-strengthening and re-emphasizing the role of women in the family with the help of certain types of YouTube video (Rosida, Azwar, 2021), and try to decipher and analyze the peace message contained in MorshadMishu’s Instagram image for The Global Happiness Challenge (Sari et al., 2022).

Also of note are scholars' attempts to identify the role of media and information literacy in fostering students' ability to critically evaluate sources of information and use social media responsibly (Manabat, 2021), to evaluate social media interactivity among digital natives and digital immigrants (Ahmed, Zia, 2021), and to comprehend the meaning of humor in understanding the trolling behavior of social media users (UlHaq et al., 2021).

In general, such a wide range of topics covered in the context of social media seems justified. The depth of their penetration into the everyday life of a modern person is so great that it naturally requires a comprehensive analysis by the academic community. Obviously, today social media construct the environment where media and information literacy skills will be in high and constant demand for a long time to come.

The same is true for social interaction at its broadest. Not surprisingly, scholars are interested in analyzing communication barriers (i.e. cultural, psychological, educational, economic, and religious ones) and process of feedback in social interactions (Hassan et al., 2021) and the problem of teenage extremism as a form of social deviation in the configuration of modern media texts in the transformation processes (Gorbatkova, 2021). To continue the discourse on the younger generation, it is also necessary to mention a very ingenious study of the effects of raids on restaurants shown in crime or investigation shows of Pakistan on the behaviors of youth (Awais, Ali, 2022).

A wide range of articles is dedicated to grown-ups. Scholars try to moderate the role of self-efficacy within correlation of technostress creators with employees' work-life balance in the context of journalists' use of information and communication technology at work (Ibrahim et al., 2021), as well as to explore the phenomenon of groups of men known as Involuntary Celibates (Incels) in an internet meme culture (Aulia, Rosida, 2022). Worthy of separate attention is research of A.E. Lebid, M.S. Nazarov, N.A. Shevchenko, and K.M. Vashyst who analyzed the use of the terms 'information resilience' and 'social resilience' in the context of national resilience strategies (Lebid et al., 2021) and basic principles of conducting information-psychological special operations as one of the forms of information warfare (Lebid et al., 2021).

The latter of the studies mentioned above occupies a kind of borderline position between the articles that I have referred to 'social interaction' and 'politics' blocks. In fact, political dimension of media and information literacy is as important today as pedagogical or social ones. The tragic events that took place in the world in 2022 once again convince me of the importance of developing media competencies.

In this regard, I consider the research on media representation of the image of the Russian political leader in western online media especially indicative. It is quite difficult to disagree with its authors that "powerful structures of information warfare and anti-Russian propaganda have long been developed in the West, and this propaganda itself, often mixed with Russophobia, has practically turned into a factor of global politics" (Seliverstova et al., 2021). Moreover, even though the authors draw the data from a selection of publications of the American newspaper "Daily news" and the German magazine "Der Spiegel" in the online format from 2000 to 2004 and from 2018 to 2020, it seems fair to say that this trend is typical today for most other western mainstream media.

Apart from that, scholars also examine how usage of social media influence political polarization (Ali et al., 2021) and try to reveal a correlation between the information sources young Russians use and how they feel about politics and see their country's future (Kazakov et al., 2022). At last, certain media and information literacy issues are presented in the articles considering the reflection of current Russian-Cuban relationship in the content on the online news of the Cuban News Agency Prensa Latina (Ramírez et al., 2021) and the Truth Commission as a tool for accessing and disseminating information within the context of realization of the right to truth in post-conflict societies (Slavko et al., 2022).

The issue of manipulation is closely related to the political dimension of media literacy. Special mention must be made of research conducted by A. Levitskaya and A. Fedorov who first elaborated criteria and methods for assessing the effectiveness of activities, contributing to the development of students' media competence in the process of analyzing media manipulative influences (Levitskaya, Fedorov, 2021) and then suggested technologies of countering media manipulations and false information, based on tasks related to answering challenging questions (Levitskaya, Fedorov, 2021). A kind of applied variant of this scholarly strand became the study of the problems inherent in coverage of Russian news in foreign media, namely, the BBC Russian Service (Novikov, Fedorov, 2022).

Some articles published in the “International Journal of Media and Information Literacy” are devoted to the business sphere. Specifically, scholars investigate the state of the art about business information literacy and identify how researchers have studied business information literacy in businesses (CapinzaikiOttonicar et al., 2021), conduct theoretical reviews to systematically organize the literature findings to develop an Electronic Word of Mouth communication model (Yaseen et al., 2021) and explore the role of emotional intelligence in advertising (Yaseen et al., 2022).

Significant part of research concerns various aspects of media and information literacy in the context of cinematography. The authors of the articles carry out various kinds of retrospective analysis of forbidden Soviet cinema (1951-1991) (Tselykh, 2021a), foreign leaders of Soviet film distribution (Tselykh, 2021b) or theoretical concepts of film studies in “Cinema Art” Journal published from 1945 to 1955 (Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2022). Besides, they also present results of research on peculiarities of teenagers’ perception of the characters of a film narrative in a situation of moral choice (Skorova, Suvorova, 2021), narratives that are being platformed by global OTT giants to break through the Indian subcontinent market (Srivastav, Rai, 2022a), and the image of the USSR as a sports power in contemporary Russian audiovisual media texts (Seliverstova et al., 2022).

Finally, state-of-the-art papers in their pure form are very rare. By and large, during the period under review there was only one of them and it was dedicated to a five-year anniversary of “International Journal of Media and Information Literacy” (Novikov, 2021).

These are the main thematic features of the articles that were published during the pandemic, but did not directly address this topic. It is also interesting to analyze the content of publications that directly touch on COVID-19. At the same time, I note that their content orientation to a certain extent coincides with the focus of attention of non-pandemic-related works.

A significant part of the articles considers the role of mass media in the fight against coronavirus. Among others, scholars conduct comparative analysis of the reportage of COVID-19 during the first and second waves by the Egyptian and Jordanian newspapers (Shvahr et al., 2021) and identify effectiveness of coverage of vaccination awareness by newspapers online portals in India (Kumar et al., 2022). Quite interesting is an attempt to assess significance of media and information literacy during pandemic and post-pandemic period (Khanina et al., 2021). Worthy of separate attention are studies on media as a source of popular science information during the pandemic (Kitsa, 2021) and the impact of digital and conventional media on the health-relevant choice and information overload (Baldil, 2021).

Interestingly enough, mass media are treated not only as an institution that plays a positive role in the era of COVID-19, but also as a source of certain drawbacks – phenomena of loneliness and fear (Makarova et al., 2021), to name but a few.

In general, the social and psychological consequences of the pandemic can be considered a separate area of research. In my opinion, this is absolutely reasonable as difficulties caused by coronavirus urgently require analysis of their causes and nature. For example, the authors of one of the articles published in the journal claim that “alongside with uncertainty and fear caused by COVID-19 pandemic hate speech as a social phenomenon adds to tension and stress, and as such should be studied, analyzed and differentiated from sarcastic or ironic statements causing no harm” (Makarova et al., 2022).

Not less important is the complex of issues related to information – for example, ways to strengthen people’s information security during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic period as a systemic phenomenon in terms of their protectedness (Sadivnychy et al., 2021) and attempts to develop a better understanding of the online health information seeking behaviour during COVID-19 period (Shaheen et al., 2021). In connection with the contingency derived from the pandemic, a slightly different perspective was given to the already existing problem of addiction toward Smartphone on college students (García-Santillán et al., 2021; 2022).

In this context, the role of social media is also being rethought. For example, *Facebook* and *Instagram* news pages are screened for assessing degree of media literacy of modern recipients in the perception and further dissemination of information about COVID-19 (Shevchenko et al., 2021). Also of note is desire to test usage of *YouTube* for academic purpose among university students in time of the pandemic (Chhachhar et al., 2022). In my opinion, attempts to look at social media through the lens of their role and potential are absolutely justified and in a sense promising.

Roughly the same can be said in relation to the field of pedagogy. It is now obvious that proposing internet-driven alternative pedagogical system for use in teaching and learning during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic (Ibrahim et al., 2022) is likely to remain relevant in the long run.

It seems to me that the most important merit and contribution of the “International Journal of Media and Information Literacy” to social development is the fact that a number of articles are devoted to specific recommendations for improving the functioning of individual social institutions during the pandemic.

To illustrate, among the recommendations to governments, the authors of the articles highlight the following:

1. To develop “a comprehensive contingency plan that includes not only school safety measures but also ways to ensure that students and teachers continue to learn and receive support in times of crisis. The government should also provide major support for essential social services and other services that are directly or indirectly related to home learning, such as power costs and internet/Wi-Fi” (Ibrahim et al., 2022).

2. “Government-level measures can also be taken to run awareness campaigns. Such campaigns would spread awareness among people and would influence them to consult a doctor instead of seeking information over the Internet or mobile applications regarding coronavirus or other diseases” (Shaheen et al., 2021).

3. It is also crucially important for government agencies “to adapt their communication processes both to the appropriate context and to the preferences of young citizens, to build such communication relationships that largely meet the needs of young people” (Harmatiy et al., 2021).

4. In a way, on online platforms, “governments should not only inform residents, but also educate” which is especially true for young audience (Harmatiy et al., 2021).

As far as media are concerned, journalists “should focus more on sensitizing the public on the necessary steps to take in curbing the virus. They should refrain from over usage of a negative tone to panic the public in presenting the stories of the COVID-19 pandemic” (Shvahaer et al., 2021). It also seems quite important for traditional media to start more actively working in social networks in order to comment and distribute pandemic-related news. This involves (but not limited to) “various video hosting services, because the modern consumer requires maximum interactivity. One of the demanded formats of popular science information are podcasts” (Kitsa, 2021).

A promising socio-communication model designed to ensure people’s security in times of epidemics and crises was offered by V. Sadivnychy, M.S. Nazarov, A.E. Lebid, and N.A. Shevchenko. It includes a number of measures, the most important of which I consider “ensuring proper professional-information interpretation of various phenomena and processes through the engagement of top experts and professional media people capable of shedding an objective light on a particular event or phenomenon” (Sadivnychy et al., 2021).

Pieces of advice addressed to an employer when transferring employees to a distant work mode are also very valuable. Apart from the broadest of them, it is worth paying attention to making sure the employee “knows how to search for information using search engines ... is able to prove the quality and reliability of the information received ... is aware of the legal aspects of the dissemination and use of information received in the Internet” (Khanina et al., 2021). Of course, all this is very important. However, unfortunately, one can hardly expect that in reality all employers seriously think about increasing the level of media literacy of their employees.

Last, but not least. As is commonly known, disturbing news and general exposure to mass media may well be quite harmful for mental health. To avoid this, sometimes it makes sense to limit news consumption and choose only the trustworthy sources of information. In addition to this, “To overcome your vulnerability, try to share your anxious thoughts and emotions with others. Don’t be afraid to expose your weakness and vulnerability” (Makarova et al., 2021).

4. Conclusion

Concluding the review of articles published over the past year and a half in “International Journal of Media and Information Literacy”, I would like to note the following.

It is obvious that the pandemic has affected almost all spheres of society, including educational system, social ties, economy, and politics. Moreover, it not just affected, but to a certain extent modified them. Many people found themselves in largely new conditions, among other things requiring new approaches to working with information.

A large amount of unverified and unreliable information about the coronavirus and how to deal with it, myths, conjectures, and hearsay about vaccination, the transition of a significant part of the population to remote work – all these and many other factors have once again actualized the importance of media and information literacy. Today, many of those who did not attach much

importance to this before have realized how important media competences are in order to feel more or less confident in a rapidly changing world.

I note with satisfaction that many authors of articles published in “International Journal of Media and Information Literacy” promptly and adequately responded to the changed realities. They conducted studies that touched on the most acute and sensitive aspects of the impact of the pandemic on people’s daily lives. In their papers, scholars managed to reflect transformation of social relations, educational system, business and politics, and a number of other areas affected by COVID-19. They succeeded in conducting both empirical and theoretical research on pandemic and post-pandemic reality in this quite short period of time.

It is also worth mentioning that in a number of articles there have been formulated specific recommendations on how to minimize the impact of the negative aspects of coronavirus on people’s lives. Personally, I consider this as manifestation of the most important – so-called societal transforming – mission of a science.

I am sure that in the future, both the immediate difficulties associated with COVID-19 and the indirect problems caused by it will be successfully overcome. I am also confident that against this background changes in attitudes towards the complex of knowledge, skills and abilities associated with media and information literacy are possible. Composition and structure of these types of literacy itself will probably expand, too. At least, judging by the reaction of the authors of the articles published in “International Journal of Media and Information Literacy”, the future of this field promises to be rather interesting and intense.

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