



Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)

Issued since 2005

ISSN 1994-4160. E-ISSN 1994-4195
2025. 21(1). Issued 4 times a year

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Founders: UNESCO Moscow Office, Release date 15.03.25
Russian Association for Film and Media Format 21 × 29,7/4.
Education, ICO "Information for All".

Editor: Cherkas Global University Headset Georgia.

Postal Address: 1717 N Street NW, Suite 1, Order №80
Washington, District of Columbia, USA
20036

Website: <https://me.cherkasgu.press>
E-mail: me.editor@cherkasgu.press

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2025

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Published in the USA
 Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
 Issued since 2005.
 ISSN 1994-4160
 E-ISSN 1994-4195
 2025. 21(1): 3-11

DOI: 10.13187/me.2025.1.3
<https://me.cherkasgu.press>



Empowering Women Entrepreneurs in Qatar: The Role of Social Media and Media Literacy in Marketing Communication

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Abstract

This research examines how female entrepreneurs in Qatar utilize social media as a tool within their marketing communication strategies, emphasizing their underlying motivations, the advantages they derive, and the obstacles they encounter. Media literacy is introduced as a critical factor influencing the effective use of social media for marketing communication. Drawing on insights from interviews with ten women managing businesses of varying sizes, the research applies theoretical perspectives such as Social Exchange Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and the Resource-Based View to examine their engagement with social media. The findings highlight that media literacy empowers entrepreneurs to critically evaluate content, strategically connect with their audience, and navigate ethical and professional challenges. Despite these advantages, entrepreneurs face hurdles such as audience expansion, maintaining professionalism, and reputation management. This study contributes to the understanding of social media marketing, media literacy, and women's entrepreneurship in Qatar, offering valuable implications for policymakers and business practitioners. Future research can explore the broader impacts of media literacy training programs on entrepreneurial success in other contexts.

Keywords: social media marketing, women entrepreneurs, Qatar, challenges, benefits, reasons, media literacy.

1. Introduction

Social media has emerged as a fundamental aspect of contemporary life, with its widespread adoption prompting its incorporation into numerous business strategies, particularly marketing communication. Defined as the utilization of social media platforms to advertise products, services, or brands (Shawky et al., 2019), social media marketing communication now constitutes a vital component of a company's broader marketing framework and has firmly established itself within the modern business environment. In particular, a study by (Shockley et al., 2018) found that women entrepreneurs in Qatar have traditionally faced several barriers to entering the business world, including limited access to resources and a lack of opportunities. However, social media has played a significant role in empowering women entrepreneurs in Qatar, providing them with a platform to connect, communicate, and compete in the business world. Media literacy enables these entrepreneurs to maximize the benefits of social media by enhancing their understanding of content creation, ethical practices, and audience engagement.

Recent years have seen a rise in the number of women entrepreneurs in Qatar (Alagos, 2016; Nazer, 2020). However, there is limited research that could explain their use of social media for

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marketing communication in a specific context (Li et al., 2023). This study aims to explore the extent to which theoretical frameworks can explain the use of social media for marketing communication among women entrepreneurs in Qatar, given the important role that social media plays in marketing. By examining the theoretical frameworks that impact the use of social media for marketing communication among women entrepreneurs in Qatar, this study seeks to provide valuable insights into this topic.

This research seeks to address the following questions:

1. What are the key motivations, benefits, and challenges women entrepreneurs face in Qatar when utilizing social media for marketing communication, and how does media literacy influence these experiences?
2. How do theoretical frameworks explain the relationship between social media use, marketing communication, and media literacy?
3. What strategies can be recommended to enhance media literacy among women entrepreneurs, thereby improving their social media marketing effectiveness?

The theoretical frameworks that will guide this study include the social exchange theory (Cropanzano, Mitchell, 2005), the commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing (Morgan, Hunt, 1994), media literacy and other relevant theories. The social exchange theory suggests that individuals interact with others to maximize rewards and minimize costs. This theory is relevant to the study as it suggests that women entrepreneurs are likely to use social media to maximize rewards and minimize costs, such as increasing brand awareness and reducing advertising expenses. The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing, on the other hand, suggests that trust and commitment are critical factors in building and maintaining relationships with customers. This theory is relevant to the study as it suggests that women entrepreneurs may use social media to build and enhance their relationships with customers, leading to increased commitment and trust. Finally, other relevant theories, such as the uses and gratifications theory (Ruggiero, 2000) and the resource-based view (Wernerfelt, 1984), will also be used to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the application of social media in the marketing efforts of Qatari women entrepreneurs.

The study's findings will provide insight into the reasons, benefits, and challenges of using social media in marketing communication among women entrepreneurs in Qatar and will contribute to the existing literature on social media marketing and women entrepreneurship. In addition, the study will highlight the relevance and applicability of theoretical frameworks to explain social media use in marketing communication and in a culture different from where the theories originate.

In essence, this research seeks to investigate the motivations behind, advantages gained from, and obstacles encountered in the use of social media as a marketing communication tool by Qatari women entrepreneurs. The study's findings will contribute to the existing literature on social media marketing and women entrepreneurship, and highlight the relevance and applicability of theoretical frameworks to explain social media use in a culture different from where the theories originate.

2. Materials and methods

This study utilized a qualitative research approach employing in-depth interviews as the primary means of data collection. Media literacy was incorporated as a core theme, with questions exploring participants' understanding of digital content creation, evaluation, and ethical practices.

A total of ten female entrepreneurs in the country were selected for the sample using purposive sampling based on their expertise and current use of social media. Data collection was conducted via in-depth interviews held from September to October 2022. The interview questions, derived from the literature review, were tailored to address the research objectives.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, aimed at identifying recurring patterns and themes within the qualitative data (Li et al., 2023). Transcripts underwent multiple readings to discern emerging patterns and themes, which were then used to structure and interpret the data.

To ensure study validity, the interview questions underwent review by experts in entrepreneurship and marketing communication. Additionally, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of participants to gauge question effectiveness. Reliability was ensured through cross-checking and verification of collected data by an independent researcher.

Ethical guidelines were strictly followed to protect participant rights. All participants were briefed on the study's purpose and provided informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were

guaranteed, with participant identities withheld. Approval for the study was granted by the Strategic Communication Management Program Board at the Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University.

3. Discussion

Promoting products, services, or brands through social media, often referred to as social media marketing, is a key component of contemporary marketing approaches. This method offers several benefits, including increased brand visibility, enhanced customer interaction, and cost-efficiency. Furthermore, it allows for immediate communication with customers, helping to build stronger connections (Cawsey, Rowley, 2016; Sashi, 2012; Shawky et al., 2019; Shawky et al., 2019).

One key benefit of social media marketing is its capability to engage a wide-ranging audience. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, which have millions of active users, present businesses with numerous opportunities to reach potential customers. Additionally, social media allows for precise targeting based on factors like demographics, location, interests, and behavior (Ramanathan et al., 2017; Semeradova, Weinlich, 2019).

Another significant benefit is its cost-effectiveness compared to traditional marketing methods (Qalati et al., 2020). Unlike traditional advertising mediums such as print, radio, and television, which can be expensive, social media provides a more cost-effective option. This is especially beneficial for small businesses (Kikawa et al., 2022).

Notwithstanding the challenges posed by limited access to resources and opportunities, the entrepreneurial activities of women in Qatar have been experiencing significant growth (Alagos, 2016). The country has witnessed a notable increase in women entrepreneurs, with Qatar ranking high in women entrepreneurship rates in the Middle East and North Africa (AbuKumail, Qanadilo, 2021).

The Qatari government has been proactive in supporting women entrepreneurs through initiatives like the Al-Dhameen program by the Qatar Development Bank (QDB), aimed at providing financial assistance to SMEs, including those owned by women. Additionally, entrepreneurship development programs like the Bedaya Center for Entrepreneurship and Career Development offer training and support to aspiring entrepreneurs (Qatar Development Bank, 2023).

While women in Qatar have the freedom to establish and manage businesses, the percentage of women business owners remains relatively low, although efforts are being made to increase their representation in leadership roles and address cultural barriers (El-Kassem et al., 2022; Khatri, 2014; Sergon, 2022). Despite educational achievements, women's participation in Qatar's labor force remains below expectations, often concentrated in entry-level administrative roles, particularly in the public sector (Hajhamad, 2021).

Qatari women aspiring to venture into entrepreneurship encounter numerous barriers to entry, including limited access to financial support, challenges in navigating legal requirements, cultural norms restricting women's participation, and the predominance of males in the business landscape (Camacho, 2019; Faisal, 2013). Additionally, the absence of female mentors, role models, and a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem can impede women's entrepreneurial endeavors. Despite these obstacles, women in Qatar are breaking into traditionally male-dominated industries and managerial roles, aligning with the goals outlined in Qatar National Vision 2030 (Hukoomi E-Government, 2022).

A study examining social media usage by women entrepreneurs in Egypt served as inspiration for this research. It revealed that social media can serve as a powerful tool for female entrepreneurs, aiding in business development, customer communication, and brand awareness (Beninger et al., 2016). However, challenges such as financial constraints and limited technology access hinder effective social media utilization. Despite these challenges, leveraging social media can significantly impact business success, underscoring the importance of addressing barriers to its effective usage by women entrepreneurs.

Various theoretical perspectives have been applied to analyze social media use in marketing communication. Social Exchange Theory posits that individuals engage in interactions to maximize rewards and minimize costs, implying that women entrepreneurs may utilize social media to enhance brand visibility and reduce marketing expenses (Cropanzano, Mitchell, 2005). The Uses and Gratifications Theory suggests that women entrepreneurs may use social media to meet their needs, including business promotion and customer engagement (Ruggiero, 2000).

Network Theory emphasizes the role of social media in expanding networks and fostering customer relationships, which can benefit women entrepreneurs in broadening their reach and

enhancing customer connections (van Osch, Bulgurcu, 2020). The Technology Acceptance Model suggests that women entrepreneurs' attitudes toward social media influence their adoption and usage for marketing communication (Fosso Wamba, 2018). Similarly, the Information Adoption Model proposes that female entrepreneurs might experience a series of stages, including becoming aware of, showing interest in, evaluating, testing, and ultimately adopting social media for their marketing strategies (Rahaman et al., 2022).

The Resource-Based Model posits that women entrepreneurs can utilize their expertise, capabilities, and networks via social media to achieve a competitive advantage within the business environment (Wernerfelt, 1984). Effectively leveraging resources and capabilities on social media enhances the likelihood of success in the competitive business environment (Fan et al., 2021; Pervaje, 2011). These theoretical frameworks offer insights into the dynamics of social media marketing communication for women entrepreneurs, highlighting its potential impact on business outcomes and the strategies needed to overcome associated challenges.

4. Results

This research focused on examining the motivations, advantages, and obstacles associated with utilizing social media for marketing communication by Qatari women entrepreneurs. Data was collected from 10 women entrepreneurs through in-depth interviews conducted from September to October 2022.

Table 1. Motivations, Benefits, and Challenges of utilizing Social Media in Marketing for Qatari Women Entrepreneurs

Category	Subcategory	Quotations
Reasons	Usage Convenience	"The ease of communicating means that access to commercial desire can be done with a click of a button."
	Cost-Effectiveness	"It is the most cost-effective advertising method. I keep learning new features"
	Opportunities	
Personal Benefits	Brand Awareness	"The biggest advantage of social media is marketplace awareness."
	Consumer Engagement	"It allows communication with customers even outside of business hours."
	Ease of Access	"Ability to use Social media efficiently has elevated many local products to prominence in the Middle East region."
Professional Benefits	Brand Reputation	"Entrepreneurs are urged to work hard and professionally to build a strong brand reputation on the platform."
	Marketing Management	"Using Social media appropriately offers valuable visibility for new and established businesses in the market."
	Expansion	"Before launching a business, it's essential to define branding and style for effective communication."
	Sales	"Engaging with the audience is vital, as they inspire ideas and fuel sales."
Challenges	Growing the audience	"It's hard to gain followers and reach a larger audience on social media, especially for new businesses."
	Maintaining Professionalism	"It can be difficult to maintain professionalism on social media, especially when dealing with negative comments or complaints."
	Reputation Management	"Reputation management is crucial on social media because one mistake can lead to a boycott of the business."

The participants identified three main reasons for using social media for marketing communication: usage convenience, cost-effectiveness, and opportunities. They stated that social media provides an easy and convenient way to communicate with potential customers, as it can be accessed with just a click of a button. Social media platforms also serve as digital marketplaces, enabling businesses to promote their content effortlessly and encourage interaction and sharing, which can provide marketers with extensive information about consumers as seen in [Table 1](#).

Participants highlighted several personal and professional advantages of utilizing social media for marketing communication. On a personal level, they emphasized benefits such as heightened brand awareness, enhanced consumer engagement, and easy accessibility. Professionally, social media was seen as instrumental in building brand reputation, managing marketing activities, facilitating business expansion, and driving sales and revenue growth.

However, participants also identified key challenges in leveraging social media effectively. Expanding their audience was noted as a significant hurdle, requiring consistent time and effort to grow a substantial following. Maintaining professionalism on social media emerged as another challenge, particularly in addressing customer concerns promptly, as neglect in this area can result in adverse outcomes for the business. Reputation management was deemed crucial, as a poorly handled reputation can lead to boycotts and a loss of consumer trust on the platform.

The findings reveal social media provides women entrepreneurs in Qatar with a unique opportunity to succeed in a patriarchal society. Participants observed that social media is an inclusive platform, transcending gender boundaries while offering a sense of security and safety to thrive in the business world. Additionally, they emphasized that social media usage can lead to empowerment in both marketing and status for women entrepreneurs in the Arabic region.

Overall, the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the reasons behind the usage of social media networking platforms by Qatari women entrepreneurs, the benefits and challenges they experience, and the opportunities that social media provides for empowerment. These insights can be useful for both policymakers and practitioners looking to support women entrepreneurs in Qatar and the broader Arabic region.

The findings of this study reveal that women entrepreneurs in Qatar recognize multiple advantages of using social media for marketing, such as convenience, affordability, and growth potential. They also noted that social media helps boost brand visibility, foster consumer interaction, and provides easy accessibility. However, the participants also identified several challenges in using social media for marketing, such as growing the audience, maintaining professionalism, and managing reputation.

To better understand and address these challenges, the participants shared specific strategies they employed to overcome the difficulties they faced when using social media for marketing communication. These strategies can be valuable for other entrepreneurs facing similar challenges.

1. Expanding the audience: To address the challenge of expanding their audience on social media, participants stressed the need for creating engaging and high-quality content, collaborating with influencers and complementary brands, and utilizing paid advertising to reach a wider audience. Additionally, they mentioned the value of using hashtags and geotags strategically to increase visibility and attract new followers.

2. Maintaining professionalism: Participants highlighted the importance of establishing clear guidelines and policies for their social media presence, including response times, tone of voice, and the types of comments and messages they would address. They also mentioned the importance of training their team members on how to handle customer inquiries, complaints, and negative feedback professionally and respectfully.

3. Reputation management: To effectively manage their reputation on social media, participants stressed the need for continuous monitoring of their online presence, promptly addressing any negative comments or feedback, and taking responsibility for any mistakes made. They also highlighted the importance of being transparent and authentic in their communication with their audience. By openly addressing issues, admitting mistakes, and taking corrective actions, they were able to maintain trust and credibility with their customers. Additionally, participants emphasized the value of sharing positive customer reviews and testimonials to showcase their brand's reputation and successes.

The participants also emphasized the importance of understanding their target audience and using appropriate marketing tools to reach them. They noted that Instagram and Snapchat were the most popular platforms among their target audience and that the content they shared on these

platforms needed to be catchy and to the point. Additionally, they stressed the importance of listening to their audience and using their feedback to improve their marketing strategies.

By implementing these specific strategies to overcome the challenges of using social media for marketing communication, women entrepreneurs in Qatar were able to leverage the platform effectively to grow their businesses. These insights can be useful for other entrepreneurs facing similar challenges and looking to optimize their social media presence for marketing success.

When it comes to the challenges they faced, the participants highlighted the difficulties of growing their audience and maintaining professionalism on social media. They also emphasized the importance of reputation management, as one mistake on social media can lead to a boycott of the business.

To better understand the social media use of the participants, the findings from this study have been summarized and linked to relevant theoretical frameworks. The theories provide a lens through which to interpret the participants' reasons, benefits, and challenges in using social media for marketing communication. Below, we provide an in-depth explanation of each theoretical framework and its relevance to the study.

1. **Social Exchange Theory:** This theory posits that people engage with others to optimize benefits and reduce expenses. In the context of this study, it explains why women entrepreneurs utilize social media as an affordable marketing tool that provides convenience and growth opportunities, ultimately enhancing their returns.

2. **Uses and Gratifications Theory:** This theory posits that individuals use media to fulfil their needs and desires. This study helps to explain why women entrepreneurs use social media to satisfy their needs, such as promoting their business, connecting with customers, and building relationships.

3. **Network Theory:** Focusing on the relationships and connections between nodes, this theory provides a framework for understanding the importance of social media networks in marketing communication. In this study, Network Theory helps explain how women entrepreneurs leverage their connections on social media platforms to grow their audience, establish collaborations, and increase brand awareness.

4. **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM):** This model examines the factors that influence users' acceptance and use of technology, including perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. In the context of this study, TAM helps explain why women entrepreneurs in Qatar adopt social media for marketing communication, as they perceive it to be a useful and convenient tool for promoting their businesses and connecting with their target audience.

5. **Information Adoption Model (IAM):** This model focuses on the factors that influence an individual's intention to adopt information, including its perceived quality, relevance, and usefulness. In the context of this study, IAM sheds light on how women entrepreneurs assess the usefulness and relevance of social media for marketing communication, which ultimately influences their decision to adopt it as a marketing tool.

6. **Resource-Based View (RBV):** This theory posits that a firm's competitive advantage is derived from its unique resources and capabilities. In the context of this study, RBV helps explain why women entrepreneurs use social media as a strategic resource for marketing communication, leveraging the platform to enhance their competitive advantage through cost-effective promotion and increased customer engagement.

The findings enhance our understanding of how women entrepreneurs in Qatar use social media for marketing, demonstrating how theoretical frameworks can explain their motivations, benefits, and challenges. This study adds to the literature on social media use among entrepreneurs and offers practical insights to help others navigate the challenges of utilizing social media for marketing purposes.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the interplay between social media use, marketing communication, and media literacy among women entrepreneurs in Qatar. The findings highlight key advantages such as convenience, cost-efficiency, and growth opportunities, including increased brand awareness, consumer engagement, improved brand reputation, and greater sales. However, challenges like audience growth, maintaining professionalism, and managing reputation were also noted. Theoretical frameworks, including Social Exchange Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory,

Network Theory, Technology Acceptance Model, and Resource-Based View, provided valuable insights into the social media practices of these entrepreneurs.

In conclusion, this study imparts valuable insights into the strategic use of social media for marketing communication among women entrepreneurs in Qatar. Emphasis is placed on the importance of strategic planning, brand fortification, audience responsiveness, and adept reputation management on social media platforms. The outcomes contribute substantively to the extant literature on social media marketing and women's entrepreneurship in the Qatari context.

Nevertheless, several limitations merit acknowledgement. The study exclusively focuses on the experiences of women entrepreneurs in Qatar, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings to other regions. Future research endeavours should encompass diverse global contexts to afford a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. Additionally, the study predominantly centres on Generation Y and Z women entrepreneurs, possibly overlooking the distinct perspectives and challenges of different age cohorts. Future investigations may consider a broader age spectrum to capture nuanced variations in social media practices among women entrepreneurs. The study recommends incorporating media literacy into entrepreneurial training programs to equip women with essential skills for analyzing, creating, and managing digital content effectively. Policymakers should promote initiatives that combine entrepreneurship development with media literacy education, ensuring broader access to training resources. Future research should examine the impact of media literacy on consumer perceptions and brand management to further explore its influence on business success. Additionally, studies could investigate how varying levels of media literacy affect entrepreneurial outcomes across different cultural contexts.

By addressing these recommendations, women entrepreneurs in Qatar can leverage media literacy to optimize their social media strategies and achieve sustainable growth in a competitive digital landscape.

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Published in the USA
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Issued since 2005.
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 1994-4195
2025. 21(1): 12-21

DOI: 10.13187/me.2025.1.12
<https://me.cherkasgu.press>



Student-Generated Video Podcast in Foreign Language Education for Further Engineers

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Abstract

The study explores the prospects of using student-generated video podcast as a media tool to improve second language acquisition, especially for career oriented students. The study involved 40 second- and third-year students of non-linguistics majors at Togliatti State University with English language proficiency levels A2-B2. The students participated in a 6-month process of video podcast generation under the supervision of a teacher. The training phases were: basic instructions, video podcast theme selection, study of materials for the video and scripting, video recording and video editing, peer feedback and revision, final video podcast presentation and reflection. A questionnaire with open-ended and Likert scale questions were used to collect the data to investigate the students' perception of video podcast creation impact on their language skills development and their satisfaction. Finally, the results show students have a positive attitude towards the use of video podcasts in foreign language learning and that this method improves both media and digital and language skills (listening comprehension, speaking skills, vocabulary, and student confidence). Student-generated video podcast as a tool addresses contemporary professional issues by equipping learners with essential skills for the modern workplace and enhancing language proficiency. This research highlights the significant implication of video podcasting for more effective and modernized foreign language training.

Keywords: student-generated video podcasts, media literacy, digital skills, learning autonomy, self-directed learning, communicative language teaching, collaborative learning.

1. Introduction

The rising trend of digitalization in education is seen widely and has its impact on language learning as well. Moreover, the importance of foreign language proficiency in the globalized job market, particularly for engineering professions, is increasing. Student generated video podcast represents an innovative digital and media tool in language education, which can be different as a method particularly in teaching professionally oriented foreign language with a tutor's mentoring.

To address this need, this study sets out to (1) explore the existing research on student-generated video podcasts in language learning; (2) trace its integration in university language training; (3) identify research issues for the study's questionnaire; (4) record student preferences; and (5) estimate its contribution to skill development. As a starting point, the existing literature suggests that these methods offer a dynamic and engaging approach, supported by established learning theories and demonstrating several key advantages in fostering language proficiency.

The present body of research robustly supports the integration of student-generated video podcasts in language education, revealing a multitude of benefits that extend across various

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domains of learning. Studies consistently demonstrate that this approach not only enhances language proficiency but also cultivates essential media and digital literacy skills, fosters collaborative learning environments, and promotes critical thinking.

The literature emphasizes that student-generated video podcasts offer a dynamic and engaging medium for enhancing foreign language education, presenting several key advantages. Studies shaping the theoretical frameworks approve the use of student-generated video podcasts for developing foreign language skills. They have shown this foreign language acquisition tool as a strong didactic means in several theoretical frameworks.

Indeed, learners can create the video podcast content at their own pace, fostering self-directed learning and catering to individual needs. Incorporating audio, visual, and textual elements in the video podcasts caters to diverse learning styles and enhances comprehension, aligning with multimedia learning theory (Jenlink, 2019). Furthermore, the ability to select video podcasts based on interests and goals enhances motivation and encourages active engagement. Some scientific researchers also state cognitive and emotional benefits. Engaging in content creation promotes cognitive and emotional investment, which are crucial for sustained engagement and academic success (Zajda, 2023). Student-generated media content enhances engagement, understanding, and retention. It fosters motivation, active learning, and preference for digital resources over traditional ones (Navío-Marco et al., 2024).

As for the language skills, video podcasts provide opportunities for independent listening and speaking practice outside the classroom, promoting autonomy and self-confidence (Gangalakshmi et al., 2023). Some researches indicate that these media digital tool not only improve listening comprehension, as stated in the research by Song and her colleagues, whose paper focuses on the impact of a mobile learner-generated-content tool on pupils' after-school English vocabulary behavioural learning patterns (Song et al., 2023). Furthermore, creating video podcasts helps improve various language competencies, including listening, speaking, and grammar. The effectiveness of focusing on oral communication through the audio-visual format of video podcasts – which emphasizes listening comprehension during peer review, pronunciation, intonation, and other aspects of spoken language – is supported by a research showing significant increases in students' linguistic skills, with improvements of 38 % in linguistic skills and 58 % in pragmatic skills observed (Brega, Kruglyakova, 2021). Crucially, creating video podcasts provides opportunities for learners to practice speaking in a less pressured environment, improving fluency and confidence.

Emerging research highlights the versatility of video podcasts not only as a learning tool but also as an effective assessment method. Caratozzolo demonstrate how video podcasts can be used to evaluate student understanding and application of knowledge, particularly within engineering curricula (Caratozzolo et al., 2022). This form of assessment not only allows for a more authentic evaluation of student competencies but also provides learners with valuable opportunities to refine their communication skills.

Beyond their function as assessment tools, video podcasts can also provide learners with insights into real-world contexts as they cover a wide range of topics, exposing them to natural language use beyond traditional textbook dialogues. This exposure helps learners grasp the language in its authentic form and appreciate the intricacies of its use across diverse situations. Furthermore, video podcasts offer valuable insights into professional and cultural aspects of target languages, providing learners with a unique window into the target language.

Moreover, video podcasts can address current events and contemporary topics, keeping language learning relevant and engaging. This aligns with the principles of communicative language teaching, where the focus shifts to meaningful communication and authentic language use, as students engage with a real audience and convey information purposefully (Richards, 2014). The investigation by Belgibayeva and her colleagues show positive correlation of subject-specific podcasts with language acquisition resulting and enhanced learning outcomes (Belgibayeva et al., 2024).

Concerning modern skills for lifelong development, creating and consuming video podcasts develops valuable media and digital literacy skills, including media production and online navigation. In the era of digitalisation, the development of media literacy is a prerequisite for successful integration into modern society and competitiveness in the labour market. Media literacy is defined as the ability to critically analyse, evaluate, and create media content. In the era of digitalisation, the development of these skills is becoming a prerequisite for successful integration into modern society and competitiveness in the labour market. The implementation of

media literacy, as the Uruguayan experience shows, requires the consolidated efforts of all educational actors, from teachers to policy makers, for successful implementation and sustainable effects (Rojas-Estrada et al., 2024). The use of video podcasts, in turn, can be an effective tool for engaging in the process of media literacy development, allowing students and teachers not only to jointly create and distribute content, but also to actively develop skills in critical information analysis and media production (as research shows, active participation in media content creation contributes to the development of media competences (Fedorov, 2015; Gálík et al., 2024)).

Technology-mediated collaborative learning is evident in the use of media and digital tools that facilitate group work and the integration of multimedia elements (Mayer, 2014). Building upon this foundation, collaborative video podcast projects enhance communication, teamwork, and project management skills. Video podcasts encourage teamwork, allowing students to collaborate on projects, which is essential in modern educational settings. The creation and sharing of video podcasts within the classroom foster a community of practice, reflecting socio-cultural theory, where learners engage in peer interaction and knowledge co-construction (Stahl, 2006).

Furthermore, some other findings demonstrate that videos foster creativity in script writing and engagement among language learning students (Gangalakshmi, 2023). Constructivist learning theory highlights the active role students take in constructing knowledge as they research, plan, and create their video podcasts (Jonassen, 1991).

While the existing literature provides compelling evidence for the effectiveness of student-generated video podcasts, several gaps remain. First, while some studies have explored the impact on specific language skills (Song et al., 2023), few have examined the holistic impact of video podcasting on both language skills and other crucial competencies, such as media and digital literacy, teamwork, and critical thinking skills, specifically in the context of engineering education.

Despite the positive impact, the literature also discusses some potential drawbacks, such as technical difficulties, or student overload, which should be taken into account when designing and implementing media education projects. Nevertheless, it is important to note that if properly organised, these problems can be solved and media literacy will remain an essential component of learning (Wu et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the studies that explore the impact on specific skills do not explore this impact on students of technical disciplines such as engineering. There is also a need to further explore the specific methods, contexts, and instructional strategies that optimize learning through student-generated video podcasts. In particular, the role of teacher guidance and support in student-generated video production has been largely unexamined. Furthermore, research regarding student preferences and perceptions about the use of student-generated video podcasts for foreign language acquisition remains limited, and there is a need to investigate how students view this method in a real classroom setting. Thus, the present study purpose is to address some of these gaps by investigating the holistic impact of student-generated video podcasts, with particular emphasis on student perceptions, practical implementation, and skills development, within the context of engineering education.

To further trace the integration of video podcasts in university language training, it is helpful to consider specific examples of their application in real-world settings. Video podcasts are incorporated into foreign language training for engineering students in creating video podcasts about engineering projects in the Togliatti State University (TSU). Now the video podcast created by students is a technique successfully applied in TSU in organizing the self-study work in *Rosdistant*.

TSU is actively introducing the practice of video podcasting into the educational process, especially among full-time students of the *Institute of Mechanical Engineering* and the *Institute of Mathematics*, Physics and Information Technologies. Teachers note an increase in students' interest in learning, as video podcasts make it possible to present professionally relevant and personally interesting topics in English. In a study conducted by Brega and Kruglyakova (Brega, Kruglyakova, 2021), a scale for assessing the communicative skills of students using video podcasts was developed and validated; the scale is based on the criteria of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, 2018) with adaptations including indicators reflecting the specificity of video podcasting, as well as pragmatics, digital literacy and time management skills.

The video podcasts are also integrated into the language training in the form of contests among students as in the *Togliatti State University* as among students of other universities.

The Department of Theory and Practice of Translation in the TSU hosts an intra-university Olympiad in the discipline *Professional English* for students of non-linguistic specialties every year. The competition consists of three stages. At the first stage, students perform a lexical and grammatical test, at the second stage they need to complete tasks for listening to a text on a business topic. At the first third stage, the participants with the most developed skills demonstrate their oral speech skills as part of a group creative task – creating a professional video. The last part of the contest tends to be very motivating as the task gives a chance to uncover students' talents and interests.

A high level of foreign language skills, professional competences, ability to generate original ideas and skills in the field of materials science and medical technologies – all this was clearly demonstrated by TSU students who won the *IV International Competition of student video projects* in foreign languages *My University*. It was the creation of their own video podcasts that allowed them to fully develop their potential and win two nominations at once: *Invideo-2021* and *Scientific research, training majors* with the video *The way to advanced medical technologies*. It is important to note that this is not a single case: other TSU students who have mastered the technology of scientific video podcasting also became winners in the nomination *Video Science* at the regional competition *World in the style of science - 2023*, which once again convincingly proves the effectiveness of using video podcasts as a tool to develop both language and professional skills of students. The third place was won by the team with the video podcast *Recycling of aluminium waste*. Another team received commemorative diplomas for the video podcast *Disposal of excess sludge*.

The university project activity is an additional area in which the student-generated video podcast application is used. Student-led projects that use video podcasts for self-promotion are far more likely to draw in overseas funders and collaborators. This illustration of video podcast integration in university settings highlights the potential of this method and provides valuable context for understanding the student experience and how the method is implemented, which will be further explored using a questionnaire designed for this purpose, as detailed in the following section on Materials and Methods.

2. Materials and methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to explore the integration of student-generated video podcasts in language learning, specifically within English for engineering course at a technical university. The research design was guided by the following objectives: (1) to explore the existing research on student-generated video podcasts in language learning; (2) to trace its integration in university language training; (3) to identify research issues for the study's questionnaire; (4) to record student preferences; and (5) to estimate its contribution to skill development.

The study drew upon two primary sources of data. Firstly, a comprehensive literature review was conducted, analyzing scientific journal articles on video podcasts as a foreign language teaching method. This review served to synthesize existing knowledge and identify research gaps that informed the development of the study's questionnaire. Secondly, empirical data was collected through a case study focused on the implementation of student-generated video podcasts in the English for engineering course.

The case study involved a cohort of 40 second and third-year students at Togliatti State University, with English proficiency levels ranging from A2 to B2. These students were divided into groups of four and participated in the study over a six-month period. The students generated video podcasts on various engineering topics, including metal works, car construction, computer architecture, and software utility. These topics were chosen to align with their academic interests and professional development needs. Over a semester, students went through the video podcast creation phases participating in the following activities ([Table 1](#)).

Table 1. Student-generated video podcast creation phases and the tasks

Phases	Tasks
Instruction	Participants were instructed in video podcasting essentials, encompassing scriptwriting, video podcasting using smartphones, and basic editing with free software.
Theme Selection	Groups selected topics related to their engineering disciplines.

Phases	Tasks
Research and Scripting	Students conducted research on the chosen topic using English video resources and collaboratively wrote scripts for their video podcasts.
Recording and Editing	Groups recorded and edited their video podcasts, focusing on clear pronunciation and engaging delivery.
Peer Feedback and Revision	Video podcasts were shared within the group for peer feedback, focusing on content, language use, and technical aspects.
Final Presentation and Reflection	Finalized video podcasts were presented in class, followed by a reflection session on the learning experience.

In order to explore the impact of the method further, a questionnaire was developed for this study, to collect data on students' preferences and their evaluation of skill development, and this data was then used to analyse the impact of student-generated video podcasts in English for future engineers.

3. Discussion and Results

The presented section is devoted to the results presentation of the case study with student-generated video podcasts involvement in to the language teaching to future engineers. In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the triangulation method was applied, which involves the integration of quantitative and qualitative data, which allowed for a more complete and comprehensive understanding of the research subject. This combination allowed the author to avoid one-sided interpretation of the results and to draw more grounded, contextualised conclusions, taking into account both general trends and individual characteristics of the phenomenon under study. Data were collected through a questionnaire, which included both Likert-scale questions and open-ended questions to gather both quantitative and qualitative data on student perceptions and experiences. The results are presented in two sections: Quantitative Data Analysis and Qualitative Data Analysis.

The quantitative component of the questionnaire (questions 1-9) used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to assess student perceptions across several key areas. Table 2 presents the questionnaire items, grouped by the following sections: (1) Impact on Language Skills, (2) Impact on Learning Experience, and (3) Overall Satisfaction and Feedback. Analysis of the average scores for each item revealed several notable trends.

Table 2. The sets of the questions according to the sections

Q #	Aspect	Score
<i>Section 1: Impact on Language Skills</i>		
1	Creating and presenting video podcasts improved my speaking skills in English.	
2	Searching and studying my future job related video podcasts and peer-generated video podcasts enhanced my listening comprehension of technical English.	
3	This project helped me expand my engineering-specific vocabulary in English.	
4	I feel more confident using technical English terminology after this project.	
<i>Section 2: Impact on Learning Experience</i>		
5	The video podcast project made learning English more engaging and enjoyable.	
6	Working collaboratively on the video podcasts helped me learn from my peers.	
7	I found the process of researching and presenting engineering topics in English beneficial and provide deeper topic understanding.	

Q #	Aspect	Score
8	I feel more confident using English to discuss engineering concepts of studied scientific field after this project.	
<i>Section 3: Overall Satisfaction and Feedback</i>		
9	Overall, I am satisfied with the video podcast project as part of this course.	

Qualitative Data Analysis. After thematic analysis of the open-ended responses (questions 10-12) and common themes or categories were identified. Each theme was assigned with a code, the frequency of each code was counted. This helped quantify qualitative data of the research.

Open-ended questions deepened the feedback.

Q10: What did you find most beneficial about the video podcast project?

Q11: What challenges did you face during the project, and how were they addressed?

Q12: Do you have any other suggestions for improving the use of video podcasts in this course?

The results of the quantitative analysis of answers to questions Q1-Q9 of the questionnaire made it possible to assess students' perception of the given below.

Improved Listening Comprehension and Speaking Skills (Q1-Q2): 55 % of students find that video podcasts creation and presentation enhanced their speaking skills in the Professional English; 76 % of students state searching and studying future job related video podcasts beneficial; watching and analyzing peer-generated vide podcasts enhanced their ability to understand technical English.

Enhanced Vocabulary (Q3-Q4): for 67 % of students the process of researching, scripting, and presenting led to a noticeable improvement in their engineering-specific vocabulary and terminology.

Increased Motivation and Engagement (Q5): 53 % of students were highly engaged throughout the project, demonstrating creativity and enthusiasm in their video podcast generation.

Team work (Q6): working collaboratively on the video podcasts helped 61 % of students learn from their peers.

Deeper Content Understanding (Q7): 55 % of students found that explaining complex engineering concepts in a different medium deepened their understanding of the subject matter.

Increased Speaking Confidence (Q8): 70 % of students pointed greater confidence in speaking English, particularly when presenting technical topics.

Overall, 78 % of students were satisfied with the video podcast project as part of the curriculum course.

In the course of Qualitative Data Analysis the illustrative quotes that represent the main themes and provide rich insights were:

Beneficial Issues of Professional Video podcasts (Q10):

"I like the new way of English learning where we are free to create what we want in English".

"I know the terms and deadlines to be on time in my professional project".

"We managed not only to create the professional video, but also take part in some university and all-around-Russia language contest. This gave us chance to compete for the high scholarship in our university".

Video podcast Challenges (Q11):

The following possible obstacles are important to consider when undertaking video podcast projects:

– Time constraints: 10 % of students are dissatisfied with how other team members manage time and they are not careful considering deadlines);

– Workload management: 14 % of students feel that there are team members who are less engaged in the project and less productive;

– Technical challenges: 20 % of students do not have the media and digital skills required for video podcasting;

– Privacy issues: 20 % of students consider that when using technology, safety should be taken into account.

Refining student-generated video podcasts implementation (Q12):

"Student-generated video podcasts can serve as a final task for some courses where the video projects can be integrated".

“Students need profound instructions which are essential for successful integration into language curricula for future engineers”.

Thus, these are the findings after quantitative and qualitative analysis which provide a complete grasp of students' experiences with student-generated video podcasts.

This section is a comprehensive analysis of the research findings that interprets them in the light of commonly accepted theoretical concepts and existing literature. Applying both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the paper examined students' level of satisfaction with the use of self-generated video podcasts in the educational process and their perception of the impact of this tool on language acquisition. The final quantitative data indicated a positive perception of student-generated video podcasts as a means of increasing engagement and improving language skills. Moreover, a significant number of students reported progress in vocabulary development (67 %), improved speaking (55 %), and listening comprehension (76 %), increased confidence in using technical English (70 %). In addition, the majority of students found the activity engaging (53 %) and useful for collaborative learning (61 %). The majority (78 %) expressed overall satisfaction with the video podcast assignment in the course. In addition to these quantitative results, the qualitative analysis revealed that students appreciated the innovative and creative aspects of creating video podcasts. They also noted the usefulness of the project in developing professional skills. However, the qualitative data highlighted key issues: lack of media and digital literacy among some students, concerns about privacy, and uneven group dynamics that need to be addressed when implementing video podcasts.

These results suggest that when effectively implemented, student-generated video podcasts can be a valuable tool for enhancing English language learning for engineering students. The high levels of reported engagement, confidence, and skill development point to the effectiveness of this method in creating a meaningful learning experience, as the project combines creative tasks with professional language skills. Moreover, the positive results align with the core principles of constructivism, where students actively participate in their own learning by researching, creating, and presenting information. The audio-visual format of video podcasts, as demonstrated in the results, also supports multimedia learning theory, where the combination of visuals and audio can enhance comprehension and retention. Additionally, the collaborative aspect of the video podcasts highlights the applicability of socio-cultural theory, in which collaborative work promotes knowledge construction through peer interaction.

A thorough review of previous studies in video podcasting for foreign language teaching allowed for the identification of several benefits of this pedagogical approach. Firstly, student autonomy, a crucial element in language learning, is significantly enhanced by the opportunity to choose authentic and relevant topics. This finding supports Zhu and Hamadi who highlighted that providing students with agency in selecting topics significantly increases their motivation and involvement (Hamadi et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2024). This emphasis on ownership and initiative in student-created content, therefore, promotes optimal learning experiences. The present study also reaffirms that giving learners autonomy helps them develop their metacognitive skills, higher-order thinking, and personalized learning, which is consistent with findings by Farrokhnia (Farrokhnia et al., 2020). In particular, student agency allows learners to become active agents in their learning process which in turn, encourages them to be more invested in the learning process, and this is an area that needs to be further developed in language classrooms.

Secondly, the study also found that collaborative learning, enabled through video podcast creation, fosters peer learning, teamwork, and communication skills, in line with findings by Mendieta-Aragón (Mendieta-Aragón et al., 2023). Indeed, the benefits of peer learning are well-documented in the literature, as working in groups provides learners with the opportunity to practice their language skills in a supportive and authentic environment. However, as also noted by Campbell and the colleagues, the impact of student-generated video content in collaborative flipped classrooms was found to vary, underscoring that further investigation of group dynamics and collaborative pedagogies in the context of language learning is required (Campbell et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2022).

Thirdly, multimodal learning, provided through student-generated video podcasts, allows for the combination of audio, visual, and textual elements, catering to diverse learning styles and acknowledging the nature of the content being consumed, as supported by Essa and Hmedna (Essa et al., 2023; Hmedna et al., 2020). Such variety and flexibility leads to a more personalized and engaging learning experience. These findings reiterate the importance of providing a flexible range

of modalities that allow students to engage with learning content that is compatible with their individual learning preferences.

Furthermore, the importance of technology integration was explored in the study, as using readily available media technologies made the project accessible and engaging for digital natives (Blau et al., 2020), which is crucial in a modern learning environment. The study, as some other researches (Ferrer et al., 2022), found that using technology with which the learners are already familiar creates an engaging environment and allows them to focus on the learning content. The findings of this study, therefore, encourage the incorporation of readily available technologies to promote a positive learning environment. Moreover, this study highlights the positive impact of educational content developed by students themselves using mobile devices and applications. The results obtained convincingly demonstrate that this approach not only actively contributes to the formation of individualized and more effective learning strategies that take into account the personal characteristics and preferences of each student, but also, most importantly, leads to a significant increase in overall academic performance, as well as a significant intensification of internal motivation to study English. The ability to actively create content makes the learning process more engaging and personalized, which ultimately has a positive effect on the results (Song et al., 2023).

The implications of the study for future research and pedagogical practices address challenges and risks of video podcast in language training. While the benefits of using video podcasts are evident, the listed above papers though match the highlighted in the article query, but they do not fully address this specific question. Though the benefits are substantial, challenges such as technical difficulties and the need for adequate training in media and digital content creation can hinder effective implementation (Fischer et al., 2022). The aforementioned publications do not concentrate on student-generated video podcast exercises to enhance the language proficiency of engineering students. Thus, the key strategies to overcome the identified difficulties are to provide methodological and technical support, to implement project-oriented learning using video podcasts, and to take into account and analyze the problems arising from students. The proposed strategies allow to effectively manage potential risks and difficulties associated with the use of video podcasts in the educational process.

4. Conclusion

The review of the literature, implementation practices, and analyses of student preferences and assessment of the impact on skills development allowed us to show the potential of student-generated video podcasts and depict it as a valuable tool for enhancing foreign language learning in technical fields. Student-generated video podcasts provide a unique opportunity to practically implement key principles of active learning, such as stimulating meaningful and interactive interaction between students, developing important skills of co-operation and teamwork, as well as seamlessly integrating modern digital technologies directly into the learning process. This pedagogical approach, which fully complies with the principles of multimodal learning, when different channels of information perception are used, forms not only an attractive but also an extremely effective environment for improving language skills, thus actively preparing future specialists for successful and confident communication in their future professional activities. The special emphasis placed on authentic learning experiences based on real-life situations and tasks contributes not only to the active development of the necessary language competences, but also to a significant deepening of knowledge in a specific subject area, as well as to the formation of highly demanded in the modern world skills of effective work with various media and digital resources, which is especially important for future engineers who will have to work in a dynamically developing and increasingly globalised professional environment. The results of the study are highly illustrative to encourage language trainers to explore and implement video podcasting in their classrooms.

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Published in the USA
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Issued since 2005.
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 1994-4195
2025. 21(1): 22-32

DOI: 10.13187/me.2025.1.22
<https://me.cherkasgu.press>



Hermeneutic Analysis of Feature Films about Family and Family Education in the 1930–1950s

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Abstract

The article presents a hermeneutic analysis of Soviet feature films on the theme of family and family education in the 1930s-1950s which allows the author to identify the qualitative evolution of family images on the Soviet screen of the period under consideration. The author presents a characteristic of the socio-cultural and ideological contexts, analyzes the content of Stalinist films, considers the main genre modifications, and examines the dominant stereotypical images of family and family education. The conducted analysis of films of different genres enabled us to state that at this stage, Soviet feature cinematography was solving the problems of strengthening the Soviet family and building an ideal image of family relations, where adults and children were included in social and industrial events. Moreover, the family images that the viewer saw on the Soviet screen in those years were very far from the real picture of the Soviet society and represented an idealized reality, where each person was happy, could achieve success, find a family both in the traditional sense of the word, and become a member of the large family of the USSR peoples. With the strengthening of ideological control and the establishment of a totalitarian regime in the country, in cinematography, and in the real life of Soviet people, the focus was on new values, which consisted in selfless devotion to the party, the people, labour feats and a ruthless attitude towards enemies. Family and family upbringing were no exception and were under the close attention of the state. Creating a family and raising children in accordance with those values was an important condition for well-being and prosperity in the society of that period.

Keywords: family, family upbringing, media, media text, media education, feature films, Soviet cinema, socialist realism, Stalinism, USSR.

1. Introduction

The interest of the young Soviet state in feature films in the 1930–1950s was consistently high. The main objective of releasing feature films during that period was “the creation of a new type of person – disciplined, capable of working in complex production sectors. In the USSR, less than a decade was allotted for the fulfilment of this task. Cinematography played a special role here as a special educational tool” (Aniskin, 2016: 155).

Before a new film was released on the country's screens, films were viewed and discussed at the highest level. The so-called “Kremlin screenings” were held, where party leaders took part in the film's assessment. The important criteria for a film were its ideological compliance with the state ideology and policy, and its educational value. Along with its propaganda and agitation functions, cinema in that period was seen as “an opportunity to temporarily immerse a person in a

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rainbow world, where one could relax the soul and be inspired for new labour exploits” (Aniskin, 2016: 155).

The history of Russian feature cinema of the 1930s was marked by the arrival of sound on screens. This event allowed the viewer not only to watch visual moving images, accompanied by music and captions, but to hear what the characters were talking about. The arrival of sound in cinema marked an even closer attention of the state authorities to what and how was shown on the Soviet screen.

As the conducted analysis shows, the disclosure of the family theme in Soviet feature films of 1935-1954 has its own specifics. In the period under review, when “family and marital relations went from experimentation and defamiliarization to the return and strengthening of traditional relations in the family. The Soviet family was being formed, it became the basis of the new society of the country of victorious socialism” (Yantsen, Koroleva, 2019: 131).

At the same time, rigid ideological control set strict limits on the display of the family based on social and collective values, work for the Motherland, and physical self-improvement. Therefore, “within the framework of edifying art, which includes films built on the principles of socialist realism, we see a demonstration of the image of “new people” and normative reality (as it should be in Soviet society), an integral part of which was physical education and sports” (Fisheva, 2020: 152).

An important component of the ideological factor, that all feature films released on the Soviet screen during the period had, was irreconcilability towards enemies. Vigilance and political maturity were seen in the ability to recognize obvious and hidden enemies of Soviet society, even if they were family members. “Denunciations of relatives were commonplace. Not only was this not considered a negative phenomenon, but it was also welcomed if the denunciation reported an illegal act. People practically did not ask themselves about the morality of the actions they were committing. After all, if loyalty to family conflicted with loyalty to the state, a true Soviet citizen and patriot should not have to face the problem of choice – they should definitely prefer the interests of the state” (Volodina, 2013).

During the period under study, the model of a happy Soviet family was born and actively positioned in the mass consciousness, which was also reflected in later periods of Soviet cinema. “The aesthetics of socialist realism, which triumphed in Soviet “mass” culture at the beginning of the 1930s, powerfully oriented art towards agitational and propaganda tasks. However, despite all the tendentiousness of socialist art (Mayakovsky even proposed using the term “tendentious realism” in his time), it always retained the ideological requirement of “realism”. True, the concept of realism itself, of course, is not unambiguous” (Ponomareva, 2004: 474).

Based on the principles of socialist realism, the propaganda goals of building a new society continued to occupy key positions in the Soviet film production. However, unlike the first films of the 1920s, where the family theme was not central, feature films about the family of the Stalinist era presented a happy Soviet family with strong foundations, faith in a bright future, an understanding of the correct path in life, closely connected with communist morality.

At this stage, the educational and ideological objectives of media education came to the fore. They were connected with teaching the younger generation about Soviet family models and the main educators were the Soviet people and the Communist Party. According to the Marxist theory, the actively promoted theme of a happy childhood and, accordingly, the theme of a happy Soviet family, were reflected in feature films about the family and became one of the central ones in media education based on films.

Along with the Marxist approach, the role of the practical theory associated with amateur filmmaking was increasing. Media education based on films carried out in clubs and electives was subject to strict regulation and control.

2. Materials and methods

The research material is Soviet feature films released in the 1930–1950s. The research methods are hermeneutic analysis, generalization and classification, induction and deduction, content analysis of audiovisual material in the context of examining the screen images of family and family education of this period. The hermeneutic analysis of feature films, anthropological and gender analyses of the period under consideration are based on the basic principles developed by A.V. Fedorov (Fedorov, 2008).

In our study, we analysed both Russian (Aniskin, 2016; Apostolov, 2018; Belodubrovskaya, 2011; Bolshakov, 1948; Chelysheva, Mikhaleva, 2022; Chelysheva, Sapozhnikova, 2024; Eliseeva,

2020; Fedorov, 2013; Fedorov, 2016; Groshev, 1952; Lubashova, Lukhtan, 2015; Mazur, 2017; Mikhailin, Belyaeva, 2020; Mikhaleva, 2017; Minenko, Zhilyanina, 2020; Neminuschiy, 2016; Nusinova, 2006; Salny, Katrich, 2023; Ponomareva, 2004; Toropova, 2020; Volodina, 2013) and foreign scientific findings (Anemone, 2015; Davies, 1998; Mohammadi, Akhavan, 2022; Smith, 1997; Spring, Taylor, 1993; Tanis, 2024; Taylor, 1984; Waterlow, 2023) devoted to the analysis of family and family education in the mirror of Soviet feature films of Stalin-era cinema.

3. Discussion

As the conducted analysis shows, the concept of family in Soviet feature films of the period under analysis acquired a new meaning. The tendencies of the inseparability of family and society, which originated in the 1920s, continued to develop. At the same time, “it was during this period that the Communist Party appropriated the function of governing the state and society, essentially turning into an administrative-punitive body. Repression became the main method of party leadership. At the same time, the 1930s saw high rates of cultural development. The school provided education in unity with the family. In 1936, the Constitution of the USSR proclaimed “state socialism”, legislatively enshrined the dominance of public ownership of production means, the equality of all nations and nationalities. However, party guidelines led the country away from the democratization of state and public life. By the mid-1930s, the totalitarian system had strengthened, giving rise to the personality cult of I.V. Stalin. The upbringing of the younger generation by official pedagogy was defined as the preparation of people devoted to the dictate, capable of obeying and fulfilling the will of the leadership” (Grankin, 2003: 23). All these tendencies were reflected in feature films about family and family education.

The concept of “family” was understood during the years of Stalin’s rule as the entire society of Soviet people brought up under the guidance of wise and fair fathers – representatives of the leading political party. Any person who shared the ideals and aspirations of the builders of socialism – loyal fighters for a bright future – could join this family. “At that time, public education was the priority of the state policy in Russia, and with the help of the educational and upbringing system, ideological influence was exerted on society. The education of a new type of personality – comprehensively developed builders of a communist society as a pedagogical ideal of Soviet Russia was considered an important link in the cultural revolution and a necessary condition for the construction of communism” (Novikova, Pristupa, 2021: 113).

These provisions could not but influence the creation of films during the Stalinist period, and were quite in tune with the principles of socialist realism, which served as the main principle for promoting any literary or cinematographic work to the masses. N.I. Nusinova emphasizes that feature films of the 1930s were distinguished, first of all, by the established idea of primitive, socially engaged and dogmatic cinema of “socialist realism”, which replaced the revolutionary, avant-garde art of the 1920s (Nusinova, 2006).

It is no coincidence that during this period cinema was considered by the state as an important factor in raising a new type of person – one who could work valiantly, repel attacks from enemies and build a happy family. It was these trends that were reflected in the first sound Soviet films. And although *Putyovka v zhizn’/Road to Life* (1931) directed by N. Ekk, *Vesyolye rebyata/Jolly Fellows* (1934) directed by G. Aleksandrov, *Deti kapitana Granta/The Children of Captain Grant* (1936) directed by V. Vaynshtok, *Volga-Volga* (1938) directed by G. Aleksandrov, “unfortunately, did not yet have a very wide palette of sound, they still characterized the heroes and antiheroes, emphasized the peculiarities of social processes in the young Soviet country, created sound images and showed the sound worldview of the authors of the film, tried to awaken in the viewer a new worldview and perception of Soviet reality and its happy future” (Lubashova, Lukhtan, 2015: 96).

During this period, “the idea of the “great family” was actively promoted, which marked the Stalinist period of development of the Soviet state, when “the leaders of Soviet society became “fathers” (headed by patriarch Stalin); national heroes became “sons”, and the state – a “family” or “tribe”. The new, fundamental metaphor offered to society gave rise to a standard set of symbols presenting a false picture of organization, in order to consolidate a strictly hierarchical state structure. The metaphor also met the needs of the Stalinist fraction in its “struggle”: it represented a formula for the symbolic legitimization of real power (the succession of generations in the “family” symbolized the succession of political myths, and in particular Stalin’s rise to power after

Lenin's death), as well as the further political course (the evolution of the views of previously loyal "sons") and the uncomplaining humility of citizens" (Klark, 1992: 73).

As for family education in the period under consideration, this problem was also taken under absolute control of the state. Children's living conditions were strictly regulated. The upbringing of children in families was given great importance, and the state played the leading role in raising and taking care of the growing person.

4. Results

Analysing Russian feature films on the theme of family and family education is impossible without referring to the historical context and defining the features of the Stalinist era that determined the influence of the events of that time on audiovisual media texts. We will attempt to present their brief characteristics.

The 1930s marked a "time of a clear turning point in the Soviet Union's policy. The Stalinist group, having gained the upper hand in the inter-party struggle, took a course towards the national-state survival of the country, within the framework of which broad social and political reforms were carried out. Disappointed by the failure of the propaganda campaigns of the 1920s, the pragmatically minded I.V. Stalin and his supporters rejected utopian idealistic slogans and, relying on symbols from the Russian national past for help, turned into statist. Too complex and abstract to occupy the imagination of the masses, socialist ideals were forced to give way to a Russian national system of images, heroes and myths that was more recognizable to the people" (Zolotarev, 2015: 29).

In 1936, "the Constitution actually enshrined the construction of socialism in a single country – the USSR" (Bredikhin, Gonchar, 2022: 18). Under these conditions, "the family begins to be thought of as monogamous and long-lasting. Abstinence, chastity and modesty are promoted. The image of a loose woman among several generations of Soviet people is associated exclusively with Western bourgeois society. The next stage of legislative consolidation of marriage norms of the new era took place after 1936, although abortions were criminalized as early as 1926. Now the government is taking a completely different direction in regulating family relations. State control over the payment of alimony is being tightened" (Minenko, Zhilyanina, 2020: 175).

One of the important state tasks was to strengthen the new type of family – the socialist family. Thus, "by 'mainly built by socialism' the cinema mythology of the 1930s implies a new model of the socialist family, the symbol of which is the cinema of the Stalin era" (Nusinova, 2006: 389).

During these years, the idea of family ties between all Soviet people living by common ideals and values was actively promoted. The idea of interethnic families was gaining strength, personifying the symbol that a person of any nationality in the Soviet country could find family happiness. An example of this is the popular musical film *Tsirk/The Circus* by G. Alexandrov, which became a kind of anthem of the true freedom found for all people who wanted to find family happiness. The popularity of the film is evidenced by the following figures: by the end of the 1930s, "40 million people had watched it, and the "Song of the Motherland" quickly became the second national anthem, like "America the Beautiful" in the USA. The film established the ideal of *femina sovietica* and made Orlova the main superstar of Soviet cinema. *The Circus* became one of the first films to embody the Grand Style of high Stalinism – through myth and circus spectacle" (Dushenko, 2013: 203).

Considering the socio-cultural, ideological, worldview, and religious contexts of feature films about family and family education, it can be stated that their content was fully consistent with the ideology of those years, which implied full compliance with the principles of socialist realism. The dominant idea of nationality, the accessibility of cinematic stories to the masses, the closeness of screen characters and their stories to ordinary people living and working for the benefit of society, the ideological content corresponding to the ruling ideology, were integral components that had to be present in feature films of those years.

The years of Stalinism became a period when "the social began to prevail over the personal, the interests of the collective, the state – over family interests. The collective, in essence, becomes an object of worship, opposed to the individual. There were virtually no areas of life left that were not under the state control. The state determined the norms of behaviour not only in society, but also in the family" (Volodina, 2013). These norms were actively positioned on the screen and were a key factor in allowing a film to be released.

The ideological accents characteristic of the cinema of the Stalinist period were enthusiastically supported in the Soviet press. For example, “the central newspapers *Pravda*, *Izvestia*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, determined the vector of development of cinematography and recorded the features of the production of a particular film. Individual details of the film process were covered by the industry newspapers *Kino*, *Kadr*, *Sovetskoye Iskusstvo* and the journals *Iskusstvo Kino*, *Teatr*, etc. Their pages published excerpts from scripts, conversations with representatives of film crews, interviews with directors and screenwriters. The extent of propaganda and the involvement of the population in the mythological space is evidenced by articles published during the release of a film in industry and departmental regional small-circulation newspapers” (Chernova, 2007: 14).

With the gradual strengthening of totalitarian control over the life of society, the state began to view the family as a stronghold and foundation for the performance of strictly regulated social roles by Soviet people, “directed efforts to strengthen the institution of the family. But now it was a different family, in which a new generation grew up, the majority did not know any values other than Soviet ones. The desire of the authorities to control the sphere of family relations is based on the desire to combine the efforts of official structures and the family to educate the younger generation within the framework of the indoctrinated system of values. Families, where everyone was ready to live and work for the benefit of the state, served as a support for the state system, was adapted to the goals of the totalitarian state” (Volodina, 2013).

The hierarchy of values of the characters in feature films of the period under consideration was associated with labour exploits and establishing new ties, including family ones, based on the unity of goals, ideology, and aspirations. The screen actively promoted “the myth of the romance of Komsomol construction projects, the normality of self-sacrifice, the reward for sacrifice in the name of the socialist ideal, and the interchangeability of the personal and the social – the displacement of biological family ties by the ties of the social family. Gradually, this leads to the denial of the basic commandments of Christianity and their replacement with Soviet analogues” (Nusinova, 2006: 401).

It was during these years that the theme of the sacrifice of patriotic heroes was peddled, who, in the name of public interests, were ready for labour and military exploits, were always on the alert and knew how to see any, even invisible, enemy and resist them, achieving an unconditional victory.

Family happiness became a consequence of film characters’ merits. They overcame difficulties in studying, working, merciless fighting with enemies. This, as it seems to us, is the main stereotype of the success of movie heroes in those years.

Historical events taking place in the country, changes in ideology and politics, had a significant impact on Stalinist-era film production, when “new moral norms and values were actively developed and introduced, replacing the previous “bourgeois” ones. “In fact, there was a devaluation of moral and ethical norms, universal human values, which could be ignored in relation to “enemies”, “strangers”, even if it concerned family members. The family, in essence, was adapted to the tasks of a totalitarian state” (Volodina, 2013).

Cinematography became a mouthpiece for ideological work related to irreconcilability towards enemies and selfless service to socialist construction. Accordingly, the structure and narrative techniques in feature films of the Stalinist era also underwent changes compared to the first films of the Soviet period. “The authorities, having clearly outlined the turn of Soviet ideology, returned to national-state construction and, from the mid-1930s, tried to restore the patriotic component of propaganda. Thus, from 1934 onwards, many Russian historical figures were spoken of in a completely different tone. Propaganda films began to be made about them, which the entire country watched with delight (*Peter I*, 1937; *Alexander Nevsky*, 1938; *Suvorov*, 1940, etc.)” (Zolotarev, 2015: 30).

Fostering patriotism and love for the Motherland, also in family education, became one of the central themes of film production in that period. The famous Soviet film historian A. N. Groshev wrote about this in 1952: “In the 1930s, Soviet film artists turned to Russian history, reinterpreting it in a new way, creating images of historical figures on the screen. The resolution of the party and government on the teaching of civil history in schools, adopted in 1934, and the instructions of Comrade Stalin on history issues gave the right direction to creative film workers in their solution of the historical theme. A special and significant place among historical films was occupied by films dedicated to the civil war” (Groshev, 1952: 13-14). Later, already in the 1940s, a number of films

were devoted to the theme of fostering patriotism: F. Ermler's drama *Ona zashchishchayet Rodinu / She Defends the Motherland* (1943), A. Ivanov's film *Synov'ya / The Sons* (1946), etc.

The difficult times of industrialization of the country, recovery from famine and devastation of the civil war determined the ascetic atmosphere of life of Soviet families, which we can see in feature films. Moreover, "until the mid-1940s, the demonstration of ascetic life was perceived as a positive characteristic of the character: the meagreness of the home environment, "snacks" instead of normal food, the arrival of the "hero" to a new place of life and work with one suitcase were interpreted as "revolutionary consciousness", "non-acquisitiveness" and "anti-bourgeoisness". On the contrary, increased attention to clothing, food, furnishing the apartment was marked as "forgetting ideals", or even as "moral decay". Therefore, the depiction of everyday life is reduced to a minimum: the main characters have work, study, active leisure, but routine everyday concerns are either absent altogether (as symbolically insignificant), or fall on the shoulders of secondary characters, and more often – are only indicated" (Dushenko, 2014: 169).

In most films of the first years of the Stalinist period, the depiction of everyday, mundane issues of family life was not given much importance. But already by the end of the 1930s, one can increasingly see a new aesthetic of Soviet life, a departure from the former asceticism and poverty. In the society of victorious socialism, both furnishings and the characters' clothing demonstrated the growing well-being of Soviet people.

Light clothes, elegant dresses, beautiful hairstyles of characters, and sumptuously laid tables personified the victory of the working man over the former devastation. And although "the illusory world that existed in most Soviet films, an important detail of which were luxurious outfits, was far from reality, this did not irritate the viewer. The technological equipment of everyday life even in large cities of the USSR was, in comparison with the West, low, and cinema continued to seem like a miracle from which no one demanded the truth" (Lebina, Terekhova, 2016: 96).

In accordance with the main themes that were touched upon in feature films of the Stalinist era (stories about revolutionaries and the party, heroes of labour, the fight against the enemies of socialism, funny adventures of ordinary workers from musical films, etc.), a significant number of dramatic, comedic, and adventure films were shot during this period (Mikhaleva, Chelysheva, 2024).

Comedy films played a special role. This was due to the fact that "in the era of Stalinism, cinema was considered the main visual mediator, within the framework of which the presented images of ideal "new people", inscribed in the spaces of ideal cities, villages, parks, factories, but incredibly far from reality, created a sense of integrity, harmony, optimism – a sense of the embodied future. In this regard, it was the "light genre" – comedy – that was the priority direction in the development of cinema in the 1930s and was considered the main transmitter of dominant values" (Fisheva, 2020: 146).

Idealized models of life, including family life, left their mark on stereotypical methods of depicting reality in Soviet feature films. Viewers saw ideal images of a bright future that was about to arrive. And this future depended only on the person alone, their will, firmness and devotion to ideas.

The images of family education in most Stalin-era feature films were inextricably linked with the theme of socialist construction, in which all family members were involved. As a rule, everyone – both adults and children – were engaged in public affairs and were closely connected with society. Positive adult family members worked for the benefit of society with labour achievements and records (*Chuk i Gek / Chuk and Gek*, director I. Lukinsky, 1954; *Zhenshchina / The Woman*, directors Ye. Dzigan and B. Shreyber, 1932; *Svetlyy put' / The Bright Path*, director E. Aleksandrov, 1940). Children's groups, even in informal settings, were also often distinguished by strict discipline, responsibility, and independence beyond their years (*Timur i ego komanda / Timur and His Team*, director A. Razumny, 1940).

The prosperous life of the Soviet family depends on society, where "love is considered only as a way to build a family, as love for marriage. All this is evidence of the increased "institutionality" of love, as well as its "non-erotic" and "non-corporeal" nature. The "public" nature of love is also indicated by the lack of privacy in love scenes. Love relationships arise and proceed in public: they are discussed, they are facilitated or hindered, advice is given, etc. In plots of this kind, the role of mentors is great – serious and adult people, bearers and keepers of values (ideological, labour, everyday)" (Dushenko, 2014: 168). One can see examples of such plot lines in some musical comedies: *Svinarka i pastukh / The Swineherd and the Shepherd* (1941), *Kubanskiye kazaki / The Kuban Cossacks* (1950), *Svetlyy put' / The Bright Path* (1940) and others.

During the Stalinist period, “Soviet women were assigned only two possible roles: workers and mothers. Men, on the other hand, played their traditional roles as breadwinners, protectors, and heads of families” (Yantsen, Koroleva, 2019: 130). These visualized models on the Soviet screen played an important role in shaping public opinion about the family and the role of women and men in socialist construction during the period in question.

Soviet viewers saw women working on the screen on an equal footing with men, walking hand in hand along the path to a happy life in socialist construction. Moreover, female images also had male features: in feature films of Stalin’s time, women jumped with a parachute, drove tractors, and marched in sports parades to a bravura melody glorifying their country (Nusinova, 2006). In other words, the idea of gender equality between men and women continued to develop in feature films of the period under study.

However, the family social roles of men and women gradually began to be differentiated. More and more often, men were shown as family protectors and breadwinners. Women were valued not only for their ability to work equally with men, but also for being caring mothers. But if in real life “this led to a double burden on women: work and home. The image of a woman – mother and worker became an important component of Soviet ideology, merging with the image of the Soviet family” (Eliseeva, 2020: 11), then on the movie screen the viewer was presented with an optimistically created image of a woman-worker who managed to do everything, practically never got tired, since her children were under the close attention of the state and the community, that took on all the functions of caring for and raising the younger generation. Bright examples here can be the heroines of such feature films as *Zhenshchina/The Woman* (1932) directed by E. Dzigan and B. Schreyber, *Svetlyy put’/The Bright Path* (1940) directed by E. Aleksandrov, *Chlen pravitel’sstva /Member of the Government* (1939) directed by A. Zarkhi and I. Kheifits where women worked tirelessly on a collective farm, mastered agricultural machinery, were shock workers in production, learned to manage collective farms, etc.

Positive male characters were endowed with strength, will, and optimism. They were ardent communists and builders of the new world, and at the same time, caring fathers who taught their children independence and responsibility for their own destiny. The male screen image had a certain set of moral and ethical qualities. This topic was raised in the feature film *Strogiy yunoshka/A Severe Young Man* (1935), where the main character was developing the third GTO (Ready for Labour and Defence) complex – a complex of moral qualities that a Komsomol member must possess. In addition to the usual points such as clarity of purpose, perseverance, strength of character, humanity, this code included generosity, sentimentality and even chastity. “The requirement of chastity was not proclaimed by the state, but was actually implemented in art as an obligatory feature of a new type of person” (Fisheva, 2020: 150). We see such male images, personifying the heroes of socialist society, in the films *Chuk i Gek/Chuk and Gek* (director I. Lukinsky, 1954) and *Komsomolsk* (director S. Gerasimov, 1938).

The typical male image had clear features of masculinity. Positive male images represented “new heroes” who were always ready to defend the interests of socialist society. “A warrior-defender, a worker, an athlete – these are three hypostases of the “new man”, the representation of which is carried out in feature films” (Fishina, 2020: 153).

Children’s characters in feature films of the period demonstrated greater independence and purposefulness. Many children’s characters in films, despite their young age, performed feats and helped other people. Images of independent and responsible children were presented, for example, in the adventure film *Timur i ego komanda/Timur and His Team* (1940) directed by A. Razumny, where the pioneers did not only demonstrate independence and discipline in their families, but also provided assistance to families left without male support, voluntarily taking on labour functions.

In the films of the period under consideration, one can meet characters of different ages. If we talk about the birth of a family, then the most typical are very young people. “It should be noted that “he” and “she”, as a rule, are not adults and “innocent”. Young women in the films of this period are usually “homewreckers”, and love for a married woman is found only in “marginal” works, as is the situation of adultery. The heroes still have everything ahead, i.e. the prospect of not only “personal”, but also working, “social” development is set” (Dushenko, 2014: 167).

Often in films there were people of the older generation, for example, grandparents. They, as a rule, lived together with children and grandchildren and took on the educational functions of caring for children while the parents were at work.

In the films of the Stalinist period, the viewer could see adult characters of different professions and levels of education. Moreover, acquiring new knowledge, mastering a profession or professional self-improvement became one of the characteristic features of both male and female characters. Purposefulness was one of the important factors of family and public education. The vast majority of films on family themes featured complete families, as well as young people who got married during the course of the film.

As a rule, films about the family are considered in the period of the 1930s-1950s in close connection with labour and social activities. Mutual feelings of young people arise in accordance with the achieved goals. This was typical for both films about urban and rural families. Analysing the images of rural families in the era of the Stalinist regime, L.N. Mazur states that “the most popular in Stalinist cinema were wedding stories related to the marriage stories of the main characters. Moreover, the images of shock workers for whom a happy family life was a reward for shock work were especially popular” (Mazur, 2017: 379-380).

5. Conclusion

Thus, the concept of “family” on the Soviet screen in the 1930–1950s goes beyond traditional ideas. During the years of Stalin’s rule, this concept became one of the main pillars of building a happy Soviet society. A model of a strong and friendly family was being actively formed, both in the traditional sense and in the sense of uniting all peoples, representatives of different professions. Moreover, unlike a real family, understood as a union of two people that could fall apart, a family of peoples (colleagues, team members) was regarded as an unshakable union of like-minded people striving for the victory of communism and irreconcilable towards the enemy.

The ideas of building a strong Soviet family were based on creating models of the desired future. In other words, the Stalin-era feature films created images that were far from reality, but were perceived by the mass audience as a model, an ideal that every Soviet person should and must strive for through selfless service to the ideals of socialism, shock labour, and collectivism.

In accordance with these goals, the family images are presented from the earliest years, children are brought up in a community, they become participants in work events, are actively engaged in technical creativity, and demonstrate independence and purposefulness. Also, the educational and ideological tasks of media education, associated with teaching the younger generation to pursue correct ideas about family models of behaviour, where parents are actively and consciously involved in work and public assignments, come to the fore.

The educational role of cinematography is seen at this stage in showing clear and distinct goals to the audience, related to the institution of the Soviet family, which was to become a role model for the mass audience. The theme of a happy childhood, actively promoted in Soviet society, is also reflected in feature films about the family.

The strengthening of ideological control over all spheres of Soviet life had a significant impact on the image of family education presented in feature films.

Along with Marxist approaches to media education, the role of the practical approach associated with amateur filmmaking was strengthened. Accordingly, little attention was paid to the artistic and aesthetic component of amateur films at that time, and the emphasis in media education was on studying the technical possibilities of using cinematography. Media education based on films, which was carried out in clubs was subject to strict regulation and control.

6. Acknowledgements

This research is funded by the grant of the Russian Science Foundation (RSF, project No. 24-28-00032) at the Rostov State University of Economics. Project theme: “The image of family and family upbringing in Russian feature films and prospects for media education (1920-2020)”. Head of the project is I.V. Chelysheva.

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Published in the USA
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Issued since 2005.
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 1994-4195
2025. 21(1): 33-44

DOI: 10.13187/me.2025.1.33
<https://me.cherkasgu.press>



Myths of Journalism on the Covers of the Polish Trade Magazine “Press”

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Abstract

The article addresses the semiotic analysis of the covers of the Polish trade journal “Press”, focusing on the implicit ideological assumptions about contemporary journalism. The aim of the research is to identify contemporary journalistic myths and to understand what has been left out in the construction of the image of journalism on the covers. A commutative test technique and denotative and connotative analysis were used, allowing key stereotypes such as the myth of the warrior journalist and the lone observer to be captured. The results of the analysis indicate a dominance of male images and a limited representation of women, confirming patriarchal narratives in the media. This phenomenon may be related to the nature of the magazine, aimed at a journalistic community that seeks to affirm its own values. The article highlights the importance of understanding the processes of meaning construction in the context of the crisis of trust in the media and the technological challenges that affect the image of journalists. The findings contribute to a broader reflection on the role of journalism in society and its representation in the media. These can be used as part of contemporary journalism education in higher education, an example of which is given in the article.

Keywords: images of journalists, journalism education, journalism in Poland, myths of journalism, semiotic analysis, trade journals.

1. Introduction

A basic theoretical reference in the study of the image of journalism can be the classical theories of myth and semiotics, especially in the terms of Roland Barthes, who defined myths as forms of ideological communication through sign systems. Barthes, building on Saussure's structuralism, suggested that myths have a ‘naturalising’ function – they make certain ideologies appear self-evident and objective (Barthes, 1968). In the context of journalism, myths can give certain values, such as objectivity or independence, the status of unquestionable norms.

By myth we mean here not the colloquial notion of something falsified, nor is it a reference to Greek or Roman mythology. Myth in this sense is the implicit ideological assumptions behind a given piece of social reality. In media studies, this allows for a more in-depth analysis of the image, but also of the basis for the functioning of the social groups in question. Contemporary social myths are ‘created, constructed, constructed or planned – whatever degree of conscious action accompanies these activities’ (Lepa, 1999: 7-8). This raises the need for a critical evaluation, an educational and media response to these new ideological constructs, as well as a counteraction to possible professional propaganda.

Therefore, the analysis of the trade press seems an interesting teaching solution for academic journalism classes. The myths associated with the profession of journalism make it possible to

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establish the contemporary hierarchy of values in the profession, to point out dominant and desirable attitudes, and to see at what is usually an implicit ideological assumption of journalism.

2. Materials and methods

A semiotic: denotative and connotative analysis of 69 covers of the Polish trade journal “Press” from the last ten years (2015-2024) was carried out. Specifically, from issue 01-02/2015 (225) to issue 11-12/2024 (293). The magazine has been published since 1999, first as a monthly, and since 2017 as a bimonthly. It is aimed at journalists, advertising and public relations professionals, as well as media professionals. The magazine is known for organising journalism competitions such as Grand Press and Grand Press Photo.

An answer was sought to the question of contemporary journalism myths present on individual magazine covers. They were categorised into larger thematic groups. They were presented – in the form of cross tabulations – in relation to the gender of the people presented on the covers and in relation to age categories. In the semiotic analysis of the covers, the technique of the commutation test was used to seek answers to the question of what was omitted in the construction of the image of journalism on the covers of the “Press”. In preparing the descriptions of the individual covers, the artificial intelligence application The Semiotic Engine was used as a support.

Denotative and connotative analysis, commutative tests performed on 69 “Press” magazine covers indicated 177 detailed myths about contemporary journalism. They were grouped into 5 main categories: the myth of the warrior journalist – defender of truth, the myth of the intellectual journalist – authority, the myth of the lonely observer – outsider, the myth of the journalist-artist – creator and the myth of the modern journalist – user of technology. As a side note: one of the covers for issue 05-06/2019 (260) did not contain an image of persons, so its analysis was omitted. On 13 covers, two persons were presented – e.g. issue 11-12/2019 (263) – hence in further analyses the results obtained were related to both persons presented. Some persons, such as Dariusz Rosiak, were presented more than once – issues 05-06/2020 (266) and 01-02/2021 (270) – which was taken into account in the mythological analysis by attributing connotations from different periods to the same person. The age category was also assumed to refer to the year in which the person was first presented on the cover of “Press” magazine.

The results of these analyses are presented below on 5 selected covers relating to the 5 main myths of journalism. A cross-tabulated summary of the mythological analysis is then presented, looking for correlations between gender and age and the dominant journalism myth. In total, images of 69 individuals were analysed. They were assigned to the main categories of journalism myths 190 times, where one person could be assigned to more than one myth.

3. Discussion

Recent empirical research has focused on the myths about journalism that affect its perception and professional values. For example, research by Jurado Martín shows how the film industry reflects the image of journalists and media subjects through thematic narratives that often reduce journalism to sensationalist content. A content analysis of 290 films revealed that films often portray journalism in a sensationalist manner, with little emphasis on economic, sports or health issues (Jurado Martín, 2024). In contrast, Coronado Ruiz's research analyses how women journalists are portrayed in US television series over more than three decades. Stereotypes of female journalists were shown to have evolved, but some archetypes still persist, reflecting societal progression in diverse representations (Coronado Ruiz, 2024). Assaf and Bock also analysed another myth – that of Robert Capa – and its impact on photojournalism education. The research shows that the Capa myth is characterised by a hegemonic masculinity, which can obscure the humanity of the famous photographer (Assaf, Bock, 2022). Other studies like De Wulf Helskens and Arriaza Ibarra have focused on representations of journalism in the Danish series Borgen (TV broadcasting from 2010 to 2022) and the Spanish series *El Caso. Crónica de sucesos* from 2016. The analyses showed that both series criticise the myth of a free press by presenting journalism in the context of political and commercial challenges (De Wulf Helskens, Arriaza Ibarra, 2024). Meyers, on the other hand, argued in his study that responsible journalism can be biased, provided it meets standards of accuracy and comprehensiveness. In his view, embracing bias can serve the public good if there is a wide range of information sources (Meyers, 2020).

Sybert, on the other hand, examined the archetype of the family newspaper and its impact on public discourse. The analysis shows that this archetype often perpetuates romanticised versions of

journalism's past, which can block visions of alternative futures (Sybert, 2023). Similarly, Sridharan and Bosse's research suggests that the closure of local newspapers in the US creates an information myth that reinforces the importance of local journalism in the face of a crisis of trust in the media. Analysis of the farewell statements of local newspapers that have closed show that they often memorialise institutionalised journalistic myths, emphasising the importance of local news and creating myths about community news (Sridharan, Bose, 2024). In contrast, Hess and McAdam explored myths about the future of local newspapers in Australia. Analysis of interviews and focus groups reveals three key myths: print is dead, the traditional advertising model has collapsed and there are no jobs in journalism (Hess, McAdam, 2024).

Contemporary studies on journalistic mythology also include analyses of the trade press for media professional groups. Thus, Engelke studied the discourse on participatory journalism in two leading trade magazines in the USA and Germany. The research showed that evaluations of participatory journalism vary and depend on the context of audience participation (Engelke, 2023). Ferrucci and co-authors investigated how trade journalism journals in the US construct the notion of 'news deserts'. The analysis showed that industry leaders find it difficult to clearly define this phenomenon and its implications for citizens (Ferrucci et al., 2023). Čehovin Zajc and Lukan, on the other hand, studied the career paths of insecure millennial journalists in Slovenia. According to their findings, young journalists are motivated to work, but the structural conditions of journalism often lead to career changes or precarious work (Čehovin Zajc, Lukan, 2023). Camponez and Oliveira analyse the impact of the health crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic on the working conditions and image of journalists. Their analysis showed that economic hardship and ethical challenges affect journalists' job satisfaction (Camponez, Oliveira, 2021).

The topic of the social myths of journalism still seems relevant, especially in an era of technological changes in the profession, questions about the political independence of newsrooms or ethical doubts about the journalistic mission in public life. A semiotic analysis of the covers of the trade journal "Press" allows us to see the hidden ideological assumptions about contemporary journalism.

4. Results

The myth of the warrior journalist – defender of truth

The myth of the warrior journalist – defender of the truth presents the silhouette of the professional reporter as a heroic, courageous and indomitable figure. In this view, journalists become symbols of strength, intellectual power and moral courage, struggling against dangers both in the field and in the virtual world. Their work requires cold calculation, but also deep empathy and commitment to the struggle for truth and freedom of expression. The journalist is shown as a guardian of democracy, a personal warrior who faces pressures and threats to uncover the truth, and as a moral judge who is not afraid to confront darkness. The image of the journalist as an independent individual, a steadfast professional who fights against hatred and manipulation, reflects not only his role in society, but also his inner struggle and determination. In the context of contemporary challenges such as disinformation and pressure from authority, this myth highlights the importance of journalism as part of the protection of truth and democracy, creating the image of the 'knight of light' in an age of turmoil.

This category was formed from 58 myths described in detail (N = 177), representing 32.77 % (the most numerous group of myths). In total, it was assigned to 61 individuals. This represents 32.11 % of all assignments of the main myth category to individuals (N = 190). By gender, it was attributed to 41 men (the most numerous group, 67.21 %) and 20 women. By age, up to 4 individuals were assigned 21-30 years, 15 individuals were assigned 31-40 years, 30 were assigned 41-50 years (the most numerous group, 49.18 %), 6 were assigned 51-60 years, 3 were assigned 61-70 years, and 3 were assigned 70+.

An example of a cover that reveals this myth is issue no. 01-02/2020 (264) of "Press" (Press, 2020) magazine. The cover features Tomasz Sekielski (1974-), a Polish radio, television and newspaper journalist, documentary film director, novelist and author of television reports. He is dressed in a dark, hooded coat-like outfit, which gives him a mysterious and somewhat dark appearance. His face is partly in shadow and his expression is serious and concentrated. In his hands he holds a light object that looks like a lightsaber, giving the cover elements associated with pop culture and fiction, such as the world of *Star Wars*. On the left side you can see the text I was wandering in the market, and below, in smaller letters, *Dziennikarz Roku 2019 – Tomasz Sekielski* (the Journalist of the Year 2019 – Tomasz Sekielski). At the top of the cover are the titles of other

articles, including *TV Republika zrezygnowanych* (TV Republic of the Resigned), *Czy Pieczyński musiał odejść?* (Did Pieczyński Have to Leave?), *Sekcja: Direct Mail* (Section: Direct Mail) and *Exclusive: Panorama Reklamy 2019* (Exclusive: Panorama Advertising 2019).

The hooded cloak and lightsaber are associated with the archetype of the warrior or knight, suggesting struggle, the defence of values and the search for truth. These elements refer to the symbolism of the 'good warrior' who works in the dark but with a clear purpose – this may suggest investigative journalism that uncovers what is hidden. The inscription *Bląkałem się po rynku* (I wandered in the marketplace) may refer to Sekielski's personal journey, both literally and metaphorically. It suggests a search, difficulty or loss in the media world, which may contrast with his image as a 'warrior'. The overall cover has a dark, dramatic atmosphere, which may evoke the struggle against adversity and the dark sides of society, for example in relation to exposing difficult topics.

The commutation test involves swapping elements of the cover to see how its meaning would change. If, instead of a hooded coat, Sekielski wore a suit, the cover would stop looking like a scene from an epic battle and would look more like the formal image of a media professional. It would have changed the connotation from warrior to traditional expert. Changing the lightsaber to a regular microphone would also change the context. The lightsaber suggests activity, combat and the symbolic 'cutting through the darkness', while the microphone would be a more literal symbol of the journalistic work involved in interviews and speaking. Changing the background colour to bright pastel colours would dramatically change the perception of the cover, giving it a lighter tone and taking away the drama and dark atmosphere that are key to building the image of the 'warrior'.

Several myths can be identified from the symbolism and texts. The lightsaber and the hooded cloak are reminiscent of the archetype of the knight or hero who fights against darkness, which in the context of investigative journalism means fighting against disinformation, corruption and hiding the truth. There is a strong myth of the journalist as a hero who strives for justice and light in dark times, and Tomasz Sekielski is presented as such a knight – brave and determined. The subtitle *Bląkałem się po rynku* (I wandered in the marketplace) suggests that Sekielski has not always been sure of his path, which makes him a seeker. It is the myth of a journalist who is not afraid to get lost on the way to discovering the truth, even if it means difficulties and challenges. He is a symbol of travel and discovery, not just reportage. Sekielski's hooded coat and the serious, solitary expression on his face may suggest that he acts alone, unafraid of being alone in his mission. This is the myth of the journalist who stands up for the truth whether he has support or not. It can suggest independence and the courage to stand up to forces greater than oneself. The overall contrast between the dark background and the bright sword of light is a classic metaphor for the struggle between darkness and light. Journalism is depicted here as a force that brings light where there is darkness, which, in the context of Sekielski's work, may refer to his investigations into controversial and difficult issues.

The myth of the intellectual journalist – authority

The myth of the intellectual journalist – authority – constructs an image of the professional as the voice of the people, who combines the qualities of a leader and a reflective critic. In this narrative, the journalist becomes not only a guardian of tradition but also a moral guardian, exposing evil and acting as an arbiter of truth. His authority is based on knowledge, authenticity and the ability to communicate complex ideas in a way that can be understood by a wide audience. This image emphasises both individualism and intellectual responsibility, as well as the journalist's dual identity as expert and observer. At a time when traditional authorities are being undermined by the new media, the critic's role as an influential but somewhat limited person becomes even more important. The classy journalist, talented but also humble, becomes a symbol of moral resistance to disinformation. At the same time, this myth highlights the dangers of information overload and crises of authority, in which the intellectual must redefine his or her role. In the face of these challenges, the journalist not only reports events but also shapes public discourses, acting as a mentor and controversial authority. His or her intellectual strength and passion for the truth become the foundation of modern journalism as it grapples with the challenges of digital times, in which knowledge and reflection are crucial to maintaining authority.

This category was formed from 43 myths described in detail (N = 177), representing 24.29 % (the second largest group of myths). In total, it was attributed to 46 individuals. This represents 24.21 % of all assignments of a given main myth category to individuals (N = 190). By gender, it was assigned to 36 men (the most numerous group, 78.26 %) and 10 women. By age, up to

1 person from the group 21-30 years, 10 people – 31-40 years, 18 – 41-50 years (the most numerous group, 39.13 %), 10 – 51-60 years, 4 – 61-70 years, 3 – 70+.

Connotatively, the cover combines elegance with a certain distance. The monocle that Wielowieyska holds in front of her eye is associated with an attribute used by people from the upper classes or former authorities, which may symbolise journalistic perspicacity, caution and analysis of reality with a certain distance. The journalist's facial expression, which is serious but at the same time calm, emphasises professionalism and self-confidence. The composition itself – subdued colours, elegant dress and a distinguished gesture – points to classy journalism, where analysis and accuracy have a special place. The monocle, as a symbol of a tool for careful observation, further emphasises the intellectual nature of Wielowieyska's journalistic work.

The application of the commutation test could involve changing the gesture or the monocle for another element. If, instead of a monocle, the journalist held, for example, a pen, the cover's message would be less formal and more traditionally associated with journalism – instead of reflection and detachment, writing activity would be shown. Conversely, if the background had been changed to a more modern or dynamic one, it would have changed the overall tone of the cover from a distinguished elegance to a more contemporary feel, affecting the perception of the journalist as someone more involved in the current fast-paced media environment.

This cover identifies several important myths associated with journalism. The monocle, elegant outfit and serious facial expression suggest the figure of a journalist-intellectual who constantly observes, analyses and approaches her work with great perspicacity and intellect. Wielowieyska is presented as a person who, instead of reporting events on the run, carefully examines them and draws conclusions. The styling, the use of a monocle and the neutral, elegant background give the journalist a certain distinguished aura. This is a picture of a journalist who acts with class, professionalism and a subtle sense of humour. The caption *Taki nasz urok* (Such is Our Charm) suggests that this class and elegance is a natural characteristic of those in the profession. The monocle can symbolise not only elegance, but also a profound capacity for observation. Wielowieyska is portrayed as a journalist who penetrates facades and sees more than what is visible at first glance. She is someone who emphasises analysis and accuracy in her journalistic work. The title *Taki nasz urok* (Such is Our Charm) also suggests that the cover has a certain note of irony. In this way, Wielowieyska not only shows a distance from the world she analyses, but also a certain self-irony towards herself and her work. She is a journalist who is aware of the importance of her profession, but does not take it too seriously in the sense of puffery.

The myth of the lonely observer – outsider

The myth of the lone observer – outsider – portrays the journalist as a detached figure who, through his unique perspective, is able to perceive reality in a way that eludes others. This archetype combines the qualities of an empathetic detective and an ironist who, on the one hand, seeks the truth and, on the other, comments with detachment on the absurdity of the world around him. The journalist-outsider, as a lone leader or rebel, stands in opposition to mainstream narratives, often struggling against the censorship and silence that limit his possibilities. Elements of naivety and idealism are present in his work, which, although they may appear to be weaknesses, are in fact the foundation of his independence and authenticity. This character can be seen as an anti-hero who, despite his solitary mission, is not afraid to criticise the system and take risks in pursuit of the truth. The journalist-humorist and satirist in the media, through his ironic view of reality, provides the audience with a deeper reflection on the condition of society. In the face of conflict, his role as a multilingual observer becomes even more important, as he is able to bring together different perspectives, becoming a voice for those who are marginalised. The myth of the lone observer thus underlines the importance of an independent view of the world, which, although embedded in solitude, has the potential to change and inspire.

This category was formed from 31 myths described in detail (N = 177), representing 17.51 % (the third largest category). A total of 35 were attributed to this category. This represents 18.42 % of all assignments of the main myth category to individuals (N = 190). By gender, it was assigned to 25 men (the most numerous group, 71.43 %) and 10 women. By age, up to 4 individuals in the 21-30 age group, 11 individuals in the 31-40 age group, 13 individuals in the 41-50 age group (the most numerous group, 37.14 %), and 7 individuals in the 51-60 age group. No assignments in the 61-70 and 70+ age categories.

An example of a cover story that reveals this myth is issue no. 01-02/2024 (288) of “Press” (Press, 2024a) magazine. It depicts Wojciech Czuchnowski (1964-), journalist and columnist,

associated with “Gazeta Wyborcza” (The Electoral Gazette) since 2002. The central element is a man holding a newspaper, whose facial expression exudes confidence, with a slight grimace that may suggest irony. The figure is dressed in dark, probably overcoat clothing, wears glasses and his stubble adds to his character. The text on the cover, including Czuchnowski's name and the slogan *Innej takiej gazety nie ma* (Another Such Newspaper Does Not Exist), together with the date of publication (01-02/2024), emphasises the topicality and importance of the content. The colour scheme of the cover, with a black and white photograph juxtaposed with yellow typographic accents, suggests simplicity and elegance, as well as seriousness and distance.

Connotative analysis brings out additional meanings and cultural associations. The man's facial expression may suggest arrogance or irony, representing the attitude of a critical journalist who takes a detached view of the media. Glasses and facial hair are associated with intellectuals, reinforcing his image. “Gazeta Wyborcza” (The Electoral Gazette) symbolises committed journalism, and the colour yellow can signify energy and exclusivity, suggesting that the magazine's content is aimed at professionals. The commutation test, which involves changing elements of the composition, shows how different details affect the meaning of the message. For example, changing the colour from yellow to red can give it an alarming tone, while turning the newspaper into a tabloid would transform the man into a sensationalist character. A smile instead of an ironic grimace would soften the message, giving it a friendlier feel.

An analysis of the myths, based on Roland Barthes' theory, reveals several important layers. Czuchnowski, holding a newspaper, becomes a symbol of an independent journalist and an uncompromising defender of the truth, where the newspaper is not only a medium but a symbol of the fight for freedom of speech. His outsider image, accentuated by his beard and glasses, creates the image of a critical media observer. The yellow accents and professional styling of the cover suggest that the audience of “Press” magazine is the elite of the industry, people aware of the value of information and its impact.

The myth of the journalist-artist – creator

The myth of the journalist-artist who creates his environment reveals the complex relationship between journalism and art. Such a journalist not only reports on events, but becomes an integral part of the story, in which he documents both the world and himself. Elements of refined elegance and ironic professionalism intermingle in his or her work, creating the impression of an artist-nonconformist who often breaks conventions. The journalist-artist sees sport as a metaphor for life, discovering universal truths and emotions in it. As a reflective traveller and empathetic analyst, he explores the diversity of cultures and experiences while becoming their portraitist. Also present in his work are playfulness and spontaneity, which give his accounts authenticity. Through his actions, he acts as a linguistic rebel, provoking thought and challenging established patterns. The journalist-artist is not only a documentarian, but also an explorer who confronts his inner demons, becoming a voice for those who remain in the shadows. In this way, he creates a new reality in which journalism ceases to be just a profession and becomes an art form, full of passion, commitment and creative expression.

This category was formed from 24 myths described in detail (N = 177), representing 13.56 %. In total, it was assigned to 26 individuals. This represents 13.68 % of all assignments of the main myth category to individuals (N = 190). By gender, it was attributed to 20 men (the most numerous group, 76.92 %) and 6 women. By age, up to 5 individuals in the 21-30 years group, 9 individuals in the 31-40 years group (the most numerous group, 34.62 %), 8 in the 41-50 years group, 2 in the 51-60 years group, and 2 in the 61-70 years group. No assignments in the 70+ age category.

As an example of a “Press” (Press, 2016) cover that reveals this myth, we can cite the magazine's issue 06/2016 (239). It depicts Max Cegielski (1975-), journalist, writer, radio and TV presenter, cultural animator and traveller. His face is covered in black paint, contrasting with his blond beard and blue eyes. Cegielski is wearing a woollen cap, which may suggest a cold environment or a fashion element. The title on the cover is *Uciekam na Wschód* (Escape to the East), which suggests that the subject of the article is his journey or fascination with Eastern culture. His gaze is intense, which attracts attention and builds a mysterious aura.

On a connotative level, the cover evokes a mask or disguise, which may suggest wandering, a search for identity or blending into another culture. The black face paint gives Cegielski a stern and mysterious look, which may allude to rituals or symbolism associated with travel to the East, particularly in the context of exploring other cultures and spirituality. This suggests that the journalist is symbolically taking on a new ‘skin’ in an attempt to understand a foreign culture

through immersion. The title *Uciekam na Wschód* (Escape to the East) may refer to his desire to escape the Western lifestyle in search of something more primal or authentic in the East.

In a commutation test, the paint on Cegielski's face could be swapped for another element, such as traditional Eastern dress. This change would give the cover a more classic travel or anthropological feel. The black paint, however, is a more unusual element, suggesting a deeper cultural immersion or symbolic take on identity. If Cegielski had been wearing ordinary, everyday clothing without additional props (such as a hat or paint), the cover's message would have become less puzzling and more subdued, and the cover itself might have looked less intriguing. The face paint is crucial in building a mysterious, almost ritualistic atmosphere.

In this cover, Max Cegielski plays the role of a journalist-discoverer who not only travels but also deeply immerses himself in foreign cultures. The black paint on his face symbolises the process of transformation, of embracing other identities, which is characteristic of the explorer who seeks to understand a foreign culture from the inside. It is the myth of the journalist as an explorer who explores other worlds, unafraid to become part of the reality being explored. The title *Uciekam na Wschód* (Escape to the East) suggests that Cegielski, tired of the Western lifestyle, is looking for something more authentic and spiritual in the East. This is the myth of a man who turns away from the materialism and consumerism of the West, escaping to a simpler, more primal life in the East. The journalist is thus portrayed as someone who not only travels, but also tries to find a deeper meaning of existence. The black paint on Cegielski's face symbolises the transformation he undergoes during his travels to the East. It is the myth of the journalist who becomes more than an observer – he turns into a participant, exploring other cultures by experiencing them first-hand. Paint can also refer to ritual symbolism, suggesting a spiritual or cultural immersion in the world under study.

The myth of the modern journalist – user of technology

The myth of the modern journalist as a user of technology reveals a complex portrait of contemporary media, in which technology plays a key role in shaping both content and the way it is presented. The modern journalist, often portrayed as a vulnerable person in the digital world, has to balance professionalism with personal experience, making her vulnerable to the onslaught of information. In this context, we see a successful woman who, on the one hand, controls technology and, on the other, struggles with the rat race in the big city, where the push for glass becomes an integral part of her everyday life. However, the modern journalist is also a technology critic who looks at digital reality with distrust, striving for authenticity and a return to nature. The myth of the 'eye of truth', which aims to reveal reality in the face of ubiquitous media filters, is present in his or her actions. The contemporary journalist becomes a guide for the future, combining 'feminine strength and delicacy' with the need to reflect on humanity in the face of technological challenges, making her role in today's world both relevant and complex.

This category was formed from 21 myths described in detail (N = 177), representing 11.86 % (the smallest category). In total, it was assigned to 22 individuals. This represents 11.58 % of all assignments of the main myth category to individuals (N = 190). By gender, it was assigned to 12 men (the most numerous group, 54.55 %) and 10 women. By age, up to 1 person in the 21-30 years group, 9 persons – 31-40 years (the most numerous group, 40.91 %), 8 – 41-50 years, 4 – 51-60 years. No assignments in the 61-70 and 70+ age categories.

An example of a cover that reveals this myth is issue no. 05-06/2024 (290) of "Press" (Press, 2024b) magazine. Denotatively, the cover depicts Joanna Dunikowska-Paź (her exact age is publicly unknown, she has been assigned to the 41-50 group), a journalist and television presenter, now back on public TVP (Polish Television). She is dressed in a bright trench coat, against a backdrop of modern glass city architecture. She looks confidently ahead, standing upright, in the soft daylight. The upper left corner shows slogans related to the magazine's subject matter, such as *Metoda Gluchowskiego* (Gluchowski's Method) or *Suwart wiecznie żywy* (Suwart Eternally Alive). The bottom right corner contains the caption: *Dobrze jest wrócić – Joanna Dunikowska-Paź* (It is Good to Be Back – Joanna Dunikowska-Paź).

Connotatively, the cover promotes an image of return and rebirth. Dunikowska-Paź's body position, her confident, calm expression and the setting of modern buildings suggest a triumphant return or continuation of her career after a break. The trench symbolises professionalism and elegance, while the scenery in the form of glass skyscrapers connotes progress, success and modernity. The bright trench contrasts with the cool glass surroundings, which can further emphasise the strength and confidence of a woman who is finding her place in a modern, fast-

changing world. The title itself *Dobrze jest wrócić* (It is Good to Be Back) has a metaphorical meaning, indicating the feeling of returning to something important, not only professionally but also mentally, which is reinforced by the presence of a modern background, suggesting a dynamic professional environment.

The commutation test is to see how changing certain elements would affect the perception of the cover as a whole. If, for example, the background was changed to a more traditional one (e.g. with a brick facade), the message about modernity and dynamic careers would be weakened. In such a situation, the cover would suggest more conservative, stable values rather than a return to something new and innovative. Also, changing the colour of the coat to a darker colour – black, for example – would reinforce the seriousness and authority of the character, but at the same time could dilute the warmth and accessibility that the light trench suggests. Also, a change in facial expression to a more serious one could suggest challenges or difficulties the character has had to face. In contrast, the current facial expression suggests confidence and calmness in the face of these challenges. The commutation test shows that the key elements of the composition (background, clothing, facial expression) are deliberately chosen to convey confidence, professionalism and success in a modern setting.

The journalistic myths present on this cover are primarily related to the myth of success in the big city. The modern architecture in the background symbolises the city as a space for career and success, and the figure in the foreground epitomises the successful individual who has returned to professional life in a metropolitan context. This myth is often used in the media to emphasise the power of individualism, determination and adaptability to a modern, globalised world. The slogan *Dobrze jest wrócić* (It is Good to Be Back) connotes a rebirth or a return to full activity after a break. In media culture, comebacks are often glorified, especially after difficult periods, suggesting that success can be achieved not just once, but that it is possible to rise again and again after temporary lows or breaks. Joanna Dunikowska-Paź on this cover is portrayed as a modern woman coping in a complex, metropolitan environment, combining elegance with determination and confidence. This is a classic image in the media, where a woman not only finds her way in the dynamic professional world, but also brings her own principles to it.

Cross-tabulation analysis of myths

Men made up the largest group in the “Press” magazine cover study, accounting for 69.57. Women – 30.43. The largest number of men was in the age groups 21-30, 61-70 and 70+, where they made up 100% of these groups. In contrast, the highest number of women was in the 31-40 age group, where they made up 50 (Table 1). The results suggest that men and women have different age distributions in the sample, indicating a moderate relationship between gender and age groups. Cramér's V value is 0.364. Men dominate most of the age groups, especially in the younger and older age categories. The survey included N = 69 people, both men and women, appearing on magazine covers.

Table 1. Gender and age groups on the covers of “Press” magazine

	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	70+	
Male	6	9	19	9	3	2	48
	100,00 %	50,00%	65,52 %	81,82 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	69,57 %
Female	0	9	10	2	0	0	21
	0,00 %	50,00 %	34,48 %	18,18 %	0,00 %	0,00 %	30,43 %
	6	18	29	11	3	2	69
	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %

In the analysis of the main categories of journalistic myths on the covers of “Press” magazine, men were the largest group, accounting for 70.53 % of the total sample, while women accounted for 29.47 %. The survey included N = 190 assignments by gender to myths. The most frequently attributed category for men was ‘The myth of the intellectual journalist – authority’, which 78.26 % of men fell into. In contrast, women were most frequently assigned to ‘The myth of the modern journalist – user of technology’ category, accounting for 45.45 % of this group (Table 2). The results

suggest that men and women have different preferences or tendencies in the context of the journalism myth categories. Cramér's V value of 0.196 indicates a weak relationship between gender and journalistic myth categories. This means that gender has little influence on which categories of journalistic myths appear on journal covers. In other words, there is little difference in the occurrence of these myth categories between men and women.

Table 2. Gender and the main categories of journalistic myths on the covers of “Press” magazine

	The myth of the warrior journalist – defender of truth	The myth of the intellectual journalist – the authority	The myth of the lonely observer – the outsider	The myth of the journalist – artist – creator	The myth of the modern journalist – user of technology	
Male	41	36	25	20	12	134
	67,21 %	78,26 %	71,43 %	76,92 %	54,55 %	70,53 %
Female	20	10	10	6	10	56
	32,79 %	21,74 %	28,57 %	23,08 %	45,45 %	29,47 %
	61	46	35	26	22	190
	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %

In the same analysis on journalistic myth categories on magazine covers, the largest age group was 41-50 year olds, or 40.53 % of the total sample, while the smallest group was 70+ year olds, or 3.16 %. The survey included N = 190 age category assignments to myths. The most frequently attributed category in the 41-50 age group was ‘The myth of the warrior journalist – defender of truth’, which accounted for 49.18 % of this group. The least frequently assigned categories were ‘The myth of the lonely observer – outsider’ and ‘The myth of the modern journalist – user of technology’ in the 61-70 and 70+ age groups (0.00 %), and ‘The myth of the journalist-artist – creator’ in the 70+ age group (Table 3). The results suggest that different age groups have different preferences or tendencies in the context of journalistic myth categories. Cramér's V value of 0.187 indicates a weak relationship between age groups and journalistic myth categories. This means that age has little influence on which categories of journalistic myths appear on journal covers. In other words, there is little difference in the occurrence of these myth categories between different age groups.

Table 3. Age and the main categories of journalistic myths on the covers of “Press” magazine

	The myth of the warrior journalist – defender of truth	The myth of the intellectual journalist – the authority	The myth of the lonely observer – the outsider	The myth of the journalist – artist – creator	The myth of the modern journalist – user of technology	
21-30	4	1	4	5	1	15
	6,56 %	2,17 %	11,43 %	19,23 %	4,55 %	7,89 %
31-40	15	10	11	9	9	54
	24,59 %	21,74 %	31,43 %	34,62 %	40,91 %	28,42 %
41-50	30	18	13	8	8	77
	49,18 %	39,13 %	37,14 %	30,77 %	36,36 %	40,53 %
51-60	6	10	7	2	4	29
	9,84 %	21,74 %	20,00 %	7,69 %	18,18 %	15,26 %
61-70	3	4	0	2	0	9
	4,92 %	8,70 %	0,00 %	7,69 %	0,00 %	4,74 %

	The myth of the warrior journalist – defender of truth	The myth of the intellectual journalist – the authority	The myth of the lonely observer – the outsider	The myth of the journalist – artist – creator	The myth of the modern journalist – user of technology	
70+	3	3	0	0	0	6
	4,92 %	6,52 %	0,00 %	0,00 %	0,00 %	3,16 %
	61	46	35	26	22	190
	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %	100,00 %

Didactic possibilities of semiotic analysis in journalism education classes

In contemporary journalism education, semiotic analysis is a unique and invaluable tool for understanding the creation of contemporary images of media workers, including journalists. Hence, we use this method with students of the subjects: Qualifications and Competences in Journalism and Popular Science Journalism, which I teach as part of the Journalism and Social Communication major at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, during the 2024/2025 academic year. This method opens up a critical space in which they can reflect on how articles, headlines, images and even journalistic practices are never purely neutral, but are shaped by a range of social, cultural and professional norms. This research method challenges students to go beyond superficial readings and encourages them to engage with the underlying structures of communication that determine how stories are told, how audiences interpret them and how journalism, as a profession, communicates its myths and values.

The aim of such an exercise is to develop the ability to critically analyse the visual and linguistic elements that construct the image of journalism and the values associated with it, such as objectivity, independence and professionalism. Students analyse “Press” covers from selected issues, focusing on how visual and linguistic elements together construct the image of the journalistic profession. This exercise will help to understand how the myth of objectivity and professionalism is constructed through semiotic codes. Typically, students work in two groups and select one cover each of different issues of the “Press”. They then identify the main visual elements (e.g. photographs, illustrations, colours, layout) and linguistic elements (e.g. titles, headlines, texts) used on the covers. Then, applying Barthes' theory, they analyse how these elements act as myths that make certain ideological assumptions (e.g. objectivity, journalistic independence) natural and obvious (Barthes, 1968). Consequently, they consider how layout and photographs affect the perceived authenticity or professionalism of the journalist. They also pose questions for group discussion: What values and norms (e.g. independence, objectivity) are symbolically conveyed through images and words? What visual and linguistic codes reinforce the impression that journalism is a profession based on ‘unbiased’ and ‘scientific’ truth? What might be the ideological consequences of this type of representation in the context of journalism education? Finally, prepare a presentation in which you present your conclusions on how “Press” covers construct the image of the journalist.

5. Conclusion

A semiotic analysis of the covers of the trade journal “Press” allows us to discern hidden ideological assumptions about contemporary journalism. An answer was sought to the question of the contemporary myths of journalism present on individual magazine covers. The semiotic analysis of the covers used the technique of the commutation test, seeking answers to the question of what was omitted in the construction of the image of journalism on the magazine covers.

“Press” covers construct the image of journalists through recurring motifs that fit certain stereotypes. The image of the journalist as a ‘warrior-defender of truth’ suggests that this role is not only a profession, but also a mission. Such an image shapes the ideological message that journalists are heroes who struggle against threats to truth and freedom of expression. The analysis shows that 58 of the 177 myths described relate to this archetype, the largest group among the images studied (32.77 %). In the light of Jurado Martín's research, which points to the way the media shape

perceptions of journalists, it can be seen how these archetypes influence perceptions of the profession ([Jurado Martín, 2024](#)).

Commutation tests reveal how the omission of images of women journalists limits the diversity of representations and reinforces patriarchal narratives in the media. When only men appear on the covers, traditional stereotypes about gender roles in journalism are reinforced. It is worth noting that the analysis showed that 67.21% of the attributed myths are about men, highlighting the underrepresentation of women in this context. A study by Helskens De Wulf and Arriaz Ibara found that representations of women in the media are central to their social perception, confirming the observation of an imbalance in representation ([De Wulf Helskens, Arriaza Ibarra, 2024](#)).

Denotative and connotative analysis makes it possible to distinguish between the literal and contextual meanings of the images portrayed. Coverage often depicts journalists as 'lone observers' or 'creators', which gives them a specific identity and reinforces the myth of the 'journalist-artist'. Such images not only illustrate their role, but also build the perception that journalism is a creative activity, which can lead to a distortion of the real image of a journalist's work. Similar observations appear in the research of Meyers, who argues, however, that embracing bias in journalism may nevertheless be compatible with a responsible approach to the job ([Meyers, 2020](#)).

In the context of contemporary challenges such as disinformation and a crisis of trust in the media, the analysis reveals how these myths affect perceptions of the role of journalism in society. Many of the covers analysed depict journalists as 'modern technology users', indicating their adaptability in the face of a changing media landscape. However, again, it can be seen that certain aspects are overlooked, such as ethical issues related to the use of technology in journalistic work. Hess and McAdam's study shows that changes in media work patterns have serious consequences for the perception of journalists as professionals in the face of new technologies ([Hess, McAdam, 2024](#)).

It is possible that this construction of the image of journalists on the covers of "Press" is due to the fact that it is a trade magazine, which is mainly aimed at journalists themselves and media professionals. Consequently, the creators of these covers may feel the need to affirm certain values and myths that are close to the professional environment. Journalists may seek to portray themselves in a way that emphasises their role as defenders of truth and independent thinkers, which may be very different from the image they have in the eyes of the wider public. This internal need to identify with heroic and ambitious archetypes can lead to the creation of narratives that do not necessarily reflect the actual public perception of their role, but rather idealise it, resulting in the reproduction of myths and stereotypes that do not always correspond to reality.

In conclusion, the semiotic analysis of "Press" covers reveals important processes of meaning construction and their ideological implications. Images in the media space influence public perceptions of journalism, reflecting ideologies that make certain values 'natural' and 'self-evident', such as objectivity or independence. It is therefore worth continuing research in this area to better understand the impact these myths have on our perception of the media and journalism as a profession. It also has an important educational dimension, hence the proposal to use this method of analysis in practical classes for future journalists.

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Published in the USA
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Issued since 2005.
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 1994-4195
2025. 21(1): 45-53

DOI: 10.13187/me.2025.1.45
<https://me.cherkasgu.press>



The Role of Media Education in Reducing the Negative Consequences of Digitalization

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Abstract

Digitalization of all spheres of public life, including education, changes the practices of consumption, use and production of information. In modern conditions, the consequences of digitalization have both positive and negative tonality. Along with the availability of information, one can state the risks of information overload, data falsification, and a decrease in media culture. The aim of the research work was to study the impact of digitalization of education on students' practices of using and consuming information, perception of the value of knowledge and academic education, as well as traditional forms of education. The results of the study showed a deformation of value norms characterizing the attitude towards academic traditions in education. Excess information on the Internet devalues the value of knowledge obtained in the learning process. Students consider lectures to be an outdated practice; most of them would like to change the form of knowledge acquisition, moving from lectures in the classroom to "listening to videos". An illustration of the insufficient level of media competence of a student, the deformation of his media culture is the lack of understanding of clear differences between fragmentary information from the Internet and systemic knowledge obtained during training. The study revealed a low level of students' motivation to work with educational digital materials presented in the educational environment of the university. It is concluded that the key tasks of media education in modern conditions should include those that have a positive impact on reducing the negative consequences of digitalization. In the course of the study, they are systematized as follows: the formation of a healthy approach and conscious attitude to information in young people, the formation of skills for assessing the reliability of information content, the development of a subjective position in students when accessing digital services. It has been established that media education, with the increasing pace of digitalization, should take on the tasks of forming digital ethics among participants in the educational process, become the foundation for maintaining cultural norms and educational values of working with information, broadcasting the importance of academic traditions in the course of obtaining knowledge.

Keywords: media competence, media education, educational environment of the university, digitalization, information.

1. Introduction

The vector of educational policy in most countries of the world today orients schools and universities towards the introduction of digital technologies into the educational process. This trend actualizes the study of issues of digitalization of education, its content and consequences. Heads of universities and schools, as well as teachers, are concerned about the success of the integration of information and communication technologies into the educational process,

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the effectiveness of preparing schoolchildren for the "digital future" (Gáliková Tolnaiová, Gálik, 2020; Polizzi, 2023; Sun, Pan, 2021). The effectiveness of such training is connected, first of all, with the media education of young people, since the "digital future" includes not only the spread of artificial intelligence, virtualization of medicine, education, public services, but also the globalization of the communication space, scaling of information networks (Shestakova, 2019). The digital society is characterized by such risks as information overload, the influence of large volumes of superficial, virtual communication links on the individual, the formation of cognitive disorders, and the crisis of traditional values (Kasavina, 2018). The scaling of attractive advertising content and entertainment in virtual space limits the critical thinking of teenagers and becomes a factor in the deformation of information culture (Feijoo et al., 2023). Scientific research rightly notes the need to develop media competence not only for successful work in the formal educational environment, but also in everyday life (Zhu et al., 2021).

Large-scale digitalization initiates the development of ambivalent processes, on the one hand, information overload, and, on the other, information deficit (Golub, 2018). In these conditions, teachers face quite complex tasks, which include adapting young people to life in a digital society, developing their media competence, digital literacy, and skills for navigating the Internet space (Heersmink, 2018). The scientific papers substantiate the conclusion that successful digitalization of education, the use of artificial intelligence, virtual reality technologies in education is becoming an elusive goal outside of solving the problems of developing media education, increasing the media competence of young people and overcoming the digital divide (Zhang et al., 2024). The development of functional skills for searching for information, evaluating it and producing it should become mandatory components of educational programs in schools and universities (Pangrazio et al., 2020).

Media education provides, on the one hand, effective professional training for young people, the foundation for their successful career in a digital society. On the other hand, media education allows maintaining cultural norms, academic traditions of acquiring knowledge, and educational values. Media competence and digital literacy are the foundation for successful communications, cooperation, and the formation of ethical standards in a digital society (Aydınlar et al., 2024). The integration of ChatGPT into educational systems raises new questions related to ethics, academic integrity, media culture and media competence (Naamati-Schneider, Alt, 2024). The results of experimental studies show that distance learning has a higher rate of plagiarism compared to the traditional format of the educational process (Onyeaka et al., 2024). Violation of ethical standards and cheating in exams are becoming one of the attributes of the digital era, the large-scale penetration of digital technologies into everyday life. These violations undermine the authority of the institute education (Singh, 2021). Punitive sanctions will not be able to cope with the problem of academic fraud. Much more profound and long-term results can be achieved by a well-thought-out policy of developing "that will provide students with a conscious understanding and successful experience of the legitimate use of information content contained in various sources" (Rogach, 2024: 640).

It seems extremely important to study the possibilities and role of media education in the processes of preserving the value of academic education, preventing its devaluation in the context of universal accessibility of information, and scaling up diverse digital content.

2. Materials and methods

During the research activities, the author set the goal of establishing students' attitudes towards the digitalization of education, studying the consequences of digitalization for their practices of searching and consuming information content, perception of the value of academic education and traditional forms of participation in the educational process.

Research objectives:

1. To determine students' attitudes towards digitalization of education and its possible advantages (individualization of learning, increasing student motivation, ensuring accessibility of information).
2. To study the transformation of social norms of young people in the context of digitalization, attitudes to information, learning, traditional teaching practices.
3. To analyze the dependencies between the attitude of young people to digitalization and the formation of skills for searching and systematizing information, critical understanding of digital communication products.

To solve the set tasks, a questionnaire survey of students of Russian universities (N = 633) was conducted. The questionnaire included several blocks to analyze students' attitudes toward digitalization, interpretation of its priorities, risks and possible threats to maintaining the quality of education, self-assessments of young people's digital literacy. In addition, the tools used to collect data included questions that allow us to establish the presence or absence of students' skills in working with information, including skills for its critical analysis. The author also included questions that allow us to establish the transformation of students' behavioral norms and values in relation to working with information and obtaining knowledge in the context of the popularization of digital technologies.

In order to clarify certain points, a focus group was additionally held (N = 12). Students were asked to discuss questions related to understanding the risks of scaling information on the Internet, the importance of skills for critical understanding, and assessment of the reliability of information. A separate block discussed questions about changing the value of education in the context of information redundancy, and the educational needs of young people in modern conditions.

Research hypotheses:

1. Digitalization negatively affects the attitude towards traditional teaching practices (lectures and seminars in the classroom), reduces students' motivation to actively acquire knowledge, limits their readiness for active interaction with the teacher as a bearer of knowledge and experience

2. Students' understanding of the advantages of digitalization and its positive consequences allows them to more effectively develop skills for searching and systematizing information, and critically comprehend the products of digital communications.

3. Discussion

The quality of education and its role in modern society are the subject of scientific and public discourse. Scientists pay attention to the plasticity of opinions and perceptions of education, the dynamic transformation of interpretations of its role and meanings (Santos et al., 2022). Digitalization has had the most significant impact on the public's perception of the value of education. Digital technologies have opened a window of opportunity for obtaining an education beyond territorial and temporal boundaries (Frolova, Rogach, 2022). However, the illusion of ease of obtaining information devalues the value of education, based on excessive digital optimism. The point is that the availability and even redundancy of information in the conditions of a digital society is perceived by young people as an exhaustive condition for the development of personal potential and the acquisition of necessary knowledge.

Scientists draw attention to the transformation of behavioral models of young people in education, the transition to practices of "everyday life, the sofa-and-screen nature of acquiring knowledge" (Narkhov et al., 2021). One can also note deviations in educational patterns of behavior: minimization of interest in reading books, violation of the principles of knowledge acquisition ("lecture as a background" during which the student is engaged in correspondence with friends, games, scrolling through social network pages). Cyberloafing is becoming a common practice of youth behavior today (Arslantas et al., 2023), an attribute of a low level of media competence.

Prevention and mitigation of these problems is in the resource field of media education, which allows us to separate such concepts as "information consumption" and its critical understanding, analysis, synthesis and production. This statement is supported by the conclusions made in the works of A.V. Fedorov. The scientist defines media competence of an individual as "a set of his or her motives, knowledge, skills, abilities that facilitate the selection, use, critical analysis, evaluation, creation and transmission of media texts" (Fedorov, 2010: 64). Thus, reflection on the causes and consequences of the decline in the ethical behavior of participants in the educational process who actively use digital technologies, the development of a critical perception of "digital citizenship" (Nguyen, 2022), will help prevent the devaluation of academic knowledge and the devaluation of the role of the educational institution in modern society.

New digitalization trends, reducing students' motivation to study, pose an extremely serious challenge to the institution of education. In particular, a number of scientists draw attention to the undermining of the transformative potential of education in the context of digitalization (Selwyn et al., 2023). "The tyranny of algorithms" (Rasch, 2020), automated knowledge control systems, "unmanned technologies of assessment" of academic performance contrast with traditional educational values. The negative consequences of digitalization are associated, among other things,

with the narrowing of the creative space in education, the formation of a number of barriers to the formation of media competence of an individual.

Digitalization is fundamentally changing the processes of production, consumption and exchange of information (Vuori et al., 2019). Accordingly, there is a need for theoretical and empirical understanding of new approaches in education to prepare young people for the changing conditions of digital reality. Russian scientists draw attention to two opposite concepts of education in this context: user-consumer and personal-development. The first concept is focused on the technological dominants of education. It includes the formation of skills in servicing digital technologies, automated skills in working with information systems (Shutenko et al., 2022). The second concept (personal development) takes into account the need to develop the student's creative competencies and cultural experience. The dominant feature of this approach is the value of knowledge as a generalized method of cognitive actions (Shutenko, Shutenko, 2023). Thus, in the context of digitalization, it seems extremely important to ensure the formation ethical standards for working with information, and educational values.

The analysis of scientific discourse on the topic of digitalization of education, reflection of its advantages and risks draws attention to the need for a deeper understanding of the role of media education in the context of digital reality, students' skills in working with information. The issues of transforming the behavioral models of young people in the education system, changing the practices of perceiving academic traditions are becoming especially relevant.

4. Results

The results of the study showed that in the modern conditions of digitalization, simplified access to information, the attitude of students to traditional educational practices of acquiring knowledge has changed significantly. Most respondents point to the need to change the established traditions of conducting lectures (Figure 1).

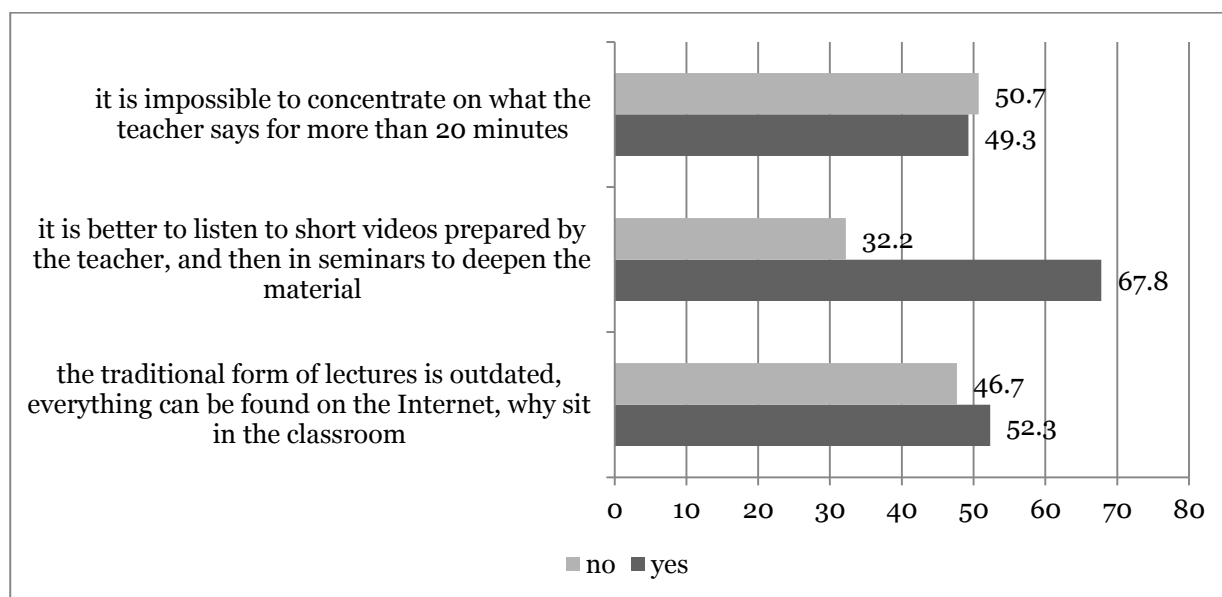


Fig. 1. Students' attitudes towards traditional lectures in the classroom, %

More than half of the students surveyed (52.3 %) believe that the traditional form of lectures is outdated. The ability to find any information on the Internet, according to respondents, reduces the value of knowledge obtained in the classroom. The availability of information ensures "the acquisition of knowledge in a ready-made form, including through images that do not require understanding" (Zeer et al., 2021). Thus, the redundancy of information, the clip form of its presentation on the Internet significantly devalues knowledge. The expansion of the information space inclines young people to the idea that there is no strict need to memorize the material, listen attentively to the teacher.

The results of the focus group confirmed these findings, students very lightly characterize the value of educational materials, justifying this by access to information resources.

Irina K., 3rd year: "I rarely take notes... When I prepare for an exam, I search the Internet for material on the issues... Everything is there..."

Anton M., 2nd year: "There is something interesting, but, as a rule, a lecture is about nothing... I can find it all in one click..."

When answering the question about ways to assess the reliability of information on the Internet, students demonstrate a fairly high self-assessment of their skills.

Darya A., 2nd year: "Yes, I know what 'fake news' is, but it's immediately obvious... Yes, there's a lot of lies, but in this regard I can tell the difference..."

Nikolay D., 3rd year: "There's certainly 'a lot of garbage' on the Internet, but there are also trusted sites..."

The focus group showed that students do not draw a clear line between information on the Internet and systemic knowledge obtained in the course of classical education.

The decline in the prestige of knowledge is expressed in the deformation of value norms that characterize the attitude to academic traditions in education.

It can be assumed that only media competence of young people will allow them to realize the existing gap between fragmentary and unreliable information that is posted on Internet resources and genuine academic knowledge. At the same time, the key role in this process belongs to the teacher, who has the ability to develop such skills in students as analytical and critical understanding of information, a creative approach, and the generation of new knowledge (Frolova, 2024).

It is alarming that half of the respondents (49.3 %) cannot concentrate on what the teacher says for more than 20 minutes. Difficulty maintaining attention, memory impairment, the desire to quickly switch between different information sources in modern conditions are not only attributes of the digital society, but also deformations of media culture. The most significant changes concern students' attitudes to the forms of obtaining knowledge and assimilation of material in the higher education system. The transformation of the media culture of young people has led to the fact that 2/3 of respondents (67.8 %) would like to change the form of assimilation of knowledge, to move from lectures in the classroom to "listening to videos". However, there are serious risks in changing these behavioral models. Virtualization of training minimizes the "feeling of real life", while maximizing communication gaps between the teacher and the student. Such gaps do not allow the formation of socially significant skills of the student, reinforce the ethical standards of working with information. Disruption of social connections in the learning process deforms the cognitive process, narrows thinking to abstract categories (Khlopovskikh et al., 2022).

During the study, students were also asked about their attitude towards the teacher. The overwhelming majority of respondents (83.9 %) agreed with the statement that the teacher should have a sense of humor, use "entertaining content" in the learning process. Thus, a traditional lecture can evoke a positive response from a student if such attributes as "fun atmosphere" are activated (Ideland, 2021); pleasure and positive climate (David, Weinstein, 2023). Thus, the hypothesis put forward during the study was confirmed. Digitalization and, above all, the experience of distance learning had a negative impact on students' attitudes towards the academic traditions of lecture teaching. Negative consequences include the deformation of the teacher's authority and increased demands for an entertaining nature of education. The insufficient level of media competence of the student reduces the criticality of the perception of information presented on the Internet. Most modern students do not draw clear boundaries between such channels for obtaining knowledge as information on the Internet and educational materials in the educational environment of the university.

The study found that students perceive the digitalization of education processes very positively (Figure 2).

The overwhelming majority sees the availability of educational materials in the information space as the main prerequisites for digital optimism. 95.1 % of respondents agreed with this advantage. Indeed, large-scale digitization of educational materials has become a revolutionary turn in the development of the educational institution. The survey results showed that a dominant opinion has formed among students about the positive consequences of the digital transformation of the educational process: 88.8 % of respondents note an increase in the availability of information; 87.5 % note a positive trend in increasing the level of knowledge. This effect is achieved due to the possibility of using advanced technologies to search for information, the advantages of a neural network for creating illustrations. In addition, the availability of

diverse information content makes it possible for students to form individual learning paths, removing territorial restrictions.

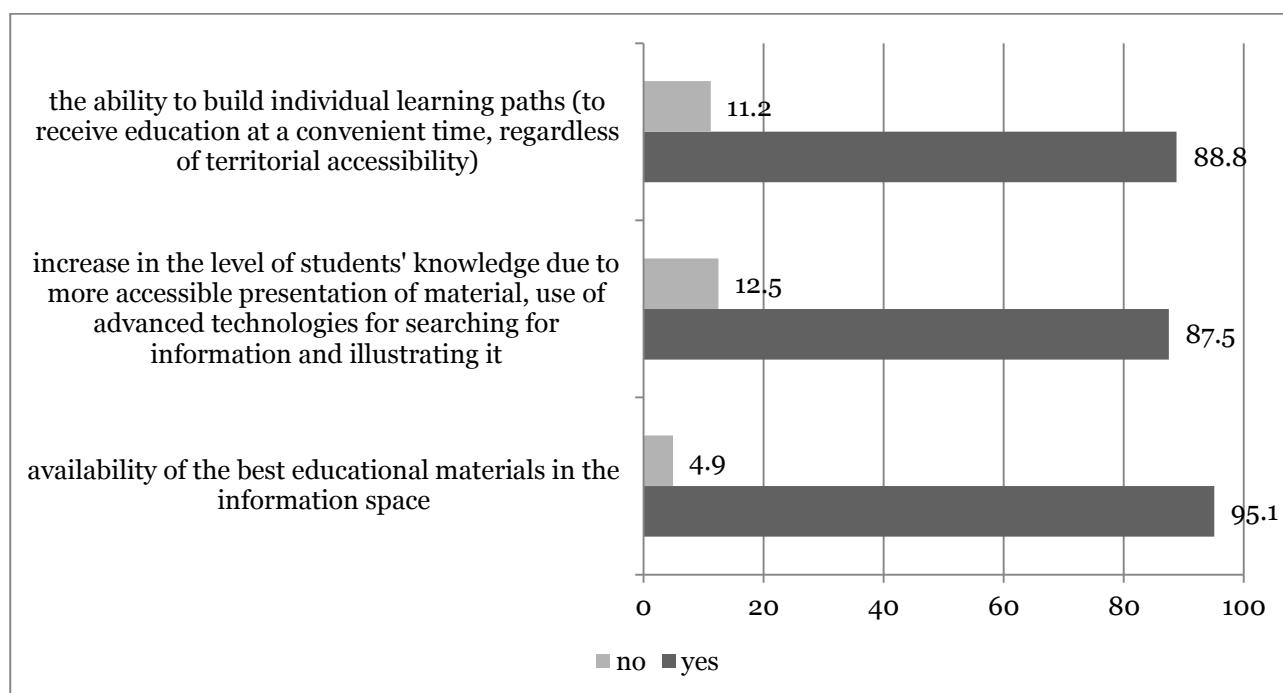


Fig. 2. Benefits of digitalization of education, %

During the focus group, students expressed diverse opinions. On the one hand, attention was focused on the advantages of universal accessibility of information:

Anton M., 2nd year: "You can find information on any issue. If you want to study a subject in depth, you will always find content..."

A number of students expressed their opinion about the limitations in using available information, the need for careful work on its search and verification:

Anna P., 3rd year: "I think that we should be careful with information on the Internet. Especially on professional issues. Another thing is the content prepared by teachers at the university... This is always good..."

During the discussion, students came to the conclusion that it is necessary to differentiate between the processes of digitalization of education and the development of the global Internet. Despite the desire of most universities to ensure the availability of educational materials, students do not always take advantage of these advantages.

Darya A., 2nd year: "I know that there is a personal account. Something is posted there... Honestly, I rarely use these materials. It is more convenient to find them on the Internet..."

Thus, the digital optimism of young people is largely related to the development of the global Internet, the possibilities of unlimited communications. At the same time, the digital achievements of the educational environment of universities where students study remain on the periphery of their attention. Most students use electronic personal accounts to carry out the required communication with the teacher, record the completion of assigned tasks. Much less often, students study digital content in depth, listen to recordings of video lectures. It can be assumed that at the current stage of development of society, one of the tasks of media education is the formation of skills in working with information in terms of interpreting channels for obtaining knowledge, differentiating their significance. Reflection on the advantages of digitalization of education would allow students to more effectively navigate the educational environment of universities.

Analysis of the results of the questionnaire allowed us to establish a relationship between understanding the advantages of digitalization and the presence of skills for critical understanding of information (Table 1).

The results of the analysis confirmed the hypothesis about the existence of a relationship between understanding the advantages of digitalization, involvement in the practices of using

digital content of universities and the formation of skills in searching and systematizing information, critical understanding of digital communications products. Among students who did not appreciate the availability of educational materials in the information space, the proportion of respondents with a lack of skills in searching and systematizing information, critical understanding of digital communications products is significantly higher.

Table 1. Relationship between the assessment of the benefits of digitalization (availability of educational materials) and the availability of information handling skills, %

<i>Do you think that digitalization of education provides...</i>	<i>Assess your presence of the following information processing skills...</i>	
availability of the best educational materials in the information space	I can critically think about digital communications products	
	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>
yes	88.2	11.8
нет	67.7	32.3
sample mean	87.2	12.8
availability of the best educational materials in the information space	I can systematize searches on information platforms containing data necessary for study	
	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>
yes	90.7	9.3
no	77.4	22.6
sample mean	90.0	10.0

The obtained results require further verification, analysis of other factors influencing students' self-assessment of their media competence.

5. Conclusion

Digitalization of all spheres of public life has radically changed the processes of searching, consuming and producing information. On the one hand, the availability of information facilitates the process of mastering knowledge, but, on the other hand, in the conditions of insufficient media competence, excess information can limit the student's readiness to memorize educational materials, understand and analyze them. As the results of the study showed, the majority of the surveyed students have changed their attitude to traditional academic forms of education in the context of digitalization of education. In particular, the idea of the obsolescence of lecture forms of education is circulating among students, this is said by 52.3 % of respondents. This thesis is justified by the availability of any information on the Internet. At the same time, students do not have a clear idea of the differentiation between "any information" and fundamental knowledge obtained during training. Understanding the term "fake news", comprehension of the phenomenon of the "post-truth era" is reflected in the ideas of modern youth. However, these risks are perceived abstractly – outside of direct personal experience. The role of media education in this context is to develop a critical attitude towards information, differentiating the boundaries between fragmentary, often falsified information from the Internet and systemic knowledge obtained during training.

Students focus on digital communication practices with the teacher, strictly fixed rules for working in a personal electronic account. It can be assumed that students have low motivation to work with educational digital materials. During the focus group, informants said that they are more focused on independent search for information on the Internet than on an in-depth study of materials presented in the educational environment of universities. The tasks of media education in this context are seen in the formation of a conscious attitude to information, a critical analysis of the channels for obtaining it, and the development of the subjective position of students when using digital services. A connection has been established between students' awareness of the benefits of digitalization (expanded access to educational materials) and the development of their skills in systematic information search and critical understanding of digital communications products.

Further research areas may include: analysis of factors that increase students' motivation to work productively with digital content; study of tools for forming the subjective position of young people when choosing a source of information and its further use to obtain new knowledge; development of media skills for determining the reliability of information content. Particular attention should be paid to research into the role of media education in forming the educational values and norms of young people, the culture of information consumption.

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Published in the USA
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Issued since 2005.
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 1994-4195
2025. 21(1): 54-60

DOI: 10.13187/me.2025.1.54
<https://me.cherkasgu.press>



Intercultural Communication Conflict Between British and Americans in TikTok Memes

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Abstract

This study was conducted to help provide an understanding of intercultural communication as a social interaction in the form of communication between individuals with different cultural backgrounds. This study connected conflict in intercultural communication. It is considered a problem that arises due to ineffective communication and social interaction among individuals due to differences in cultural backgrounds. This research uses visual methodology to identify the concept of Intercultural Communication Conflict Between British and American in five TikTok Memes. Based on the research findings, intercultural communication conflicts are portrayed in video memes as a difficulty or confusion in communication between Americans and British due to a number of different circumstances. A lack of intercultural knowledge among speakers, disparities in terminology and dialects, and variances in the purpose of the conversation are all examples of these problems. The occurrence of intercultural communication conflict in several situations can be caused by one side's lack of cultural awareness, the existence of different goals in communication between each other, the perception of one party who feels that they are superior to the other, as well as a lack of tolerance in the cultures of different countries, and lack of knowledge about culture when visiting other countries.

Keywords: American culture, British culture, intercultural communication conflict, TikTok memes.

1. Introduction

Memes are a part of modern-day communication (Lievrrouw, 2013). TikTok, one of the most popular apps, is well-known for its act-out memes and lip-sync videos, in which users remix music and sound clips. TikTok's design is informed by a memetic logic that prioritizes spreading an idea rather than giving credit to the original creator, while most social media sites are places for users to present themselves and manage their online identities (Darvin, 2022). In this context, the videos are considered parodies, and according to Hutcheon (Hutcheon, 2000), parodies are supposed to be similar to the original in some ways while also being easily distinguishable from it (Hirsch, 2019). We can find that in TikTok, there are a lot of meme videos parodying the intercultural communication conflict between the British and the Americans. These videos demonstrate how cultural differences can impede effective communication even when two parties share a common language. According to Vallaster (Vallaster, 2005), when people from different cultural backgrounds approach the same problem from different perspectives, a "shared understanding" is more difficult to achieve.

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Meeting one another, sharing one's culture with one another, working together, and talking to one another across cultural divides are all characteristics of an intercultural society (Lukesová, 2015). This distinction can be seen as a chance for growth and prosperity, but it can also be a major point of contention. Misunderstandings and conflicts between cultures often result from ineffective communication and interactions between individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Lü, 2018).

In investigating the study of intercultural communication conflict, it is necessary to examine other studies that relate as references and considerations. We found three studies that are equivalent to this study. I.A. Ndiayea, and B. Ndiayea examine the influence of mass media in the perspective of social life. They try to analyze the way mass media in Poland portray the image of Africa and its influence on people's social life. I.A. Ndiayea, and B. Ndiayea (Ndiayea, Ndiayea, 2014) argued that the Polish media picture of Africa leads to negative assessment of Africans living in Poland, seriously ruining intercultural communication. M. Lukešová examines the intercultural conflict. The analysis is motivated by the diversity of students at Czech Universities, such as cultural background and personality. Lukešová has 97 respondents who are students as research samples and uses a questionnaire to collect data. C.S.T. King and K.S. Bailey examine intercultural communication. They try to analyze intercultural communication from the perspective of international students in the US and their responses about the universities in helping international students. C.S.T. King and K.S. Bailey (King, Bailey, 2021) found that in the perspective of international students in the US, intercultural relations are carried out well, especially with US students. The faculty has a big role in this relationship because it provides space for international students to play an active role. The extent to which communication barriers arise is a major factor in determining the success of intercultural communication. A wide range of barriers will certainly arise in the course of any communication activity. The presence of barriers might impact the efficiency of any communication activity.

This study obtained several things from research that discusses intercultural topics. This study makes a difference from previous research and examines intercultural communication conflict. The study's objectives were to examine the existence and frequency of British-American communication conflicts. This study uses TikTok memes and examines them using a visual methodology. Because this study discusses intercultural studies and has diversity and variety. Fortunately, this study uses TikTok memes. So, no research has examined the conflict of intercultural communication on TikTok memes.

This study was conducted to help provide an understanding of intercultural communication as a social interaction in the form of communication between individuals with different cultural backgrounds. This study connected conflict in intercultural communication. It is considered a problem that arises due to ineffective communication and social interaction among individuals due to differences in cultural backgrounds. This study is also intended as a reference for other researchers who are interested in this discussion. This study also requires further development. The main focus of this study is to explain how intercultural communication conflicts between British and Americans are portrayed on TikTok memes.

2. Materials and methods

This research uses visual methodology to identify the concept of Intercultural Communication Conflict Between British and Americans in TikTok Memes. According to R. Gillian (Gillian, 2018), the basic structure developed in this methodology is to analyze the visual objects according to the four sites: the site of production, which is where an image is made; the site of the image, which its visual content; the site of circulation, which is where it circulates, and the site of audiences, which is the visual image faces the spectators or users (Aulia, Rosida, 2022). Regarding The Intercultural Communication Conflict, the main problem is understanding the language communicated to us, either English to other languages or English to English, just like British to American or American to British, and for that, the communication must be well spoken by the speaker and well understood by the audience.

Communicating with someone new to the English language requires more than talking loudly and slowly and exaggerating our facial expressions (Farnsworth, 2021). It requires extra effort when we talk to someone who is not a native English speaker. However, it does not mean that talking to natives will be that easy. It also takes effort, and if we cannot deliver our words well or understand other people's words well, conflict in communication might arise. This research uses 5 TikTok meme videos between British and American.

3. Discussion

Language and culture are an inseparable unity in human life. Language and culture are important aspects of human communication, both of which have a significant influence on communication with other people who have different cultures and languages or the same but different languages.

The first video meme reflects the intercultural communication conflict between American and British cultures in regards to responding to someone's thank you or gratitude. From the short video, we can see that there are cultural differences between Americans and Britishers in responding to someone's thank you. The use of different languages in responding gives us an understanding that the two are different as shown in the dialogue ([Table 1](#)).

Table 1. American (A) and British (B)

B: <i>Hey, could you pass that on to me, please?</i>	A: <i>Yeah! Here you go!</i>
B: <i>Brilliant, thank you!</i>	A: <i>Yep!</i>
The Britishman repeated his "thank you" and was taken aback by the American's curt response. B: <i>I said thank you!</i>	A: <i>Yeah... I heard you the first time.</i>
B: <i>Oh, sorry... I just thought you said "yep".</i>	A: <i>I did</i>
B: <i>Oh, a bit rude... don't you think?</i>	A: <i>Is it?</i> (The American considered his response to be adequate and unlike the British said his response was "a bit rude").
B: No, it's fine... most people respond with "you're welcome" or "no problem", d'you know what i mean?	A: Oh, well... Thank you for educating me.
B: Oh, well... Thank you for educating me (Repeating what the American said).	A: Yep

The British think that "thank you" should be answered with "you're welcome" or "no problem" because most British people do this. While Americans are not like that, they return thanks in a more curt manner, which is considered perfectly normal. The British people in the dialogue above seem in disbelief and shock at the response given and become a bit emotional. "Individuals who come from honor cultures will react more strongly to insults that threaten their social image than will individuals from dignity cultures" ([Maitner et al., 2017](#)). According to Culpeper ([Culpeper, 2021](#)), the British consider politeness in speech acts important as "politeness speech acts that were particularly important in polite society."

The second video meme shows the cultural shocks experienced by British people while living in America. One of the existing culture shocks is the existence of a culture of giving small talk with other people even though Americans do not know that person.

Table 2. American (A) and British (B)

A: <i>Hi, good morning!</i>	B: <i>Do i know him?</i> (Confused face)
A: <i>Hey good morning my friend!</i>	B: <i>Why is everyone talking to me?</i> (More confused face)

And another similar case in a different version is when the British go shopping.

Table 3. American (A) and British (B)

<i>A: Can I help you finding anything sir?</i>	<i>B: No, thanks. Just browsing</i>
<i>A: T-shirts are 2 for 1 and I can show you the 50% off section</i>	<i>B: I'm fine really, thank you</i>
<i>A: Are you being helped?</i>	<i>B: Bloody hell!</i>
<i>B: I'd like to buy this please</i>	<i>A: The total is \$ 21.20</i>
<i>B: It said \$ 20 over there</i>	<i>A: That's without tax</i>
<i>B: How much is this one? (showing money coin)</i>	

Discussing where this meme was produced, this meme video was produced on the TikTok platform, which has a lot of users from all over the world with different cultures, proving that this meme circulates to many people from all over the world, with the hope that many of them will "understand" or know that circumstances like those in the video meme also happened to them. This video's intended audience consists of Americans and British who may have similar communication difficulties. Groups of people form national cultures, and as we all know, these groups will have their own different spiritual goals and cultural traditions, which will, in turn, shape their national culture in unique ways. Therefore, there will be significant distinctions between the cultures of the United Kingdom and the United States (Zhang, 2022). This video meme is about the cultural difference between Americans and British. The American is studying at Leicester in England. She informed an English buddy that where she lived, Las Vegas, was a cool location but not as cool as Paris. The British responded that Paris was generally fair, and then the conflict ensued:

Table 4. American (A) and British (B)

<i>A: If you said you went to Paris at my school in the US it's like really cool, anywhere from Europe really</i>	<i>B: Oh really? (Confused face)</i>
<i>A: Yeah. I mean people think it's really cool that I studying in Leicester</i>	<i>B: Really? (More confused face)</i>

Traveling or studying in Europe is cool and exciting to Americans. People's knowledge is another crucial component in intercultural communication (Jhaiyanuntana, Nomnian, 2020). Thus, because of the British's lack of knowledge of the group, this lack of knowledge can trigger communication conflicts (Peresada et. al., 2022; Sukma and Kartika, 2022). The fourth video meme shows the intercultural communication conflict between Americans and British in terms of differences in language or accents in English, resulting in a failure to fulfill the goal of communication (in this case, informing something). Concerning where this meme was created, it was created on the TikTok platform, which is connected to many people from various countries and cultures. This demonstrates that this meme is circulating among audiences who may be experiencing the same phenomenon as in the video. Both of their languages are English, but variances in vocabulary and accents cause intercultural communication issues. This fourth video meme depicts a conversation between an American and a British cleaning lady.

The conversation above highlights the existence of intercultural communication conflicts that disturb the discussion goals due to misunderstandings and misperceptions on one side. The term "hoover" is unfamiliar to the average American; in the United States, the term "vacuum" is used to refer to a similar kind of cleaning equipment. "Closet" is the American word for a small storage space, while "cupboard" is the British term for furniture with doors and shelves used for storing dishes, food, and

clothes. This conflict stems from the fact that American and British English have different word usage and accents. Despite the fact that the United States is also a country that speaks English, the culture in the United States is quite unique, and as a result, American English has developed (Zhang, 2022; Zhang, 2018). The Americans lack knowledge of British culture in terms of words and accents.

Table 5. American (A) and British (B)

B: Hello, I put the Hoover in the cupboard	A: You put the what in the cupboard?
B: The vacuum	A: Which cupboard?
B: In the office room	A: There are no cupboards in there?
B: The closet	A: Ok

Like some of the meme videos above, the fifth video meme also shows the intercultural communication conflict between Americans and the British. Even though the people in the video meme are in English, there is a conflict in the communication. The conflict occurs when a British guest experiences different cultures in an American restaurant. Thus, communication appears not achieved in informing or receiving information. This meme video is on the TikTok platform and is enjoyed by many people from different countries and cultures. TikTok is the most popular social media platform, with 689 million users from 150 countries and 100 million users in the US (Basch et al., 2021). Many viewers indicate that this meme video is circulating and being watched by people who experience a similar phenomenon. In detail, this video meme depicts a British guest having dinner at an American restaurant and conversing with a server.

Table 6. American (A) and British (B)

First Conversation	Second Conversation	Third Conversation
A: "Let me fill that up for you, sir." (pointing to an empty drinking glass)	B: "Please, can I have eggs, bacon, and home fries?"	B: "Thanks, cheerio!" (close the bill)
B: "No thanks, I don't want another one."	A: "And how would you like your eggs?"	A: (open the tip, speechless, and disappointed)
A: "It's free refills."	B: (Confused face)	
B: "Free..!" (laughs), "Really?" (speechless)	A: "Over easy, sunny side up?"	
	B: (More confused)	

In the video meme above, there are three conversations between a British guest and an American waiter. The three conversations indicated the existence of intercultural communication conflicts. In the first conversation, the waiter offered to refill the drink. However, the British guest thought refilling the drink was paid, and he did not want his drink refilled. Whereas in America, refilling drinks is free (Roy, 2021). There was a conflict in intercultural communication, in which the guest did not receive the information properly. He made mistakes in receiving information by laughing at the waiter and being shocked because he did not believe that refilling drinks were free. In the second conversation, the British guest asked the waiter for some food, and one of them was eggs. The waiter asked again about the level of doneness of the eggs. The British guest was confused by the question because, in its place of origin, there was no specific question about the

level of doneness of the eggs. With a face still confused, the British guest is again offered various choices regarding the level of doneness of the eggs. The American terms about the level of doneness of eggs confused him even more because he did not understand the term. Data based on YouGov America shows that Americans like to eat eggs in various ways, such as scrambled eggs, over easy, sunny side up, and eggs over medium (Ballard, 2019). Conflicts arose in intercultural communication because the British guest did not receive information well, and the waiter did not provide good information and became a misunderstanding. The British guest finished the dinner and closed the bill in the third conversation. When closing the bill, he gave a tip to the waiter. In America, it is imperative to tip, and there is a nominal standard for tipping. According to Burgess, tipping is becoming the norm in the US (Burgess, 2012). The standard tip in US restaurants is 15 to 20 % (Lynn, 2006). In this conversation, a conflict arose in intercultural communication. After the British guest gave a tip to the waiter, he didn't show any happiness. It indicates that the nominal tip given by the British guest was not up to par.

4. Results

This study has uncovered the cause and impact of intercultural communication conflict between Americans and British in a variety of video memes that circulate on the TikTok platform by utilizing visual methodologies. The memes in question were found on the TikTok platform.

According to the findings of this research, intercultural communication conflicts are portrayed in video memes as a difficulty or confusion in communication between Americans and British due to a number of different circumstances. A lack of intercultural knowledge among speakers, disparities in terminology and dialects, and variances in the purpose of the conversation are all examples of these problems. This leads to misconceptions and a restriction of intercultural communication, which can sometimes result in the goal of the conversation not being accomplished. For instance, the vocabulary used to describe the same thing in American English and British English might be somewhat different, which can lead to misunderstandings when trying to receive information in either of those languages.

5. Conclusion

The existence of communication conflict as it is expressed in intercultural society is reflected in social media; one of the platforms that can reflect the intercultural communication conflict is Tik Tok. Conflicts in intercultural communication are depicted as difficulties or barriers in achieving communication goals between two or more people of different cultures. The five TikTok meme videos that we analyzed in this article are only a small part of the intercultural communication conflict between Americans and the British. The occurrence of intercultural communication conflict in several situations can be caused by a variety of factors, such as one side's lack of cultural awareness, the existence of different goals in communication between each other, and the perception of one party who feels that they are superior to the other, as well as a lack of tolerance in the cultures of other countries. Conflicts that occur are also caused by a lack of knowledge about culture when visiting other countries. Because not everyone understands who a tourist is or is not. Thus, it can lead to misunderstandings because they do not receive information properly or do not provide information clearly.

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Published in the USA
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Issued since 2005.
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 1994-4195
2025. 21(1): 61-67

DOI: 10.13187/me.2025.1.61
<https://me.cherkasgu.press>



The Media Text vs Media Context: Semantics of Tropes

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of the semantics of tropes used in modern media discourse, taking into consideration their elocutionary and illocutionary features.

Traditional forms of social interaction have moved into the information space, where all the types of conflicts manifest themselves. These are the conflict of ideological and value attitudes, the conflict of moral values of the information society, etc. The addressee/author of the media text uses all possible stylistic means of representation to enhance the appeal. Tropes and toposes are used to express, among other things, the conflicting intention of the addressee/author of the media text, which is the purpose of the study of this article. The article scientific novelty is to extrapolate the study of tropes and toposes in the implementation of conflict intentions for the development of media literacy, identification conflict text and conflict context marks were analyzed. The study is based on traditional media linguistic methods linguistics as well as methods of content analysis and intent analysis, which can be considered to be effective in the field of media rhetoric and media stylistics.

The empirical material is current media texts presented in different traditional and Internet-mediated forms. Media literacy education is essential for a wide readership and should be a part of school education. Teaching such subjects is very important for potential addressees/collective addressees of a media discourse/text. These disciplines should be based on the classical and modern texts. It will ensure developing not only language sense and preventing and avoiding conflicts, but it will ensure developing media literacy. Media education is extremely useful for those who write in their blogs as well as in social networks.

Keywords: media discourse, standard, media communication, media context, topos, trope, evaluation, conflict.

1. Introduction

The media space naturally acts as a platform for comparing and fighting different values. Value conflicts are always contradictions reflecting the diversity of existing points of view.

Today, traditional forms of social interaction have moved into the information space, where all the types of conflicts manifest themselves. These are the conflict of ideological and value attitudes, the conflict of moral values of the information society, etc. Value “splits” and “divisions” are directly reflected in media toposes (in comparisons) and tropes (metaphor). The processes of interpretation and conceptualization are interrelated, and tropes such as comparisons and metaphors are integrative and basic for them.

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An important and relevant area of analysis is the study of tropes as markers of conflict/non-conflict communication (Ozbek et al., 2023; Volkova, 2018; Volkova et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2023), as well as the study of their role in the formation of contextually determined shades of semantics, taking into consideration their elocutionary and illocutionary features, important both for the addresser and addressees of media texts in terms of preventing possible conflicts. All this indicates the relevance of the study. The authors set a purpose to analyze the use of basic tropes such as metaphor and metonymy as well as toposes in media texts.

The article scientific novelty is to extrapolate the study of tropes and toposes in the implementation of conflict intentions for the development of media literacy, identification conflict text and conflict context marks were analyzed.

2. Materials and methods

The study is based on traditional media linguistic methods linguistics as well as methods of content analysis and intent analysis, which can be considered to be effective in the field of media rhetoric and media stylistics.

The empirical material is current media texts presented in various forms, both traditional and Internet-mediated. The empirical material is current media texts presented in different traditional and Internet-mediated forms.

3. Discussion

Quantitative evaluation is considered to be the evaluation of an intellectual (or rational) type, however, it is obvious that dividing evaluations (Kang et al., 2022) into emotional and rational (Brusenskaya, Kulikova, 2018) is conventional (Kang et al., 2022), because, as we can see from the examples, emotional (on the scale of good/bad) (Lane, 2020; Muzykant et al., 2023; Shin et al., 2022; Shin et al., 2022) and rational (in terms of quantity) (Brusenskaya et al., 2018; Brusenskaya et al., 2021) are closely connected in evaluation (both *ordy* (hordes) and *tonny* (tons) are unambiguous pejoratives).

The heuristic functions of the main tropes (Kayal, Saha, 2023; Langer, Gruber, 2021) and their ability to provide a broader view of the object are well known (Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2015; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2018; Fedorov et al., 2019; Gálik et al., 2024; Kulikova, 2022; Kulikova, Barabash, 2024a; Kulikova, Barabash, 2024b; Kulikova, Brusenskaya, 2024; Macgilchrist et al., 2020).

The possibilities of tropes for explicating value “separations” have been less studied (Fedorov, 2001; Fedorov, 2009; Fedorov, 2010; Fedorov et al., 2014; Fedorov, Chelysheva, 2002; Stoumpos et al., 2023; Švelch, 2022). Meanwhile, the studied material proves, tropes are often used to position, compare and contrast social values and to explicate conflict.

According to G.G. Khazagerov (Khazagerov, 2020), in the field of eloquence today, due to the visualization of culture and the predominance of cyberspace, it is necessary to pay close attention to metonymy. It itself and the phenomena correlating with it (both verbal and non-verbal ones), which are close to the phenomenon of metonymy, for example, memes, semantic prototypes, model examples, etc. are extremely important for modern communication. For example, metonymy as an expressive concise unit in the media:

“Therefore, to talk about the ugliness of business is to talk about the ugliness of the whole society. Is it necessary? I think it's very necessary. Because there is nothing more useful than a direct look at things (also a wonderful expression from “Oblomov”) and at oneself. Any improvement begins with the recognition of imperfection. Starting with the compilation of the defective statement” (Voevodina, 2011).

In this context, the author expresses her intention using a jargon unit:

“But what the EGE (abbreviation used for Unified State Exam) completely destroyed it is general secondary education. He's gone! Graduates of the school in the last form, and the most prudent ones in the last two or even three ones, learn only those subjects that they will take for the Unified State Exam. The rest are simply “zabivayut”) (“scored” – jargons verb used in Present Tense, plural). A pragmatic mother mentored her daughter in front of me: “Stop doing nonsense, don't waste your time”. “Nonsense” is physics, chemistry, biology, in which her daughter did not need the Unified State Exam. And the teachers get into the position: they're not animals. Ignorance of non-Unified State Exam subjects is not strictly questioned” (Voevodina, 2017)

The author/addressee of this media text uses the plural form of the noun “woman” in the direct meaning, and the singular form to express a generalized collective meaning:

“What a magnificent irony of history! Women began working outside the home in an effort to overcome their second-rate. But it was through mass work that they demonstrated this second-class status in the most vivid way.

Everything a woman does is marked by imitation. It is probably more correct to say not second-rate, but secondary nature. All female wisdom is a rehash of male wisdom. Women turn out to be good popularizers of someone's ideas, translators - in the broadest sense of the word. They often turn out to be good translators in the true sense of the word.

In their work, women often turn out to be what nature prescribes for them. They are friends, assistants of men. If you think about it, that's exactly what they are. Every great professional man has a gaggle of female fans around him” (Voevodina, 2015).

A modern media text is impossible without the topos of comparison. Indirect comparison in modern media can form sarcasm in relation to the described phenomena:

“In general, natural science subjects are best suited for the Unified State Exam. The humanitarian ones are worse. After all, there is a lot of subjective, unsubstantiated in humanitarian subjects.

The Russian exam includes questions on speech culture: this, in my opinion, is good. But whether a student needs to know the names of different figures of speech, such as litotes, parcellations or epiphora– I am not sure. That is, it is not harmful to mention this in the classroom, but it is much more useful to develop thoughtful reading and writing skills. This is exactly what schoolchildren lack. And no wonder! Today's pupil writes very few texts and reads very few of them. How was it before? Rewrite and insert the missing letters, or underline the adverbs, and replace direct speech with indirect speech. In any case, it was necessary to rewrite, and visual memory was reinforced by motor memory, when the hand itself knows how to write. Now children have ready-made “workbooks” where they insert letters directly into the text, connect the necessary words with arrows, and do not completely rewrite everything. As a result, they don't remember how to spell words. They're just words that aren't regulated by any rules, and there are plenty of them in our language” (Voevodina, 2017).

Indirect comparison in modern media can form sarcasm in relation to the described phenomena.

4. Results

Ironic modality prevails in modern media discourse in all genres except purely informational ones:

“By the way, I am very familiar with this “generation”: these are my young employees. Yes, they often do not know what, in the opinion of the older generation, they should know. For example, how many world wars there were. They are monstrously illiterate: I keep removing misspelled ads from the wall – and this is what passed through the filter of a computer spell checker. I can't imagine what would have happened if they had written by hand. But every generation has its own knowledge.

Do you need perfect spelling today if your computer checks it? I don't know. My grandmother used to say, “If I read a misspelled text, I don't trust the content”. I admit it: me too. But how true is that? Today's young people have some knowledge, skills and abilities of their own, called “competencies” in the Western way. Which my grandmother and I probably won't have. A very unpleasant story is emerging (Voevodina, 2017)

These examples clearly show the implicit essence of the negative evaluation contained in irony, the recognition of which is based on presuppositions common to all recipients. The authors are ironic about what, in their opinion, needs criticism, and they undoubtedly have an impact on the way readers think and behave.

The figure of irony is based on the conflict “between the pseudo-positive illocution of an explicit statement and negative extralinguistic parameters” (Sleptsova, 2008: 8). Irony is not only as good as direct denunciation, invective, but also gives an increase in meaning, since the ironic narrative explicitly presents a positive (deliberate, fake, false) evaluation, and its opposite is read. In the author's point of view, it is negative, but true evaluation.

The tradition in studying tropes and toposes as an object of rhetoric is very serious based on well-known ancient and modern researches. However tropes and toposes as markers of conflict communication, their conflict ability in addressee worldview creation have not presented yet. For example, how these potencies are realized in media comparisons:

“One of the exam innovations that came out of a leaky bag under the new minister is this: at the end of the 9th form, a pupil must demonstrate the ability to verbally speak in their native language on a given topic. It must be understood that a revived essay is responsible for the ability to express oneself in writing” (Voevodina, 2017)

There is type of comparison in the nomenclature of tropes, as comparatia in which similarities are found between distant objects.

Implicitness is a universal property of linguistic signs and it is expressed through multilevel units of language/speech – from word forms, combinations of words, actual phrases, sentences/utterances, as well as texts.

As is known, the plan of content and the plan of expression (Algavi et al., 2021) act as oppositional, which correspond to the implicitness/explicitness of information, in the latter case these are implicit meanings.

When information is explicit, dictionary definitions of language units act as the basis, and new meanings/implicit information are determined by the media context.

According to V.Z. Demyankov: “It is rare for linguistic theory today to disagree with the following basic idea of the interpretive approach: meanings do not exist by themselves, they are neither “contained” in words and sentences nor “extracted” from them, but are they are “calculated” by the interpreter based on the properties of speech and its context” (Demyankov, 2006: 49). Because, as a rule, words and utterances, in addition to direct, may have indirect, figurative meanings it forms implicit semantics. Implicit semantics is decoded depending on the recipient’s worldview and background.

According to T.A. Vorontsova (Vorontsova, 2006), the technique of rejecting an identifying nomination is a frequent and regular way to implicitly express negative evaluation towards an interlocutor, for example, in different genres of media texts (interviews, talk shows, communication in the blogosphere, taking into consideration the formation of hypertext in the Internet media space through comments. In the public version of media discourse, the following types of such nominations are used: nominations by gender, by profession/occupation, by age. For example:

“A rabotnica (worker – female) in a red kerchief, a deputy, a delegate, komsomolka-vuzovka (Komsomol-member of the university – female) – these are the signs of the new age. Of course, there were many housewives, but the ideal, the example, the dream was there, at work. As they taught a woman could reach any status: become an engineer (male, standard form), scientist (male, standard form), deputy (male, standard form)<...> There was nothing to say about the medichki (medics – female, colloquial) with the uchitel'nicy (teachers – female), they were all there <...> There were a lot of tetki-inzhenershi (aunts-engineers – female, colloquial, contemptuous form) <...> My mother was a inzhener-mekhanik (mechanical engineer – male, standard form), and my mother-in-law was a inzhener-khimik (chemical engineer – male, standard form)” (Voevodina, 2015).

The complication of semantics due to the connotative components that are able to mark negative/positive evaluation can be formed due to the media context, including in the broad context of the situation.

“Modern media discourse is characterized by conflictogenicity, a tendency to violate communicative, ethical, and legal standards of communication in public discourse, the use of means of speech aggression and manipulation, and therefore issues of linguistic security and communicative ethics, especially in online media, are acute” (Kulikova, 2020: 5).

The asymmetric dualism of the linguistic sign as a universal property of the language system causes incomplete correspondence and even mismatch of the plan of expression and the plan of content. The lack of isomorphism between the signifier and the signified in language generates such a cardinal property of language as implicitness ensuring to avoid direct negative evaluation.

5. Conclusion

The complication of meanings in media discourse also occurs taking into considerations presuppositions (Shilina et al., 2023), since this concept includes different implicit meanings and shades of meanings that are outside the verbally represented units, but connected with them by the context as a whole based on linguistic connections, as well as associative ones, which determines an accurate and complete understanding of information and contextual interpretation, intentionally selected by the media text author.

Utterances with implicit semantics implement non-iconic methods of language coding. The research of evaluation in non-conflict, so-called “soft” communication is highly relevant. It is important for a journalist/author/ addresser of a media text to subtly nuance a thought, to know the so-called “soft”, non-conflicting evaluation, to know a rich palette of rhetorical/stylistic means of language for creating a pragmatic effect in media communication.

Teaching such subjects is very important for potential addressees/collective addressees of a media discourse/text. These disciplines should be based on the classical and modern texts. It will ensure developing not only language sense and preventing and avoiding conflicts, but it will ensure developing media literacy. Media education is extremely useful for those who write in their blogs as well as in social networks.

Media literacy is extremely useful for a wide readership, and, in our opinion, it should become part of school education (for example in the form of electives or integrative courses of additional education, etc.).

First education of pupils at school, teaching them in Russian and native languages, as well as in literature can prepare the important media literacy base. Since the impact of media on all the spheres is getting more and it is necessary for everyone to master media literacy, moreover socialization of personality at any stage is impossible without media literacy.

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Published in the USA
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Issued since 2005.
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 1994-4195
2025. 21(1): 68-77

DOI: 10.13187/me.2025.1.68
<https://me.cherkasgu.press>



The Image of Family and Family Education in Soviet Feature Films during the Perestroika Era

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Abstract

The article focuses on the portrayal of family and family education in Soviet feature films during the Perestroika era (the mid-1980s – the early 1990s) which reflected broader societal shifts occurring in the Soviet Union. The Perestroika era marked a period of profound transformation for Soviet cinema too. The way family and education were depicted in feature films during that time offers deep insights into the complexities of Soviet life during a period of political, ideological and cultural transformations. Filmmakers used cinema as a tool for criticising the flaws of the Soviet system, highlighting such issues as bureaucracy, corruption, and economic inefficiency. As the country was moving towards greater openness and reforms, film industry became a space for questioning and exploring the intricacies of family life, generational conflict, and the role of family education. Family was a recurring theme, frequently used as a microcosm for socio-cultural changes but the focus shifted from idealized portrayals of collective Soviet society to more nuanced, individual-centered storylines that emphasized personal freedom, rebellion, and the search for identity. The generation gap also drastically aggravated: with increased freedom of expression, feature films depicted the tension between the older generation and the younger generation. Also, Perestroika-era feature films explored such themes as emotional alienation, marital breakdowns, and the pressure of social expectations on individuals. Film characters, particularly children and teenagers, were often depicted as questioning authority, whether that of parents, teachers, or the state itself. On the other hand, this theme emphasized the idea that, in times of political or economic turmoil, a supportive family could be the key to personal and collective survival.

Keywords: family, family upbringing, media, media text, media education, feature films, Perestroika, glasnost, reforms.

1. Introduction

The Soviet film industry during Perestroika (the mid-1980s – the early 1990s) underwent significant changes, reflecting broader political, social, and economic reforms introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of glasnost and Perestroika. Those reforms aimed to introduce more freedom of expression, reduce censorship, and address the inefficiencies of the Soviet system. "It is well known that the main "Perestroika" event of 1986 was the Fifth Congress of Soviet Cinematographers, which took place in May 1986. The sensation of this congress was the alternative election of delegates to this congress, due to which many "cinematographic generals" were not elected. At the congress there were a lot of very sharp speeches for those times, which contrasted with the former order of any congresses in the era of stagnation" (Fedorov, 2022: 577).

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The changes had a profound impact on Soviet cinema, which was traditionally controlled by the state, both in terms of content and production. Under M. Gorbachev, Perestroika was a comprehensive attempt to reform the Soviet Union's political and economic systems, while glasnost allowed for greater transparency and openness in cultural and political discourse.

The period marked a shift from strict state control over mass media and entertainment to more liberalized policies. This allowed for previously censored topics to be explored and, for the first time in many years, filmmakers were able to address issues like the flaws of Soviet society, the impact of Stalinism, the Soviet war in Afghanistan, and generational conflicts.

Also, the Perestroika era marked a departure from the more conventional, state-approved cinematic style that had dominated Soviet film production before. Filmmakers began experimenting with visual styles, incorporating elements of surrealism, existentialism, and modernism into their work.

The films made during Perestroika played a pivotal role in the transformation of Soviet cinema since the liberalization of the film industry opened up a new era of creative possibilities and critical reflection on Soviet society. These films did not only reflect the changing political and social landscape of the late Soviet period but also contributed to shaping the post-Soviet film industry.

The article focuses on the portrayal of family and family education in Soviet feature films during the Perestroika era (the mid-1980s – the early 1990s) which reflected broader societal shifts occurring in the Soviet Union. The way family and family education were depicted in feature films during that time offers deep insights into the complexities of Soviet life during a period of political, ideological and cultural transformation. "At different historical periods in Russia, feature films served as a platform for expressing and promoting ideological ideas, reflecting public sentiment, political changes and cultural values" (Mikhaleva, Lozovitskaya, 2024: 138). During Perestroika, Soviet cinema reflected the internal national contradictions and challenges within the family structure and education system. Therefore, these films often portrayed families grappling with the breakdown of traditional values, economic instability, and the ideological conflict between Soviet norms and the growing influence of Western ideas.

The Perestroika era marked the decline of the Soviet Union and the beginning of a shift in how feature films portrayed both the family and education. The socio-cultural changes spurred by M. Gorbachev's reforms allowed filmmakers to explore previously taboo subjects, including the problems within the family structure, and the psychological impact of living in a state-controlled society.

2. Materials and methods

The material of our study is audiovisual media texts on the topic of family and family education. The main method is a comparative-hermeneutic analysis of Soviet feature films of the Perestroika period (the mid-1980s – the early 1990s) devoted to family issues (including: analysis of stereotypes, ideological analysis, identification analysis, iconographic analysis, plot analysis, character analysis).

In our study, we analysed Russian (Chelysheva, 2005, 2017, 2024; Chelysheva, Sapozhnikova, 2024; Dmitrieva, 2020; Fedorov et al., 2018; Fedorov, 2022, 2024; Gileva, 2019; Ianushko, 2022; Petrova, 2021; Weisfeld, 1988) and foreign scientific findings (Beumers, 1999; Beumers, Zvonkine, 2017; Bruzzi, 2005; Johnson, Stishova, 2013; Kim, 2022; Lalande, 1995; Rifkin, 2002; Taylor, 2004) devoted to the analysis of family and family education in the mirror of Soviet feature films. In addition, the following research methods were used: analysis and synthesis of articles and monographs on the topic of the study, generalization and classification.

3. Discussion

The issues of family and family education in Soviet feature films of the Perestroika period in the USSR have been studied by Russian (Chelysheva, Mikhaleva, 2022; Chelysheva, Mikhaleva, 2024; Chelysheva, Sapozhnikova, 2024; Dmitrieva, 2020; Dondurey, 1996; Fedorov, 2017; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2024; Gileva, 2019; Ianushko, 2022; Isakava, 2009; Liderman, 2004; Mikhaleva, 2024; Mikhaleva, Lozovitskaya, 2024; Muryukina, Voychenko, 2021; Petrova, 2021; Sadovsky, 2016; Tanis, 2019; Tselykh, 2021) and foreign (Johnson, Stishova, 2013; Rifkin, 2002; Taylor, 2004; Todd, 2017) scholars.

Contemporary researches emphasise the vital importance of analysing feature films focused on family and family upbringing for education of children and youth: "The use of the possibilities of

feature cinema in psychological and pedagogical activities can help solve problems of crisis phenomena in the family, overcome conflicts in parent-child relationships, form constructive models of intra-family behaviour, foster a value-based attitude towards the family and parental responsibility” (Chelysheva, Sapozhnikova, 2024: 32). Moreover, the relevance of family and family education in modern conditions is “due to profound social and cultural changes, the influence of technology, economic instability and the transformation of family structures. Modern parents and teachers face new challenges of the time, requiring the adaptation of educational models that take into account the influence of digital technologies, intercultural aspects and socio-economic factors. In this context, family education continues to be the basis for moral values and the full development of the individual” (Mikhaleva, 2024: 629).

Meanwhile, a quantitative and genre analysis of Russian feature films about family education conducted by I.V. Chelysheva and G.V. Mikhaleva shows that “a significant decline in the number of feature films about family and family upbringing was noted during the Perestroika period (1986–1991). That, in our opinion, was due to the crisis and difficulties that led to a reduction in the number of films and a general decrease in the pace of film production in Russia in that historical period” (Mikhaleva, Chelysheva, 2024: 167). On the other hand, “the Perestroika period was characterized by a radical rethinking of Soviet film classics” (Fedorov, 2022: 580).

When analysing the “turning point” in the development of family values during 1990–1994 in Russia, V.A. Uvarova found out that “the specified time interval is characterized by a sharp change in ranking indicators for almost all value parameters. For example, the value element “children” moved from the second position in 1985–1989 to the fifth in 1990–1994, and the issue of the material well-being of the family, on the contrary, became more relevant, rising from the seventh position (1985–1989) to the third (1990–1994). This phenomenon is not accidental: it is directly related to a characteristic moment in the socio-economic development of Russia – the beginning of Perestroika” (Uvarova, 2004: 14).

The situation in youth education also left much to be desired: “Everywhere, education of parents and young people preparing to marry has almost completely ceased. The negative trend of pedagogical nihilism and self-removal of parents from participation in intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic education has intensified from the moment the child enters school. The process of personality education is especially complicated in “dysfunctional families”, where drunkenness, dependency, and the semi-criminal lifestyle of parents often turn out to be the prevailing factors affecting the child” (Davedyanova, 1995: 6).

As for the feature film production during Perestroika, it “went down in the history of feature films as a difficult and ambiguous period, accompanied by a tense situation in society, the emergence of new problems, fundamental changes in the lives of the country’s population, etc. A departure from old canons, a course towards Perestroika and glasnost, the fall of the Iron Curtain, a sharp impoverishment of a significant part of the population, a significantly increased number of the unemployed, criminalization – these and other factors were reflected in films on the school theme” (Chelysheva, 2017).

In addition, the transition to a market model of cinema showed that “the new system was not ready to work in conditions of constant orientation towards audience demand. With the abolition of censorship and the levelling of the taboo of eroticism in Soviet cinema, showing the naked body becomes almost the main way to attract moviegoers. However, the aesthetic tradition of depicting nudity in Soviet cinema has not yet been developed, and the moviegoer does not have the experience of watching, evaluating and discussing erotic episodes in films. As a result, regardless of the assessment, the viewer uses the “Soviet” optics of perception when interpreting a film, often referring to the educational discourse of cinema art, as well as its mimetic function. In the event that reliance on familiar interpretative patterns and cultural schemes turns out to be impossible, the viewer refuses to participate in the contemporary film process, turning his gaze to the past” (Tanis, 2019: 26).

Screen violence also increased in Perestroika film production: “During the transition period, the spectacle of violence became, in essence, the calling card of mass film on Russian screens. Discussions about this broke out in society. Two sides came together in them – those who filmed and distributed this kind of spectacle, and those who believed that it had a dysfunctional effect on viewers – children and teenagers first and foremost. One side demanded social regulation of the production and distribution of films with violence, the other denied such a need” (Tarasov, 2017: 103).

4. Results

The Perestroika period feature films (the mid-1980s – the early 1990s) about family and family education.

Historical context (dominant concepts: media agencies, media categories, media representations and media audiences).

a) features of the historical period of media texts' production, market conditions that contributed to the idea, the process of creating media texts, the degree of influence of political and social events on the media text.

Prior to Perestroika, the Soviet film industry was largely controlled by the state, and all feature films were subject to strict censorship. The state dictated the content of films, ensuring they aligned with socialist ideals. With Perestroika, M.S. Gorbachev initiated reforms that caused greater decentralization in the film industry: "The economic reform also plays an important role in changing the country during Perestroika. The goal of the reform is the transition to a market economy. After the Congress of Cinematographers of the USSR in 1986, criticism of the previous leadership was allowed, the opportunity was given to work in new film industries, and to develop new programs. Cinematographers were among the first to rush into Perestroika" (Dmitrieva, 2020).

Hence independent film production began to emerge, and filmmakers had more creative freedom than ever before: "Glasnost, the laws adopted on human rights, on political parties, on the press during the Perestroika era – all these factors had a positive effect on family journalism in the USSR. The entire media system of this period changed significantly, but the overwhelming majority of publications still belonged to the CPSU. The most important thing that happened with Perestroika is that the topic of family became more discussed and open" (Gileva, 2019: 127). This caused a flourishing of diverse genres, artistic expression, and experimentation in Soviet cinema. Moreover, the reduction of censorship allowed filmmakers to explore a broader range of themes, many of which had been previously off-limits such as historical repressions, social and political critique, individualism versus collectivism, and generational conflicts.

On the other hand, as the Soviet Union moved towards decentralization and economic restructuring, state funding for the film industry began to decline. This financial strain provoked a decrease in the production of high-budget films and the rise of smaller, independent projects. While this led to a diversification of content, it also created financial difficulties for the industry as a whole.

b) the way the knowledge of real historical events of a particular period enhances the understanding of the given media text, examples of historical references in the media text.

It is worth mentioning that during the Perestroika period, filmmakers used cinema as a tool for criticising the flaws of the Soviet system, highlighting such issues as bureaucracy, corruption, and economic inefficiency. That is why the focus shifted from idealized portrayals of collective Soviet society to more nuanced, individual-centered stories that emphasized personal freedom, rebellion, and the search for identity.

The problem of the generation gap also drastically aggravated: with increased freedom of expression, feature films began to depict the tension between the older generation who had lived through Stalinist repression and Soviet socialism, and the younger generation who were more open to reforms and changes.

It turned out that film directors were influenced by Western cinema, particularly the feature films of the 1970s and 1980s, which often dealt with such themes as alienation, rebellion, and existential crisis. Thus, this Western influence helped bring new aesthetic values to Soviet film production.

While Perestroika brought about greater freedom of expression, it was also a time of profound uncertainty and social upheaval. The liberalization of film production mirrored the larger transformations occurring in Soviet society, as people grappled with the end of the Soviet system and the beginning of a new political and economic order. "The reforms of the political system of the USSR during Perestroika became the most important for the future of the state. They had a huge number of shortcomings, their opponents appeared, wanting to return to Stalin's order, but these reforms became a big step towards liberation from the existing one-party system and totalitarianism. After the reforms were carried out, a democratic system was practically established in the country: in 1989, elections of people's deputies were held, in 1990 M.S. Gorbachev began to occupy the post of President of the USSR" (Dmitrieva, 2020).

Socio-cultural, ideological, religious context (dominant concepts: media agencies, media categories, media representations and media audience).

a) *ideology, directions, goals, objectives, world outlook, the concepts of the authors of these media texts in the socio-cultural context; ideology, culture of the world, depicted in the media text.*

The theme of the family in Perestroika-era feature films often depicted generational conflicts, where the younger generation sought new freedoms and ideals, in contrast to the older generation's adherence to Soviet traditions. These feature films presented family education as a space for contradictions, reflection, and adaptation. "In pursuit of profit, artists (and not only) begin to publish low-quality works popular with the masses, various kinds of fiction (erotica, fantasy, detective stories), both in literature and in theatrical art and cinema. According to some researchers, such a trend in cultural development leads to the spiritual impoverishment of society and a decline in morality. The situation was difficult for young people at this time. The gap between young people and the older generation becomes more noticeable than ever. Cardinal differences in the values of generations lead to numerous conflicts. A final break occurs between creativity and socialist realism. The study of various aspects of personality comes to the forefront" (Dmitrieva, 2020).

There was also a focus on more realistic and gritty depictions of Soviet life. Gone were the idealized portrayals of heroes and happy families working together for the good of the state. Films began to focus on the complexities and struggles of individual characters, as well as on social problems that were previously ignored or avoided (*Odinokaya zhenshchina zhelayet poznamoit'sya/Lonely Woman Seeks Lifetime Companion*, 1986; *God telyonka/Year of the Calf*, 1986; *Interdevotchka/Intergirl*, 1989).

The portrayal of family in feature films released in that period highlighted the erosion of the traditional Soviet family model. In earlier Soviet cinema, families were often idealized, and films emphasized collectivism, the role of the mother or father as a heroic figure, and the importance of family education. However, during Perestroika, there was a shift towards more critical portrayals of family life (*Gde vash syn?/Where is Your Son?*, 1989; *Zontik dlya novobrachnykh/An Umbrella for Lovers*, 1986).

On the other hand, "due to the fact that the hierarchy of values of the original canons was violated and competing value systems were created, a new attitude towards historically heightened values and phenomena was formed in culture. This is clearly observed in the historical images of Perestroika cinema and their artistic interpretation" (Kolesnikova, 2021: 2031-2032).

b) *the world outlook of the characters, depicted in the media text.*

Feature films began exploring such themes as emotional coolness, marital breakdowns, and the pressure of societal expectations on individuals (*Den' bumazhnogo zmeya/The Kite Day*, 1986). Characters, particularly children and teenagers, were often depicted as questioning authority, whether that of parents, teachers, or the state itself (*Vasha doch' Aleksandra/Your Daughter Alexandra*, 1986; *Nochnyye zabavy/Night Fun*, 1991). This reflected a broader trend of questioning Soviet authority and ideology.

Perestroika brought with it a growing emphasis on personal freedoms and individualism, which were reflected in the films of this era. Family education, in particular, began to focus more on personal development and less on collective ideologies. Feature films such as *Igla/The Needle* (1988) or *Assa* (1987) explored themes of personal choice, rebellion, and the search for identity, often through the lens of family relationships. The younger generation in these feature films sought to break free from the rigid structures imposed by the previous era, including the family environment.

The portrayal of gender roles within the family also evolved during this period. Traditional Soviet feature films often presented women as mothers and wives in a heroic light, fulfilling their roles within a collective socialist framework. However, during Perestroika, screen women were shown as more complex characters, experiencing personal dilemmas and questioning their roles in both the family and society (*Odinokaya zhenshchina zhelayet poznamoit'sya/Lonely Woman Seeks Lifetime Companion*, 1986; *Rebro Adama/Adam's Rib*, 1990; *Podval/The Basement*, 1990). Films increasingly depicted women as independent individuals, struggling to reconcile personal desires with societal expectations, while men were often shown as more passive or conflicted in their roles as husbands and fathers. For instance, *Malen'kaya Vera / Little Vera* (1988) by Vasili Pichul. This feature film was groundbreaking for its portrayal of the struggles of a working-class family, as well as the exploration of sexual freedom and youth rebellion. It became one of the first Soviet films to depict realistic, often uncomfortable family and social situations.

The main stereotype of success in this world.

In Perestroika-era feature films about family and family education, which spanned from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s in the Soviet Union, success was multifaceted, often reflecting the complex societal changes of the time, with a focus on personal fulfilment, material success, and the evolving role of family as both a source of support or a battleground for ideological conflicts, but the main stereotype of success often centered around the clash between traditional Soviet values and the new, more individualistic, and consumer-driven attitudes that were emerging. This period of political and economic reforms brought about significant socio-cultural transformations, and this was vividly reflected in film production.

Despite the upheaval of Perestroika, family remained a central institution in these films. Success in family life was often portrayed as a sense of unity and togetherness, with strong familial bonds providing emotional support during the times of crisis. This theme emphasized the idea that, in times of political or economic turmoil, a supportive family could be the key to personal and collective survival (*Bez syna ne prikhodi/Don't Come Without Your Son*, 1986.). With Perestroika's openness to the outside world and the rise of consumerism, feature films depicted characters caught between former Soviet values (such as self-sacrifice and collectivism) and the desire for individual success, material wealth, and personal freedom. Hence many feature films portrayed these internal and external struggles, and the plot often involved finding a balance between these competing ideals.

As for portraying gender roles, the family became a significant theme during this period. Women's roles were evolving, with some films depicting women as active agents in achieving family success, rather than just as mothers and wives. Success in the family often involved women navigating both traditional domestic roles and new professional aspirations.

On the other hand, not all feature films presented idealized family models. Many Perestroika-era feature films explored the breakdown of traditional family units, resulting in divorces, generational conflicts, and the estrangement caused by the new economic and political realities. In these cases, success was often about survival and adaptation rather than the preservation of ideal family unity (*Zabytaya melodiya dlya fleyty/A Forgotten Tune for the Flute*, 1987; *Avariya – doch' menta/Avariya – The Cop's Daughter*, 1989; *Byushiy papa, byushiy syn/Ex-Dad, Ex-Son*, 1989).

Structure and methods of narration in the media text (dominant concepts: media categories, media technologies, media languages, media representations)

a) *location and action time of a media text*

Many of the feature films from this period are set in urban environments, particularly in Moscow and Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), which were central to Soviet cultural and political life. However, rural settings also appear in feature films that underline the contrast between former Soviet traditions and the new societal changes. Rural settings can represent the persistence of Soviet ideals, resistance to change, or nostalgia for a more stable past (*Osenkiye sny/Autumn Dreams*, 1987).

b) *the environment typical for the media texts, everyday items*

Family life in Perestroika-era feature films often takes place in modest Soviet apartments, which reflect the reality of daily life under the communist system. These settings also emphasize such themes as scarcity, generational tension, and the challenges of social mobility. The apartment – particularly in a shared or communal form – becomes a key backdrop in exploring family life, personal aspirations, and disillusionment. Nevertheless, some feature films explore how Soviet families, especially the younger generation, try to imagine a better future beyond the limitations of the Soviet state. These ambitions often clash with the reality of economic struggles, bureaucratic inertia, and the remnants of totalitarian control (*My – vashi deti/We Are Your Children*, 1987).

c) *genre modifications.*

Most films on the topic of family and family education were shot in the genre of drama or melodrama, but comedies and children's feature films were also created (Mikhaleva, Chelysheva, 2024).

d) *(stereotypical) methods of depicting reality, typology of characters (character traits, clothing, physique, vocabulary, facial expressions, gestures, the presence or absence of a stereotypical manner of characters in the media text):*

- *the age of characters:* the age range of children is 7-17. The age of the adult characters (parents, grandparents, etc.) can be different;
- *the education level:* characters can have any level of education;

– *social status, occupation*: working-class families, emerging middle-class families and intelligentsia. The professions of characters are different.

– *the marital status of the characters*: adult characters are either married or single (or divorced); single parents also appear in films.

– *appearance, clothes, body build, features of their characters, vocabulary*.

The film characters reflected the main social types of their time. Their appearance, clothes, physique and character were closely connected with the realities of Soviet life of that period.

– *a significant change in the life of media characters, the challenge that the characters face*.

Significant changes in the lives of film characters often involve the destabilization of traditional family models due to the social, political, and economic cataclysms during the period of Perestroika which marked the transition from the rigid Soviet system to a more open and reform-oriented society. It caused uncertainty, anxiety, and a clash of values, particularly within the family circle. Some characters experienced job loss, financial instability, or the need to adapt to new work environments, which affected their ability to maintain traditional family roles. Younger characters, exposed to new Western ideas and the changing landscape of the Soviet Union, clashed with older generations who clung to traditional values. These tensions often manifested in the relationship between parents and children. Some characters were torn between old Soviet values and the allure of Western freedom and individualism. Consequently, that provoked both internal and external conflict within families, especially as new opportunities and challenges arise (*Ty u menya odna/You Are the Only One*, 1993). The economic and social instability forced families to adapt or risk breaking down. For some families, this meant adjusting to new roles or even disbanding entirely as a result of strained relationships or financial hardship.

e) *solving the problem*.

Characters often resolved their conflicts through dialogue, empathy, and a mutual understanding that both old and new values could coexist. Despite the challenges, many of the feature films end on a hopeful note, with families coming together to face a new future. The characters often realize that familial support is crucial in navigating the uncertain terrain of post-Soviet life (*God telyonka/Year of the Calf*, 1986). In some films, the solution involved fully embracing change and breaking away from the past. This could mean the acceptance of new family structures, such as divorce or remarriage, or adopting new economic practices to survive in the emerging market economy (*Pokrovskiye vorota/The Pokrovsky Gates*, 1982; *Malen'kaya Vera/Little Vera*, 1988).

5. Conclusion

The Perestroika era marked a period of profound transformation for Soviet cinema. Filmmakers were granted greater creative freedom, which allowed them to explore previously censored subjects and experiment with new styles and themes. The films produced during this time reflected the broader social and political changes occurring in the Soviet Union and provided a unique lens through which to understand the challenges of the late Soviet period. However, the decline of state funding and the impending collapse of the Soviet Union meant that the cinematic revolution of Perestroika was short-lived. The legacy of these films, however, had a lasting impact on the Russian film industry in the post-Soviet era.

Perestroika-era Soviet feature films, which emerged in the 1980s during the period of political and economic reforms under Mikhail Gorbachev, often focused on the tensions within Soviet society as it confronted the challenges of modernization, openness, and the collapse of the old system. The family was one of the central themes, representing a special microcosm in which broader social transformations were reflected. The location and time period in these films reveal the complex political, social, and cultural climate of the time.

The image of family and family education in Soviet feature films during the Perestroika era reflects the broader cultural and social shifts taking place in the Soviet Union. As the country moved toward greater openness and reform, cinema became a space for questioning and exploring the complexities of family life, generational conflict, and the role of family education. These films both criticized and reflected the changing values of Soviet society, marking a significant departure from earlier portrayals of idealized family life and state-controlled education.

The characters in feature films released in the period under study undergo personal and collective transformations. The societal changes of Perestroika forced individuals to reexamine their roles, relationships, and personal beliefs. Family life, once governed by the Soviet ideology,

was now being tested by the loosening of control from the state, the influx of Western ideas, economic restructuring, and political reforms. The challenges faced by characters in these films often mirror the confusion, frustration, and hope that Perestroika itself embodied.

6. Acknowledgements

This research is funded by the grant of the Russian Science Foundation (RSF, project No. 24-28-00032) at the Rostov State University of Economics. Project theme: “The image of family and family upbringing in Russian feature films and prospects for media education (1920-2020)”. Head of the project is I.V. Chelysheva.

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Published in the USA
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Issued since 2005.
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 1994-4195
2025. 21(1): 78-90

DOI: 10.13187/me.2025.1.78
<https://me.cherkasgu.press>



The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Fostering Information and Media Literacies at the University (Case Study of English Classes)

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Abstract

The phenomenon of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is understudied due to the ongoing and unstoppable process of its development. Consequently, AI literacy will constantly evolve and to be AI literate individuals will have to master not only basic but some new competences. The aim of this paper is to systematize available knowledge of AI to enhance information and media literacies in education with the help of AI concentrating on a few prompt frameworks actively used in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. To achieve this, the authors analysed recent research in this domain, experimented with three prompt frameworks (namely, RACEF, RISEN, and Co-STAR), found out the advantages and disadvantages of AI and denoted prompt frameworks, and summarized the best practices for using them in the classroom. The authors came to the conclusion that AI literacy is embedded in information and media literacies, all these literacies are united by possessing critical thinking skills, and, if taught together, make the learning process beneficial for students and teachers. As for the further perspective of the research, other prompt frameworks can be tested for a range of requests in different settings.

Keywords: English language, artificial intelligence, information literacy, media literacy, prompt framework, media studies, teacher-friendly, student-centered, ChatGPT.

1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become fashionable nowadays, but its definition is not so straightforward as one might think. In simple words, AI is the ability to perform duties of a human. Among such abilities there may be the collection, storage and use of required information, the search and accumulation of information resources necessary for work, self-training, the production of oral and written texts, etc. Artificial Intelligence refers to systems that appear to have “intelligent behaviour by analysing their environment and taking actions – with some degree of autonomy – to achieve specific goals” (European Commission, 2018: 4).

According to the Glossary of Artificial Intelligence Terms for Educators, AI is “a branch of computer science” whose systems use hardware, algorithms, and data to create “intelligence” to do things like make decisions, discover patterns, and perform some sort of action” (Ruiz, Fusco, 2023). U.S. Department of Education defines AI as “an umbrella term for a growing set of modeling capabilities”, including knowledge-based systems, computer vision, natural language processing, automatic planning and scheduling, optimization, robotics and machine learning. It also outlines three types of AI being narrow intelligence, general intelligence, and super intelligence (U.S. Department..., 2023: 11). In the current study we take the definition, proposed by Silverblatt et al. who defined AI as “an anonymous, technologically based neural network machine

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learning model that employs ChatGPT to assimilate content. ChatGPT is a large language model developed by OpenAI based on the GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) architecture” (Silverblatt et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, there is a growing concern regarding the transparency, explainability, impartiality, accountability, and ethical implications of AI systems. That is why soon we will see the development of not artificial general intelligence that can substitute humans but only narrow AI, able to achieve singular tasks (Shadbolt, 2022).

Possessing basic literacy skills is not enough nowadays. To survive and be successful in our everchanging world people need to apply new skills closely connected with modern technologies and AI. AI literacy has become a crucial element of every educated person, willing to succeed in life and career. Contemporary scholars make various attempts to refer AI literacy to already existing literacies: digital literacy (Gálik et al., 2024; Gálik, Gáliková Tolnaiová, 2022; Long, Magerko, 2020; Yang, 2022), data literacy (Long, Magerko, 2020), information and media literacy (Shnurenko et al., 2020; Turner et al., 2017). According to Turner et al. digital literacy encompasses reading, writing, speaking, viewing, and participating in online spaces skills. These activities require abilities to access, analyse, evaluate, create, and participate with media which constitute media literacy. There is no doubt from the authors’ point of view that digital and media literacy should be taught as one common literacy and their domains can no longer exist in isolation (Turner et al., 2017). With the appearance of AI digital literacy has gained even more importance and this stimulates educators implement AI education from early childhood (Relmasira et al., 2023; Yang, 2022).

Long and Magerko define AI literacy as the ability to critically evaluate AI technologies, communicate and interact effectively with AI, and use AI online, at home and at work. This ability is realized through some competences. They consider that digital literacy is a crucial element of AI literacy, AI literacy overlaps with data literacy, and scientific and computational literacies are not necessary but can complement AI literacy (Long, Magerko, 2020). German researchers formulated different aspects of AI literacy and psychological competences, such as problem-solving, learning, and emotion regulation. In contrast to other scholars, they do not organize all the components of AI literacy in a strict order but consider them to be linked loosely (Carolus et al., 2023). The definition of AI literacy proposed by Laupichler et al. depicts competences including basic knowledge, analytical evaluation, and critical use of AI applications by non-specialists. They do not embrace programming skills in AI literacy as they consider them a separate set of competences beyond AI literacy (Laupichler et al., 2023).

According to Ng et al., (Ng et al., 2021) along with the elementary skills to know and understand, use and apply, evaluate and create, AI literacy includes fostering their societal accountability and ethical consciousness. The researchers embrace data science, computational thinking and multi-disciplinary knowledge into AI literacy. Chinese scholars verified teachers’ AI literacy in four categories: Knowing and Understanding AI, Applying AI, Evaluating AI Application and AI Ethics (Zhao et al., 2022). Tseng and Warschauer (Tseng, Warschauer, 2023) proposed a framework of AI literacy incorporating five components: understand, access, prompt, corroborate, and incorporate. First, students understand the capabilities of AI-based tools and decide when these tools would be helpful for them. Then, they access and navigate AI-based tools to find out their opportunities. Third, students construct prompting to generate correct context. Fourth, they verify the accuracy of the content generated by AI. Finally, students integrate AI-generated content into their own work bearing in mind accuracy and ethics.

Thus, this paper presents a comprehensive and systematic approach to utilizing AI in education to advance information and media competences. We claim that AI makes impact on all other literacies and the formation of abilities necessary for IL and ML can be eased by applying AI. The common thing among all literacies is the presence of critical thinking skills. AI literacy is inseparable from information and media literacy and should be taught together.

2. Materials and methods

This research incorporates both theoretical and empirical approaches and involves several stages. Firstly, we started with critical literature review using the methods of theoretical analysis and synthesis. Secondly, following practical recommendations for teachers of English as a Foreign Language, we formulated several prompts to test them further. Keeping in mind the fact of permanent evolution of AI, AI literacy, and prompt framework engineering, we confined our research

on three of them, namely, RACEF, RISEN, and Co-STAR. Thirdly, as part of the experiment, three prompts were tested on two AI-powered chatbots chosen at random. Fourthly, the results of the experiments were analyzed, compared, and commented on. Finally, after formulating conclusions of the research, we specified main limitations and perspectives for further study.

3. Discussion

AI is gaining popularity in all domains at a dizzying rate. Education likewise attempts to make the most of AI's potential optimize the learning process. Among the main reasons for using AI in education researchers mention the ability to reach educational aims faster, more effectively and at a lower cost, the adaptability of learning resources to students' personal needs and local demands, greater support for teachers (Reiss, 2021; U.S. Department..., 2023). AI can examine students' learning outcomes, recognize their strong and weak points, and prepare tasks and assignments adapted to students' personal needs. Providing feedback on students writing especially in large size classes is frequently time-consuming and monotonous. AI tools and applications can easily free teachers from this task and offer quick response. The role of AI in assessing structured tasks and tests is difficult to overestimate as it can perform it promptly, accurately, immediately, and, based on the results, explain the mistakes and give recommendations for further study.

Some researchers link the ability to use AI tools to students' future career success, highlighting that the lack of such experience will result in falling behind more advanced employees (Ng et al., 2021; Tseng, Warschauer, 2023).

Teachers all over the world face the same problems that cause stress, depression, early retirement, and affect their welfare and quality of life. Thus, in the UK these are extreme workload, lack of flexible pathways in learning, priority of exam preparation over other activities, difficulty in sharing information between schools and colleges, and differences in the quality of education within the country (Baker, Smith, 2019). A recent McKinsey survey revealed that teachers in the USA, the UK, Canada, and Singapore spend only 49 % of their working time interacting with students. The remaining time is spent on preparation, evaluation, and paperwork, which leads to burnout, anxiety, and stress (Bryant et al., 2020). According to Seo et al. (Seo et al., 2024) school teachers in the USA want AI to help them with curriculum development, teaching and facilitating, guidance, and classroom and school management. So, the most promising area for AI is teachers' preparation for classes. By leveraging technology, educators can save time, devising even more effective lesson plans and methods. Teachers can discover and select a range of online learning materials and educational resources. They can also use collaboration platforms to find and access appropriate materials downloaded by their colleagues (Bryant et al., 2020). AI-based writing tools help them communicate effectively in academic and career spheres. Translation help, paraphrasing suggestions, and spelling and grammar checks are clear advantages that these tools can offer (Tseng, Warschauer, 2023).

AI in UK education is already used in three wide categories: learner-facing, teacher-facing, and system-facing. According to the researchers, learner-facing tools allow students to get information necessary for individual or personal needs, identify knowledge gaps, get feedback, or assist in joint work of students. Teacher-facing tools are applied to ease teachers' job by facilitating the preparation to lessons or assessing tasks. System-facing tools serve mainly administrative purposes such as analysing data from reports, organizing timetables, etc. (Baker, Smith, 2019).

Though most researchers admit that the use of AI in education is an inevitable process and advances the educational process, others highlight its limitations and negative effects. The main weaknesses include potential negative outcomes, risks of privacy, security risks, greater surveillance, lack of transparency and trust (U.S. Department..., 2023), absence of sentience and emotional support, unsure technical capacity and reliability of algorithms, the constant human service to proper work of AI (Bryant et al., 2020), educational inequality, a sense of insecurity (Reiss, 2021), biases and false information (Williamson, 2024), dependence on the Internet connection, absence of face-to-face interaction with people, limited availability of some rare books and manuscripts (Aithal, 2023).

There is also a danger of additional workload on teachers as they have to construct new tasks based on AI and educate students on how to do them properly. For example, according to the *Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights* teachers are supposed to educate students about safe AI use,

supervise them, lend a hand in case when something goes wrong, prepare personalized instructions, work in partnership with colleagues to understand effective prompts, analyse AI-generated lesson plans for faults, avoid over-trusting AI systems, and take part in the design and evaluation of AI systems (U.S. Department..., 2023). In this way the role of teachers is altered from instructor to facilitator and coach (Bryant et al., 2020), thus putting an extra burden on them. Some scholars worry that the higher education system is unable to control the impact of AI on schools and universities. They suppose that the main role in AI development belongs to large corporations possessing big data and this fact poses a threat to the existence of traditional educational institutions (Bates et al., 2020).

Williamson doubts that AI in education is just an advance in technology. He claims it to be “the socially and historically specific result of an accumulation of technical developments, scientific practices, institutional applications, and power struggles” (Williamson, 2024: 98). The importance of social and historical aspects is explained by the diversity of participants involved in education and the variety of their purposes. Because of this, the legal and ethical features of AI should be paid great attention to.

One more risk for education expressed by many researchers is the possibility to substitute teachers in class. To our mind, the dispute if AI technologies can replace teachers is fruitless. Together with the varying world schools and universities also change. Teachers cannot avoid new technologies in their profession, as they should always be at the forefront of current developments. The only way out for them is to learn and apply technologies in the best possible technique. In the future teachers should concentrate on ethical and social aspects in the educational process, leaving routine procedures such as theory instruction and assessment to AI (Flores-Vivar, García-Peñalvo, 2023). Teachers will keep their positions in terms of finding and adapting new materials, giving feedback, settling technical malfunctions, and psychological support (Ji et al., 2022).

The European Network for Academic Integrity admits the existence of advantages and disadvantages in AI in education and to avoid the risks offers commendations on the ethical use of AI in education. The use of AI tools should be acknowledged but cannot be listed as a co-author in a publication. Together with this, the employment of tools and services influencing spelling, proofreading, etc. is acceptable (Foltynek et al., 2023).

Su and Yang established a framework that helps educators in their work with AI. First, they advise setting the hoped-for outcome and correlating it with the possibilities of the AI tool. Second, determine whether the learning process is fully automated or used optionally. Then they recommend carefully consider ethical consequences and their impact on teachers and students. Finally, they suggest to evaluate the effectiveness of the result in terms of achieving the goal (Su, Yang, 2023).

For learners of foreign languages, AI seems to be an easy way to construct essays, texts, letters, and reports. Researchers recognized many ways of utilizing AI in foreign language acquisition. Thus, Pokrivcakova (Pokrivcakova, 2019) acknowledged personalized learning materials, machine translation tools, AI writing assistants (Grammarly, ProWriting Aid, Textio, AI Writer, Textly AI and Essaybot), chatbots (Rosetta Stone, Andy, Mondly, Memrise, etc.), AI-powered language platforms and apps (Duolingo, Busuu, Speexx, Babbel, Memrise, MagiClingua, etc.), intelligent tutoring systems (Word Bricks, CASTLE, I-ETER, Web Passive Voice Tutor, WUFUN (for Chinese university students learning English), Your Verbal Zone (for Turkish students learning English vocabulary), E-Tutor (for learning German as a second language), TAGARELA (for learning Portuguese at the university level), Robo-Sensei (for Japanese), Spanish for Business Professionals (SBP), etc.), adaptive and intelligent systems for collaborative learning support, and intelligent virtual reality.

Spanish researchers (de Vicente-Yagüe-Jara et al., 2023) investigated the impact of AI on university students' creativity while developing writing skills. They compared the level of creativity reached by the AI systems and the students and found out that it differed in terms of fluency, flexibility, and narrative originality. The results demonstrated that AI can facilitate students in writing tasks and verbal creativity. However, the scholars claim that AI cannot be a substitute for human intelligence and creativity.

The appearance of AI chatbots transfigured the educational process. ChatGPT is a form of generative AI that uses algorithms to generate new text similar to what a human might write. It is a language model that applies deep learning to produce human-like responses to natural language queries. ChatGPT is designed to be used in a conversational setting, allowing users to interact with

the model naturally and intuitively. As a powerful AI application, ChatGPT can answer questions, write stories, summarize documents, and compose essays. It can generate lesson plans or be a proofreader in academic writing. With the help of ChatGPT educators can design questions for assessment or develop rubrics for evaluating students' essays. While generating content for a topic, it is also possible to analyse emotional types from the written texts (Hwang, Chen, 2023). S. Aithal and P.S. Aithal (Aithal, 2023) in their research defined several ways of utilizing ChatGPT. They are information collection (Data Mining, Literature Review, Customer Feedback, Social Media Monitoring), and academic information collection (Literature Reviews, Citation Searches, Reference Checking, Information Retrieval). Grewe (Grewe, 2024) mentions creating materials for assessment purposes as one of the most useful employments of ChatGPT. This procedure of creating assessments being labour intensive, mentally hard, and requiring knowledge and experience usually adds extra cognitive load to educators. AI may offer many ideas for checking material, creating exam questions in different formats, or restoring already existing tests. Despite the need to proofread the work done educators save valuable time.

Guo and Wang (Guo, Wang, 2023) examined ChatGPT's possibilities to help teachers evaluate argumentative essays composed by Chinese undergraduate students. They found out that ChatGPT gave a considerably larger amount of feedback than teachers and contained information about content, organization, and language respectfully. Based on these results the researchers advise educators to combine their efforts in generating feedback on student writing with ChatGPT.

Discussing the probable benefits of ChatGPT, Su and Yang (Su, Yang, 2023) claim that they: personalize the learning experience for students, facilitate answering students' questions, create an exciting learning environment, give beneficial suggestions for teachers and useful advice for writing an essay for students. Out of five benefits, only two are for teachers. All these are in line with the results of Chinese researchers Ji et al. They analysed 24 papers connected with AI-integrated language learning published between 2015 and 2021 and found that most researchers did not specify the particular role of teachers in this process (Ji et al., 2022).

Hwang and Chen (Hwang, Chen, 2023) argue that the use of ChatGPT and other generative artificial intelligence (GAI) applications should not be limited to searching for information, communication with learners, personalized assistance or support. They insist on implying a "programming prompt" to guide GAI applications to complete tasks following a sequence of logical instructions. To perform a quality task, the researchers give guidelines for constructing ChatGPT prompts able to acquire the finest responses. They advise being clear and unambiguous in formulating the problem, describing the context, defining the role of GAI, asking questions that require reciprocal conversation and identifying the format of GAI-generated outputs. Bozkurt and Sharma (Bozkurt, Sharma, 2023) give a wider plan for engineering prompts. It involves clear articulation of the prompt's purpose, understanding the model's capabilities, clear and concise wording, setting the context, giving examples, fine tuning and debugging of prompts, format specification, defining key details, testing and iterating, and finally, considering safety and ethics.

According to Gattupalli et al, "Prompt literacy is the ability to effectively formulate, understand, and evaluate prompts to elicit appropriate responses from AI systems. It involves not just the comprehension of the questions or commands given to the AI, but also the evaluation of the AI-generated output" (Gattupalli et al., 2023: 2).

On the other side, we cannot but say about problems while applying ChatGPT. These are high cost, ethical and safety issues, and challenging the existing assessment system (Su, Yang, 2023). Some versions of ChatGPT cannot make a distinction between fact and fiction, verify the information, or cite the sources they use. What is more, ChatGPT usually collects information starting with the most popular sites, thus allowing arranging content from the most popular, not the most reliable sites (Silverblatt et al., 2023).

We think it is necessary to know the existing AI tools and resources, evaluate and choose them according to the aim, understand all their possibilities and apply them during classes. The necessity to create such tools is excessive, as in this case, the burden on teachers will rise tremendously. We consider prompt literacy to be one of the most crucial abilities to liberate teachers from time-consuming tasks and this study will concentrate on the way to produce proper prompts.

4. Results

Instructing students teachers themselves must learn how to use AI properly and become AI literate (Kim, 2022). Meanwhile, the same knowledge can be beneficial for student-teachers-to-be both

for their own learning and developing teaching materials as well as classes and lessons. The tests and examples provided concern learning and teaching English as the authors' specialization is teaching English. However, the principles applied in the study can be used in any subject.

Nowadays prompt engineering is becoming an integral part of digital literacy. To get an appropriate result an individual, either a student or a teacher, has to formulate their request incorporating almost all the aspects of the expected outcome. Otherwise, AI-created materials will be rather general neglecting peculiar requests and requirements of the particular target group. For instance, if we want to create an exercise for practicing the Present Indefinite Active tense, we can formulate a prompt quite easily: *"Create an exercise on the Present Indefinite active tense use"*. We tested this prompt on two ChatGPT (<https://chatgpt.org/chat>, <https://gemini.google.com>).

The first output is generated by ChatGPT (<https://chatgpt.org/chat>) and is presented below:

"Complete the following sentences with the correct form of the verb in the Present Indefinite Active tense:

1. *She _____ (study) English every day.*
2. *They _____ (play) basketball in the park.*
3. *He usually _____ (run) in the morning.*
4. *I _____ (enjoy) cooking delicious meals.*
5. *We _____ (watch) our favorite TV show at 8 PM.*
6. *The cat _____ (sleep) in its cozy bed.*
7. *My brother _____ (work) at a bank.*
8. *The sun _____ (rise) in the east every morning.*
9. *They _____ (take) their dog for a walk in the evening.*
10. *I _____ (read) books in my free time.*

Make sure to conjugate the verbs correctly and use the Present Indefinite Active tense in each sentence".

The exercise above seems to be appropriate as it includes sentences with different pronouns and students can practice challenging 3rd person predicates. Moreover, as the Present Indefinite tense is to be learned by beginners, the vocabulary in the suggested exercise corresponds to their level and embraces everyday English language.

The next step was to ask ChatGPT to check the correctness of the completed exercise and in doing so we made a few mistakes in the predicates intentionally, namely, five of them: 1) *She study English every day*; 2) *I enjoyed cooking delicious meals*, 3) *The cat is sleeps in its cozy bed*, 4) *The sun risess in the east every morning*, and 5) *I reads books in my free time*. Queerly, ChatGPT highlighted only three mistakes: *"There are some errors in the sentences provided: 1) She study English every day – should be "She studies English every day", 2) The cat is sleeps in its cozy bed – should be "The cat sleeps in its cozy bed", and 3) I reads books in my free time – should be "I read books in my free time". Overall, most of the sentences are correct except for a few minor errors"*. Meanwhile, it did not notice the use of Past Indefinite instead of Present Indefinite and neglected misprint in the spelling "risess".

Looking critically at the exercise created by ChatGPT, we made a note of some features. Firstly, the exercise does not offer negative and/or interrogative sentences. It means that a learner initially will not have the opportunity to practice all types of sentences. Secondly, by default, American English is used in the created exercise, *"favorite"* spelling being the signal of it. Thirdly, the second person pronoun is missing too, although some beginners happen to add the suffix -s to the predicate in the Present Indefinite tense. Finally, the exercise does not include any exceptions of the Present Indefinite use, for instance, the use of Present tense instead of Past or Future or the formation of the predicate with such nouns as police, family, etc.

The second output was produced by the extension Gemini by Google (<https://gemini.google.com>) and it turned out to be more thorough as it included several assignments with a number of sentences in each of them such as: "1) Fill in the blanks with the

correct form of the verb in the present indefinite tense (*They _____ (play) soccer every afternoon*), 2) Write sentences using the given words in the present indefinite tense (*I / wake up / at 7 am*), 3) Choose the correct form of the verb to complete the sentences (*It _____ (rain/rains) a lot in the summer*), 4) Make negative sentences from the given positive ones (*We work hard*), and 5) Make questions from the given statements (*He works as a teacher*). Such a sequence of tasks is much more logical and productive from methodological point of view and allows learners to practice different variations of verb forms. The vocabulary is consistent with the English proficiency level of students who get acquainted with the Present Indefinite use rules (for example, *to like, to read, to play, lesson, every afternoon, to eat pizza*, etc.).

The correctness of the tasks completed was also checked by AI as we intentionally made a few mistakes and a misprint, namely, 1) *She like to read books*, 2) *They played soccer every afternoon*, 3) *It is raining heavily outside*, and 4) *The cat catches mice*. AI corrected all the mistakes, even Past Indefinite tense, and gave an explanation of errors but it seemed not to be enough. For instance, ChatGPT in Gemini clarified “*Subject-verb agreement: The verb must match the person and number of the subject. She is third person singular, so the verb should be likes*” and so on but it did not highlight that Past Indefinite tense was used instead of Present Indefinite and it did not explain why suffix *-es* should be used in verbs like *catch, wash*, etc. Although it summarised that the Present Indefinite tense is used for habits, routines, general truths, and states.

Summing up, we conclude that the second experiment by Gemini (<https://gemini.google.com>) is much more efficient and comprehensive although it has some remarks as well. The analysis of such a short experiment warns us to be more critical and scrupulous about the details and leads to the idea of prompt frameworks.

A number of frameworks for prompt engineering can be applied when aiming at English as a Foreign Language class and any other course as it was remarked above. We will consider three prompt frameworks: RACEF, RISEN, and Co-STAR. The important thing about these prompt engineering frameworks is that they can be applied in any subject taught because they give common guidelines for formulating a request for generative AI.

The first acronym RACEF stands for R – role, A – action, C – context, E – example, and F – format. To clarify RACEF prompt engineering framework, we will explain what each component letters stand for. For every component, it is important to describe it in detail as accurately as possible. While defining the role (R), it is necessary to outline the role ChatGPT should take upon itself when creating teaching or learning materials whether it be “an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teacher’s assistant for adult students in chemistry” or “a World History teacher at a college for arts students”. Action (A) implies a request for specific actions on the part of ChatGPT, for instance, “Generate a lesson plan on the topic of properties of crude oil (density, viscosity)” or “Generate an activity showing the main events in Italy in the XVIth century and their influence on Michelangelo’s paintings”. In this component it is also appropriate, for example, to specify a word limit for a text, create particular tasks (fill-in the gaps, concept-checking questions, matching, etc.), or highlight topical vocabulary or keywords. As for context (C), relevant details for ChatGPT should be added here to refine the output. We can describe the duration of the class, the target audience if they have any peculiarities within their interests, preferences, aptitudes, or learning styles, and any other aspects that specify the setting. The next component, example (E), is not obligatory but desirable. Being knowledgeable about the requirements of the class or learning style of the students, it can be reasonable to offer an example activity for the AI to model. The example can be of any type: exercise, dialogue, activity, mind map, etc. Finally, format (F) indicates how the output will look like, whether it be a complete lesson sheet with ready-to-use tasks or a lesson plan with sequential activities.

Following the RACEF framework, the prompt for ChatGPT was formulated as follows: “*You are a university teacher teaching the general English for a group of students majoring in German as a foreign language. English level proficiency of these students varies from B1 to B2 in one and the same group. Create a plan for 90-minute class on the topic “Environmental protection”. Include warm-up activities, group and individual work. Include all language activities such as listening, reading, speaking and writing (as a homework activity). Some grammar exercises on Indefinite and Continuous tenses should be included as well*”.

The second prompt framework under consideration is RISEN that embraces R – role, I – instructions, S – steps, E – end goal, and N – narrowing. The prompt starts with the role (R). The user (either a teacher or a student) defines the role s/he wants the AI to take. It delineates the

proficiency and the tone of the expected output. Instructions (I) clearly state the task AI is supposed to complete. Steps (S) list a number of steps AI should follow to complete the task. The end goal (E) is about specifying the intention of the output, what the user aims to achieve with the output. Narrowing (N) is indispensable to describe a number of constraints that AI should regard while creating the output.

RISEN prompt framework led to the following framing:

“Role: You are a university teacher teaching the general English for a group of students majoring in German as a foreign language.

Instructions: Create a lesson plan for the class on the topic “Environmental protection” that revises the topic.

Steps:

- 1. Include warm-up activities.*
- 2. Include group and individual work.*
- 3. Include such language activities as listening, reading, and speaking.*
- 4. Include grammar exercises on Indefinite and Continuous tenses.*
- 5. Create a writing activity for the homework.*

End goal: By the end of the lesson, students will be able to discuss general issues concerning environmental protection worldwide, using proper vocabulary.

Narrowing:

- 1. Time-limit: class is 90 minutes.*
- 2. Learner level: English level proficiency of the students varies from B1 to B2 in one and the same group.*
- 3. Technology: Students have their mobile devices and there is a whiteboard in the class”.*

The third prompt framework is Co-STAR where C stands for context, O – for objective, S – for style, T – for tone, A – for audience, and R – for response. Similarly, context (C) provides background information for AI to aim at specific scenario. A more detailed description ensures relevance in the output. Objective (O) defines the task AI should perform to meet the goal. Style (S) specifies the desired writing style ChatGPT will use to align the response with the particular requirements. Tone (T) sets the attitude of the response whether it be formal, empathetic, neutral, etc. Identifying the audience (A) we can tailor the output for the target group to make it more appropriate, meaningful, and effective. The response format (F) defines the structure of the output whether it be a list of activities or a predetermined structure.

Consequently, Co-STAR prompt was formulated as:

“Context: The lesson takes place in a class for students majoring in German as a foreign language with the English proficiency varying from B1 to B2. They have already finished studying the topic “Environmental protection” and the lesson is to review the topic.

Style: friendly, understandable, supporting, interactive.

Tone: supporting and encouraging.

Audience: undergraduate students majoring in German with different levels of English proficiency (from B1 to B2). The total number of students is 12. The format of work should vary from class to small-group, pair to individual work.

Response: A comprehensive lesson plan. The structure of the class that lasts 90 minutes includes warm-up activities, vocabulary exercises, text on the topic with pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities, speaking exercises, and writing activity as homework”.

Thus, keeping in mind the same academic group and setting, we formulated three prompts following three prompt frameworks to test all of them on two ChatGPT (<https://chatgpt.org/chat> and <https://gemini.google.com>) and compared the responses obtained.

The first experiment involved RACEF prompt framework on both AI. Comparing the lesson plans generated by AI, we concluded that both incorporated all language activities (listening, reading, and speaking as well as writing, although ChatGPT integrated writing in the lesson itself but Gemini as homework) with grammar focus and both offered similar lesson structure starting with warm-up activity and finishing with homework assignment. However, the lesson plan generated by Gemini looked more methodological and elaborate. For example, the warm-up activity produced by ChatGPT implied discussing with students their thoughts on environmental protection and the importance of taking care of the environment and afterward asking students to brainstorm different ways they can contribute to environmental protection. Meanwhile, Gemini

formed a rather detailed suggestion: *“Brainstorming: Write ‘Environment’ on the board. Ask students to brainstorm words and phrases related to the environment. Divide the class into two groups and have a short competition to see which group can come up with more words. Mind Map: Create a mind map on the board based on the students’ ideas”*. To cite one more example, Listening Activities generated by both AI turned out to be similar – both included the tasks though Gemini broke them down into distinct steps and entitled them (Table 1).

Table 1. Listening Activity

<i>ChatGPT (chatgpt.org/chat)</i>	<i>Gemini (https://gemini.google.com)</i>
Play a short audio clip about environmental issues and conservation efforts.	Pre-listening: Introduce key vocabulary related to environmental issues (e.g., pollution, climate change, deforestation, recycling).
Students will listen and then discuss in pairs the main points they heard.	Listening activity: Play a short audio clip or video about environmental problems. Students listen to the main ideas and take notes.
Class discussion on what can be done to address the issues mentioned in the clip.	Comprehension check: Ask comprehension questions about the listening material.

Gemini also formulated objectives of the lesson, listed materials (whiteboard/flipchart, markers, handouts (texts, grammar exercises), audio/video clips), offered differentiation for B1 and B2 students, and suggested recommendations to deliver the class (*“Throughout the lesson, provide opportunities for error correction and feedback. Use a variety of activities to cater to different learning styles and keep students engaged. Encourage students to use target language actively in their speaking and writing”*). To sum up, although Gemini created a more detailed and structured lesson plan, none of both AI-provided teaching materials (exercises, audio or video, etc.) and the structure of the lesson plan appeared similar.

The second prompt framework tested was RISEN. In this experiment lesson plans turned out not to be similar – their structures differed. Gemini retained the structure similar to RACEF prompt: Warm-up (10 minutes), Speaking Activity (15 minutes), Listening Activity (15 minutes), Grammar Focus (10 minutes), Reading and Writing (20 minutes), and Homework. Moreover, some activities had much in common (Table 2).

Table 2. Speaking Activity by Gemini

<i>RACEF</i>	<i>RISEN</i>
Group work: Divide students into small groups. Ask them to discuss one of the environmental problems they heard about in the listening activity. They should talk about the causes, effects, and possible solutions.	Group discussion: Divide students into groups of 3-4. Give each group a specific environmental issue (e.g., deforestation, pollution, climate change). Ask them to discuss the causes, effects, and potential solutions.
Feedback: Invite one or two students from each group to share their ideas with the class.	Feedback: Invite one or two students from each group to share their main points with the class.

As for ChatGPT, structures of the lesson plans following RACEF and RISEN prompt frameworks diverged. Language activities were included in the lesson plan by RISEN but they were separated into two blocks: *“1) Language Activities: (30 minutes). Listening: Play an environmental podcast or audio clip and have students answer comprehension questions. Reading: Provide an article or blog post on a current environmental issue for students to read and discuss in pairs. Speaking: Have students participate in a role-play activity where they discuss environmental issues and solutions, and 2) Writing Activity: (10 minutes). Assign a writing task for homework where students have to write a short essay or letter on their opinions on a specific environmental issue and propose possible solutions”*. Meanwhile, in the lesson plan by RACEF language activities were separate step-by-step activities. The salient feature of the RISEN plan by ChatGPT was the activity “Group work” (20 minutes) that implied to *“Divide the students into small groups and provide each group with a scenario related to environmental protection. Have students discuss the scenario and come up with possible solutions or actions to*

address the environmental issue. Each group will then present their scenario and solutions to the class". This group work incorporates all language activities because students have to read the scenario (reading), discuss it (speaking and listening), and present a speech (writing, at least, drafting) but this activity resembles real-life activity changing the focus onto cooperative, sort of creative work. It should be noted here that Gemini adhering to a similar lesson plan structure in both prompt frameworks generated a creative and real-life assignment for homework. It suggested students write a short blog post or social media post about an environmental action they can take in their daily lives. In completing the task, students should use vivid language and persuasive techniques to encourage others to follow their example. Summing up, we add to the previous conclusions that RISEN prompt framework tends to be more process-oriented and learner-centred.

The final prompt framework, Co-STAR, generated similar lesson plan structures by both ChatGPT and Gemini. The structure included all language activities (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) but also incorporated a distinct vocabulary component: *"Review key vocabulary related to environmental protection using flashcards or word matching activities. Have students practice pronunciation and usage of the new vocabulary in pairs or small groups"* by ChatGPT and *"Distribute a handout with a gap-fill exercise using environmental vocabulary"* by Gemini. However, Gemini suggested including a grammar task whereas ChatGPT neglected it. Both AI-generated assignments aimed at working with a text (Table 3), both divided the work into pre-reading, while-reading, and after-reading activities and allocated 25 minutes for each component.

We should also notice that both AI in Co-STAR prompt framework pinpointed the importance of encouraging student participation and interaction, providing feedback, and creating engaging and enjoyable atmosphere.

Table 3. Work with a Text

<i>ChatGPT (chatgpt.org/chat)</i>	<i>Gemini (https://gemini.google.com)</i>
Distribute a short text on environmental protection.	Pre-reading: Introduce a new vocabulary word related to the environment (e.g., sustainability, biodiversity).
Divide the reading into three parts: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities.	Text: Distribute a short article about an environmental success story or challenge.
During the pre-reading stage, have students predict the content of the text based on the title and images.	While-reading: Students read the text individually and underline key information.
While reading, encourage students to underline key information and discuss comprehension questions in groups.	Post-reading: Divide students into groups of three. Each group discusses the text and answers comprehension questions.
After reading, ask students to summarize the main points and share their thoughts with the class.	

To put it all together, we conclude that all three prompt frameworks are viable and their use is predetermined by the goal. If one needs a structured comprehensive lesson plan, RACEF prompt framework is sufficient. RISEN prompt framework can be applied for a more detailed lesson plan that is process-oriented and learner-centred. In case of more attention to the atmosphere of the class with a specific learning context, Co-STAR prompt framework will work better.

5. Conclusion

In our study, we contributed to better understanding and structuring knowledge available on the topic of AI. We asserted that AI has a great potential to significantly influence the formation and development of information and media literacies. We revealed that AI literacy is closely intertwined with these literacies having critical thinking as the unifying factor.

In education it is crucial to understand, evaluate, and select existing AI tools and resources, realize their full potential, and spread them in the classroom. All these activities require application of critical thinking skills from students as well as from educators. So, prior to instructing students to use AI tools teachers themselves must learn how to use AI properly, making the most of its

benefits and minimizing the potential risks. As AI options are immense, we could not cover all its aspects; accordingly, we embarked on one of its facets – prompt frameworks formulated for EFL class's use. The experiment illustrated that the denoted prompt frameworks are workable and the choice of the prompt depends on particular goals and setting. Thus, the paper gives understanding of a few prompt frameworks, their options, gives examples and their comparison; it can be useful for teachers and students and general audience while formulating requests for AI.

The current research is confined to such limitations as the experiment of three prompt frameworks; with only two AI-powered chatbots; and for creating lesson plans uniquely without teaching materials, handouts, etc. although it is possible to make them by continuing the request. Therefore, the designated limitations outline perspectives for further research.

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Published in the USA
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Issued since 2005.
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 1994-4195
2025. 21(1): 91-101

DOI: 10.13187/me.2025.1.91
<https://me.cherkasgu.press>



Journalism Students' Newsgathering Practice: Experimental Testing of Methodologies and Instructional Techniques

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Abstract

The authors address newsworthiness as a critical concept in media studies and newsgathering skills as a core journalistic competency.

The latest research in media studies and information behavior suggests that journalism students have difficulty finding newsworthy topics: their search is aimed either at specific topics drawn from their personal experiences or the global media coverage. They tend to overlook minor issues, daily challenges of the 'average level' of importance linked to specific social contexts and regions.

The authors designed and successfully tested an educational methodology to enhance journalism students' newsgathering and writing ability as a basis for the development of their information literacy competencies. The methodology consisted of a number of techniques and writing exercises aimed at 'landing' the global agenda on the regional ground and raising awareness of local stories. Two approaches of working with information were tested: "from particular to specific" and "from general to specific".

The method of expanding the range of the search "from particular to general" proved effective. The quality of students' search for newsworthy events and their ability to analyze such events from the point of view of their global and regional significance have improved.

Keywords: media studies, journalism education, pedagogical experiment, newsgathering, newsworthy event, news sense.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, media professionals and academic experts state that the evolution of media has led to such changes in the profession which have made the current journalism curricula and approaches to journalist training highly debatable. A key area of discussion is professional and personal competencies of the modern journalist. In this regard, the issue of the qualities of the new generation of students and the effectiveness of professional media education methods is all the more important.

Within the framework of the generational theory, researchers address components of personality and value orientations of university applicants. The identity of journalism students in terms of their personal and professional self-realization; approaches to the formation of media personality were outlined in (Oleshko, 2021; Gavrilov, 2022).

Scholars note the direct impact of digitalization and technological transformation on adolescents and young people, on the process of their socialization (Soldatova et al., 2017), as well as media consumption (Vartanov et al., 2021). The following problem areas are identified: "priority

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of the virtual world over reality and, as a consequence, escapism” (Morozova et al., 2023: 97), information overload and difficulties in its navigation, finding reliable and useful information, its processing and usage for the purposes of professional and personal development, its comprehension and presentation (Mantulenko, 2023: 48).

Journalism students point out such disadvantages of digitalization as ‘density’ of the information flow, “in which it is easy to get lost and incredibly difficult to make a choice, somehow analyze it” (Oleshko, 2021). At the same time, participants of local surveys point out the importance of the skill “to analyze information and creatively process it” for their future employment (Gavrilov, 2021: 109), information handling.

Pre-university practices of media consumption and content creation contradict journalists’-to-be understanding of the importance of information in modern society.

The problem is that students have difficulty finding newsworthy topics, one of the key journalism competencies. Their search is aimed either at specific topics drawn from their personal experiences or at ‘global problems’ that are circulating around the Internet. At the same time, students have difficulty identifying minor issues, daily challenges of the ‘average level’ of importance linked to a specific social context and region.

This is closely related to the difficulties faced by journalism students in the process of their professional self-identification. To a greater extent, contemporary students do not identify themselves with professional journalists, instead they pose as non-institutional communicators: bloggers of low social significance (entertainment, consumption) or authors of personal web pages on social networks. Hence, they have problems with distinguishing note worthy events in the flow of personal experiences and feelings.

Teaching methods and techniques should reflect the reality of modern journalism and take into account the essential characteristics and basic competencies of the profession as early as possible. On the other hand, the digital generation students’ personality traits and their media consumption experience should also be embraced.

2. Materials and methods

Our approach to the development of competencies in future journalists is based on the research by V.V. Tulupov, L.G. Svitich, A.A. Shiryayeva (Svitich, 2013; Svitich, 2017; Tulupov, 2016; Tulupov, 2023). We also rely on the idea of news as a special phenomenon of reality, which is formed in multiple studies of journalism genres and news journalism (Lazutina, 2011; Tertychny, 2017).

The experimental part of the study was designed in accordance with V.I. Zagvyazinsky’s and M.M. Potashnik’s works (Zagvyazinsky, 1981; Potashnik, 1991). The results of the study are based on an experiment on the implementation of teaching methods and technologies and content analysis of the texts created by the participants as well as quantitative analysis of the news worthy events offered by students during the diagnostic and final tests. The experiment involved students majoring in journalism at the University of Tyumen and already taking specialized journalism courses. The experiment lasted for one academic semester (February – June 2024), with 20 face-to-face classroom meetings in each group of students, the total number of students was 58. The expert principle was used in diagnosing and analyzing the results. The content analysis method was used to process 58 texts written in the genre of news reporting.

3. Discussion

In this part, we review the existing research in the field of professional journalists’ competencies and outline the basic skills and abilities to be trained in journalism students. We also consider the concept of a newsworthy event and the influence of the global and local contexts on thematic priorities.

In recent years, more and more attention has been paid to the technological aspects of the profession and transformation of journalism in the digital environment. This quickly raised the question of additional essential characteristics of journalistic activities and shifting information competency needs. According to the forecasts of Russian and European instructors involved in the training of journalists, the importance of such competencies will keep growing in the next ten years.

Nowadays, media organizations can rely on digital innovations such as Journalistic Knowledge Platforms (JKP) which support “ingestion of real-time news items from multiple sources and production of potentially newsworthy events which are continuously pushed to journalists” (Gallofré Ocaña, Opdahl, 2023; Liu et al, 2023). For example, “Reuters developed a

real-time platform to analyze around 12 million tweets per day from Twitter to identify and verify newsworthy events before they are reported by other news agencies and automate news production processes" (Gallofré Ocaña, Opdahl, 2023). To work with such platforms, young journalists need to develop special newsgathering competencies and become more aware of their professional information behavior.

These competencies include the ability to see connections between events on the local, national and global levels; follow current events and their contexts; do in-depth research to identify events important for media coverage; identify different angles to a single news story; determine dependable sources and select information based on the principle of its reliability (Drok, Lukina, 2019).

T. Rogers points to the need to find a "news angle" of the event: national/local, breaking news/follow-up story, as well as an aspect that can be interesting/important to different groups of the population, in accordance with which one can write several articles on one news item (Rogers, 2024). Researchers conclude that "searching for relevant sources, excluding unreliable information, achieving information balance in news coverage, in-depth research of the problem and understanding the context of what is happening" (Drok, Lukina 2019: 21) are the basic principles of journalism.

A similar position is expressed by Russian media experts in the paper "Journalism Schools in Russia: the experience of professional expertise" (Berezhnaya, Korkonosenko, 2021: 416). Among the key journalist skills, they name the so-called news sense – the ability to "decide on a topic, understand where there is a topic, where there is no topic, find a news item, get to sources" (Berezhnaya, Korkonosenko, 2021: 410). A large-scale study of journalists' ideas about the profession, conducted by the ZIRCON company, highlights the characteristics traditionally associated with the profession – "the presence of journalism skills and talent, attention to social problems" (Predstavleniya..., 2017: 37).

Interest in social phenomena and problems is an important criterion of belongingness to the profession. The author of a paper on technology journalism M.N. Kim writes that coming up with ideas for a topic results from "awareness of what is relevant and significant for the public, tracking all changes in different spheres of people's lives, and, finally, a clear understanding of the range of life phenomena or issues that require media covering" (Kim, 2001: 6). G. Kennedy identifies 4 criteria for determining newsworthiness of an event: 1) the circle of people whom this event can influence, the degree of impact; 2) the geographical proximity of the event – the closer to the reader, the more significant; 3) time frame – the more recent, the more significant; 4) the fame of the participants in the event – the more famous/well-known the people, organizations involved, etc. the better (Kennedy, 1988).

To produce news stories, journalists need to know how to obtain information from sources. After analyzing 90 papers on journalists' information seeking practices around the world (mostly Europe, North and Latin America, and Asia), M. Hertzum comes to a conclusion that for global news journalists rely on the Internet and informal sources, for medical and science news – on professionals and scientists; for local news – on businesses and ordinary citizens; and for crisis reporting – on first responders, victims, and local government (Hertzum, 2022).

After identification of the source, journalists embark on the interaction with the source, which requires a special skill of building true rapport. Journalists should find balance between being too polite or too critical. Besides, they should do preparations prior to source interactions such as collecting the wider context to better understand the story and the participants. "Another skill is checking the information accurately and impartially taking into account that the sources may be wrong or have an agenda" (Hertzum, 2022).

Traditionally, the ability to recognize important and socially significant events, to 'pick out' newsworthy events from the flow of information, to have a journalistic 'nose' for news (Dedov, 2017; Svitich, 2013) is primarily associated with news journalism. L.G. Svitich, E.V. Akhmadulin highlight promptness of presenting important, objective and useful information for the audience as a fundamental principle in the profession (Akhmadulin, 2020; Svitich, 2013).

We suggest that the ability of a journalism student to identify a newsworthy event in the format of news journalism can become the basis for the development of the information literacy competencies.

A so-called newsmaker is defined as "the basis for creating a media product, indication of a situation that can make headlines and affect the general public (including journalists and media editors), relevant in terms of time, arousing interest and requiring interpretation, commentary and

further mentioning” (Gikis, 2024). Key newsmakers are: news; memorable dates; socially significant problems; special or PR events; extraordinary events leading to possible sensations (Bykov, 2008: 118-121). In local media, newsmakers are classified as object-, event-, and fact-related (Nemets, 2015: 73).

Professional journalists often cite “a news sense”, “a nose for news” or “an intuitive understanding of a news event” and agree that it is hard to pinpoint a scientific definition of a newsworthy event (Brewer, 2024; Loecherbach et al, 2024; Rogers, 2024). In general, “news events are specific events that lead to news coverage, such as a specific debate on a specific day in a specific parliament, a specific accident, or a specific football match. They can be covered by one or more articles in one or more outlets, but relate to one specific and identifiable event and are thus much more fine-grained than news topics, issues, or news categories” (Trilling, van Hoof, 2020).

Researchers often distinguish between global (international) and local (regional) newsworthy events based on geography and range of readership or viewership. “The national angle is taken by national media for major stories, trend pieces, and stories about issues that affect the country as a whole: those are the kinds of stories that fill the front pages of major metropolitan dailies. The local angle comes when a reporter localizes those stories and focuses on the local or regional impact of those events, making them immediately relevant to the local readers. Local stories can go national—when, for example, an event in a small town is so impactful as to prompt a national look at an issue or the passage of a national bill” (Rogers, 2024). Young journalists are advised to begin with their own life experiences, thus, assuming the local angle.

By way of advice to beginning journalists, a former BBC journalist Jaldeep Katwala suggests asking 10 questions to validate the newsworthiness of an event: if it is of interest, unknown to the audience, possibly secret, of high impact, true, from reliable sources, and to be continued (Katwala, 2018).

V. Dorokhov considers a newsworthy event as a tool for influencing economy and politics on a global scale. Factors drawing the media’s attention to an event include participation of the political and economic elite of society, personalization, and negativity (Dorokhov, 2013). Generally, the audience’s interest in international news is decreasing. It is influenced by economic and political factors (GDP volume, export-import ratio, factors such as ongoing conflicts or natural disasters) (Sabykina, 2020: 229), and the foreign policy of the Russian Federation.

Journalism instructors insist on focusing on the specifics of regional journalism when teaching students: regional journalists exchange experiences in their professional community (Magazine “Zhurnalist”), create consortiums (“The Alliance of Independent Regional Publishers”), researchers contrast patterns of the regional agenda-setting in the local and national media (Fokina, 2013; Kurmanina, 2020; Pavlova, 2019).

The national media outlets write about regions only if news events are related to poor municipal budgeting, industrial development, federal subsidies, benefits; visits of top officials, arrests of governors and mayors; urban improvement projects; regional celebrities; culture news is typically about all-Russian events, capital city theater tours, as well as certain regional cultural events; crime and incidents are covered in stories about corruption scandals, terrorist threats, road accidents, fires, problems of municipal utilities (Pavlova, 2019: 164). News agencies collect news from the regions on political, social, criminal, and economic topics. Often, large agencies correlate a local fact with a national one (competitions, visits of international delegations, etc. (Kurmanina, 2020: 23). An important conclusion for our work is made about the priority of local information for the residents of the regions.

Yu.M. Ershov outlines regional features of information, “this is the linking of news reports to a given area and taking into account the information needs of a specific group of residents” (Ershov, 2012: 6). Regional news helps understand what is going on in a city or region and can be practically useful as a way to attract attention of the authorities or general public to the existing problems and find a suitable solution (Kurmanina, 2020; Novak, 2018).

Researchers analyze the agenda of regional media and identify topics that determine attention to newsworthy topics: politics (activities of mayors, governors, administrations, new laws and reforms, elections, corruption), economics, housing and communal services and infrastructure changes. To a lesser extent, the media turn to international events and incidents (Novak, 2018: 135). The media provide a fairly broad thematic overview of events, the selection of which is consistent with the “needs and interests of the audience, but, of course, also depends on political and economic actors” (Novak, 2018: 135).

Thus, the “average level” of issues, tied to a specific social context and region, has its own thematic priorities and a set of news stories.

4. Results

The experiment was conducted within the framework of personal and competence-based approaches, promoting students' independence in decision-making and readiness to work with specific problems (Tulupov, 2016: 11). The search for newsworthy stories is one of the pressing daily problems of a journalist; the ability to solve it independently is an indicator of professional suitability and a guarantee of success.

According to V. I. Zagvyazinsky's classification, this is a didactic experiment conducted in the natural learning environment. Its complex nature lets do an experiment in variable conditions allowing for a comparative analysis of the results (Zagvyazinsky, 1981: 127).

Experimental activities were carried out in accordance with the stages identified by V.I. Zagvyazinsky (Zagvyazinsky, 1981) and later developed in the works of other scholars (Sidenko, Khmeleva, 2008).

Preparatory stage. The experiment lasted one academic semester; the number of classes per each group of students is 20; the total number of participants is 58. A preliminary survey revealed that most students had no or minimal experience of working in the media. Working with the entire student body involves testing the effectiveness of the methodological and educational techniques and solutions developed and implemented within the framework of the new discipline News Journalism with the assistance of the School of Education at the Tyumen State University. The experience of teaching the course Journalistic Mastery, which formed the basis for the News Journalism curriculum, has shown that the skill of working with the theory and practice of genres is not enough to develop professional reporting skills. Students should be taught independent newsgathering skills.

While delivering the News Journalism course we tested two hypotheses and, accordingly, evaluated effectiveness of one of the educational techniques, which was tentatively called *Monitoring the Online Information Environment*. The hypotheses are as follows:

1) introduction into the course of additional practice aimed at independent work on ‘landing’ the global agenda on the regional ground and raising awareness of local stories and issues will develop students' news gathering skills;

2) effectiveness of the two exercises “from particular to specific” or “from general to specific” may differ in favor of one of the approaches.

Students were subdivided into 5 groups of 10-12 people. Weekly, the two experimental groups in each class completed an assignment involving monitoring the online information environment and identifying links and possible influences of personal or global events onto the life of the region. The purpose of this assignment was to tune the professional optics of future journalists onto events of various importance, including both personal experiences and events not affecting the life of an individual directly.

Experimental subgroup 1 (‘from general to specific’ approach). Students were asked to name 1-2 most important events which occurred in Russia or in the world over the past week and indicate how these events affected (or will affect from their point of view) the life of their city or region, then find 1-2 publications covering them in the regional media. Completion time: 10 min. Expert assessment of the result (assessed by the instructor): 0 – cannot formulate significance of the global event for the regional context, 1 – is able to formulate the influence of the global event on the regional context.

Experimental subgroup 2 (‘from particular to specific’ approach). Students were asked to name 1–2 significant events that they have personally encountered (experienced) over the past week, indicate how these events are related to the life of their city or region, find 1–2 publications covering them in the regional media. Completion time: 10 min. Expert assessment of the result (assessed by the instructor): 0 – cannot formulate connection between the specific event and the regional context; 1 – is able to formulate connection between the specific event and the regional context.

Thus, we experimentally tested the two methodologies underlying the entire academic course and revealed the effectiveness of one of the instructional techniques.

The Experiment

1. *Preliminary diagnostics.* Diagnostics was conducted during the first class of the News Journalism course. The goal was to find out how confidently students navigate events in Tyumen

city and Tyumen region; whether they are able to identify newsworthy stories in the information flow. All students were given a task of naming at least five events socially significant for the city and region over the past two weeks which they could cover in a news story in the media. They were given 10 minutes to complete the task.

An expert principle was used to evaluate the results: we invited the head of the news department of a city TV channel, which is part of the regional media holding, and its producer responsible for international broadcasting. The experts used two assessment scales: 0 – not a newsworthy story appropriate for coverage; 1 – a newsworthy story appropriate for coverage.

The analysis of the results of the diagnostic test was carried out for the entire group of students and separately for each of the five subgroups (experimental subgroups 1 and 2, control subgroups 3, 4 and 5). More than half of the students (54.17 %) failed the task. Of these, 40 % in the first experimental subgroup and 57.14 % in the second one.

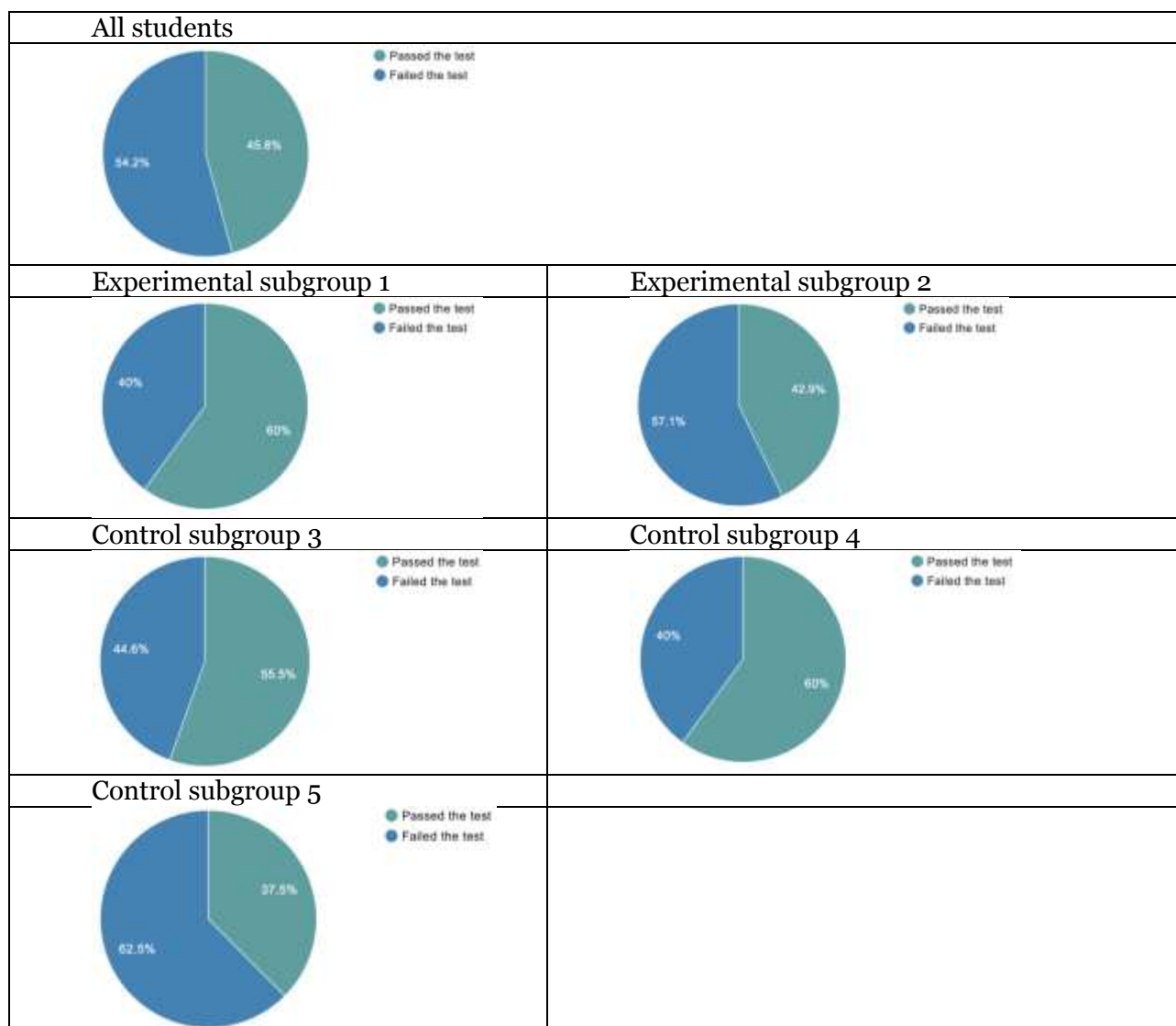


Fig. 1. Results of the preliminary diagnostic test

The topics of the 169 news worthy events in the preliminary diagnostic test included: municipal infrastructure – 27.81 %; accidents – 27.22 %; education/youth – 12.43 %; weather – 9.47 %; culture – 5.92 %; human interest – 5.33 %; social life – 5.33 %; medicine – 2.96 %; politics – 2.37 %; sports – 1.18 %.

2. *Introduction of instructional techniques.* The experiment was based on a number of instructional techniques and technologies based on the following principles.

1. From the simple to the complex. The principle is implemented at the genre level of educational publications. The first task is writing a sketch story based on the method of direct observation. This is

followed by writing a brief news item, in the preparation of which observation is combined with document analysis. The brief news item is followed by in-depth analysis: details, background, and elements of analytics are added to the text. Communication skills are practiced in the preparation of mock-up interviews. The course ends with a report, which contains all of these elements.

2. From the personal to the local and regional. Implemented at the thematic level of searching for newsworthy events to be covered in the writing exercises. Working in each genre, students go through the following stages of searching for newsworthy stories: happened near me – learned from a press release – found the story myself. In the experimental subgroups, we added an exercise called “monitoring the online information environment” aimed at continuous searching for newsworthy events.

3. From understanding the creative production process to its reproduction. It is implemented at the level of creating a text for the writing exercise. First comes analysis of the structure and style of the texts written by professional reporters, then creation of certain blocks of text (for example, in a report, description of the event context, key scenes, details, elements of an interview, etc. in accordance with the prepared detailed outline); assembly of these blocks into a finished work; individual and group reflection on the work progress and the finished product.

4. From repetition of the tasks performed to acquiring the skill. According to G. Lazutina's concept, it is a kind of sum total of the above principles aimed at building the appropriate level of professionalism (Lazutina, 2000: 21-22).

3. *Interim diagnostics* of learning outcomes in the form of expert assessment was conducted in the middle of the semester, after the completion of the training block devoted to writing a brief news item. Students learned the skills of structural and stylistic analysis of such texts, identification of newsworthy events/stories, and taking notes. Our experts assessed the events/stories chosen by the students and the compliance of the news texts they wrote with professional requirements. Thematic analysis of the texts produced by students revealed expected topics: students mostly wrote about cultural events and student life, things they know about and can relate to.

Less popular topics included hobbies and pastime activities. The topics of social life and accidents accounted for one fifth of the writings. No one wrote about politics or economics. Obviously, students do not yet have free access to accident reports and sources of political information, press releases of various corporate PR departments. However, social events and a number of other topics important to local residents are just out of the scope of students' interest. That is where more effort should be made by the course instructors.

Results of the expert assessment can be considered positive: the overwhelming majority of students' works were graded as excellent 60 %; 16 % as good; 12 % as satisfactory and 12 % as unsatisfactory. This indicates that most students are ready to perform professional tasks on searching for and reporting news. The main comments made by the experts during the experiment concerned redundancy of information when two or more news items were presented as one and use of information more suitable for advertising. This emphasizes the need to more clearly define the newsworthy event/story during in class.

4. *Results of applying the weekly task of monitoring the online information environment.* Our analysis of the papers students wrote performing the weekly task called “Monitoring the Online Information Environment” showed that 26% of the students in experimental group 1 (from general to specific) perfectly coped with the task: they were able to find two events that took place in Russia or in the world and indicate how they affected or will affect the life of their city or region and find relevant media publications.

48 % of the students identified only one event in the time given, the rest of the task was completed correctly. 26 % of the students participating in the experiment failed the task: the news events they offered did not fit into in the regional context. They were too general. They also had difficulty in finding the regional media coverage of these events. In the middle of the experiment, most of the students (71 %) demonstrated deep understanding of the connection between events of different scales and significance of global problems for the region and the city. They also managed to identify current events and formulate news items. Difficulties arose with their orientation in the information environment: it took time to find newsworthy events in the federal media and then in the local ones.

In experimental group 2, a quarter of students completed the task successfully (24.7 %), managing to establish a connection between two events from their personal lives and the life of their city or region as well as find the relevant media coverage. 57.3 % of the students managed to correctly

name only one event or find only one confirming publication. 18 % of the students failed to complete the task. This was due to the respondents' information behavior at the initial stage of the experiment: as the students themselves explained, the local news was not in their area of interest.

By the end of the experiment, this gap was filled. It is worth noting that in a number of cases, respondents did not see the difference between an event they experienced personally and one covered in the media. This concerned threatening events. Students had an impression that the facts presented in the media had been experienced by them. For example, the arrest of a pedophile in Tyumen, the fire in Tobolsk, and the flood in Orsk fell into the category of 'personally experienced'.

5. *The final diagnostic test* was conducted during the last class. The analysis of its results was conducted for the whole group of students and separately for each of the five subgroups (experimental groups 1 and 2, control subgroups 3, 4, 5). All the students demonstrated positive dynamics. The number of positive expert assessments increased by 31.25 % (from 45.83 % to 77.08 %).

Experimental group 1 ("from general to specific"), whose diagnostic test results were quite high, showed a 5.06% increase. Experimental group 2 ("from specific to general") had a significant 57.14 % increase. In the control groups, which were not subject to monitoring, the test results improved by 22.33 % (group 3), 11.43 % (group 4) and 30 % (group 5).

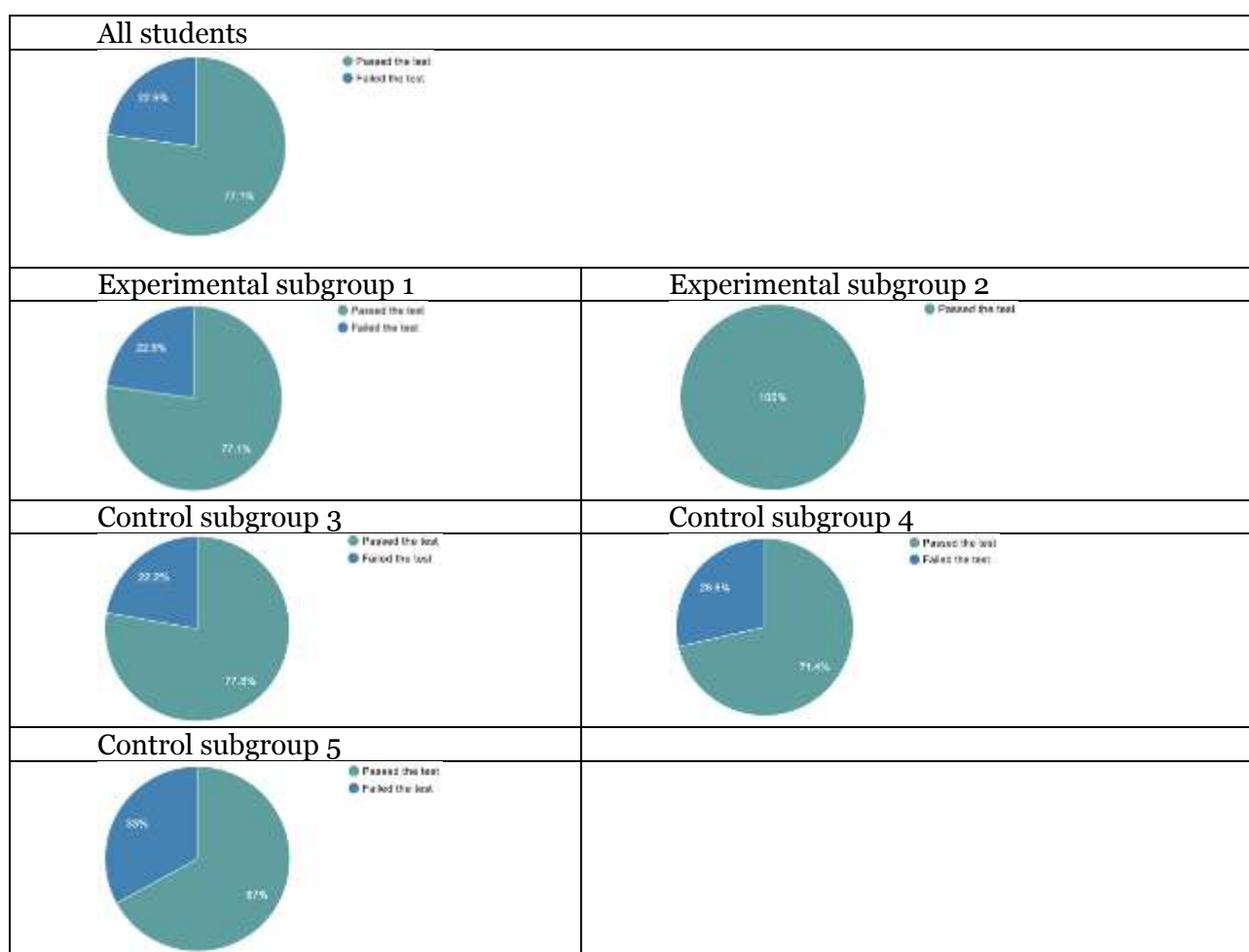


Fig. 2. Results of the final diagnostic test.

News topics suggested by students during the diagnostic test: municipal infrastructure – 28,7 %; accidents – 26,96 %; culture – 11,74 %; politics – 10,87 %; education/youth – 6,52 %; weather – 3,91 %; sports – 3,04 %; medicine – 2,61 %; social life – 1,74 %; human interest – 1,74 %; business – 1,74 %; agriculture – 0,43 %.

Summary

Comparison of the preliminary and final diagnostic test results shows that upon completion of the News Journalism course students were able to identify significantly more news worthy events than at the start (230 versus 169). The top three topics remained the same (municipal

infrastructure, accidents, and education/youth), including their quantitative indicators. The surge of interest in some topics was 'seasonal' in nature and this is natural for the regional agenda. Summer is a vacation period, hence the increase in the number of cultural events. The growth of interest in political news is caused by high-profile reshuffling in the municipal and regional administrations.

Above we noted a small number of student's writings on the topics of accidents and social life. These results demonstrate that students still realize the importance of the former (second place in the ranking), but social life remains outside their scope of attention.

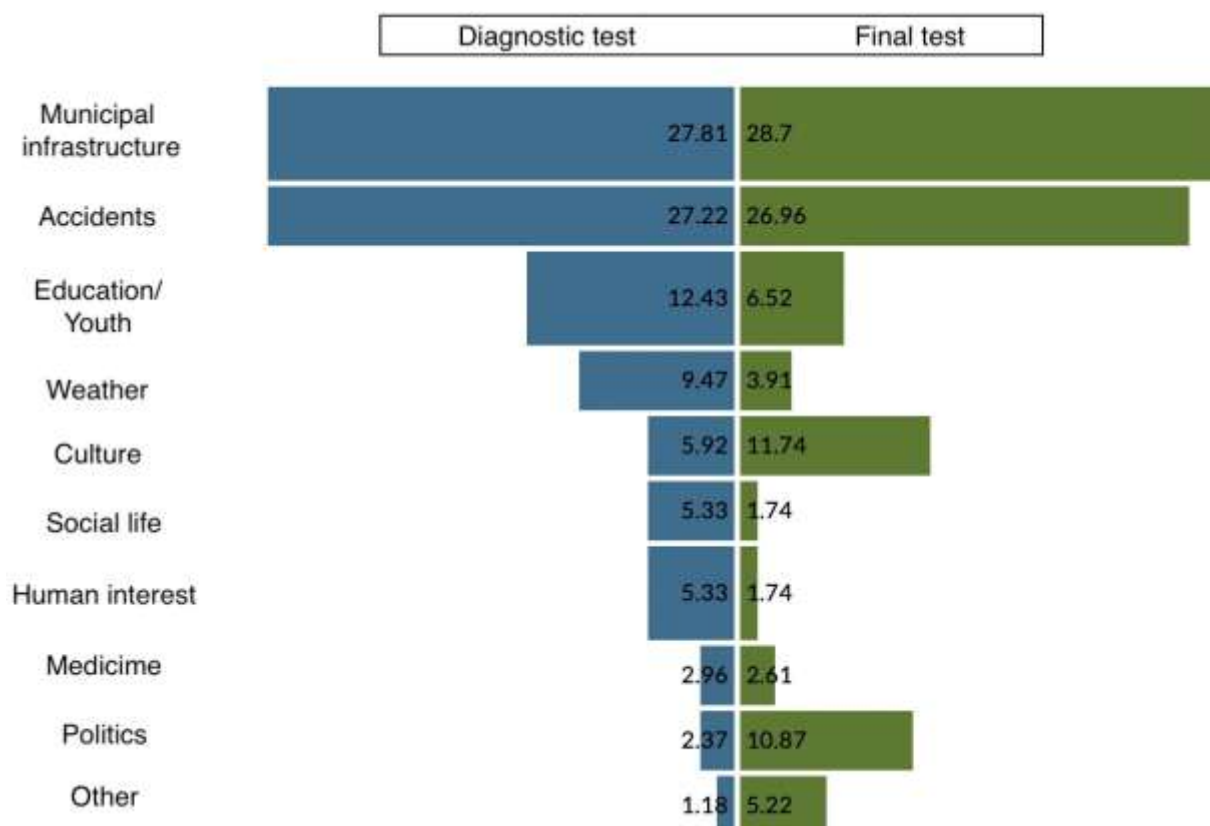


Fig. 3. Comparison of the diagnostic and final test results (in %) by identified topics

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the experiment, we conclude that the methodologies and techniques underlying the course “News Journalism” contributed to the development of students’ competence responsible for working with information, namely, searching for newsworthy events appropriate for coverage in the regional media.

The methods of weekly monitoring of the online information environment and the use of media expert assessment of students’ works had a positive effect. Future journalists learned to better search, analyze, and filter information from the information flow suitable to be used for professional purposes as a basis of a media product. While assessing the news texts created by the students, experts agreed that they correlated with the local media agenda and could be used by professional journalists and media editorial offices (Gikis, 2024).

Weekly media monitoring enhanced the teaching effect developing in students the skill of continuous ‘scanning’ of the surrounding reality and the information environment. The quality of students’ search for newsworthy events and their ability to analyze such events from the point of view of their global and regional significance also improved. The method of expanding the range of the search – searching for newsworthy events “from particular to general” – proved effective. In our opinion, it requires further investigation and enhancement to be used regularly in journalists’ instruction.

The topics addressed by the participants of the experiment, namely the small number of writings on accidents and social life, are indicative of both the regional media agenda and modern student. Escapism of young people, which researchers write about (Morozova, Shevchenko,

Kuzmina, 2023: 97), remains an important problem in the instruction of future journalists, which cannot be solved during one course.

According to the researchers of the pedagogical experiment, its final phase is implementation (Sidenko, Khmeleva: 2008). The experiment we conducted will be put into practice in the News Journalism course as a technology used to develop the necessary professional skills in journalism students. In addition, its principles and elements can be extrapolated on the teaching of other academic disciplines. The method of measuring professional competencies in the input and final diagnostic tests, the effectiveness of which was substantiated above, can be successfully applied in other journalism courses. Work with newsworthy events should not end at the stage of writing brief news items.

Its more advanced version is necessary when teaching analytical and narrative genres, in the creation of which newsworthy events can be hidden from empirical observation and emerge only after the application of the theoretical knowledge on perception of reality.

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Published in the USA
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Issued since 2005.
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 1994-4195
2025. 21(1): 102-111

DOI: 10.13187/me.2025.1.102
<https://me.cherkasgu.press>



Media Competence of a Modern Student: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

Media competence of young people is one of the basic factors for implementing successful life strategies, effectively using information in professional and personal life, and resisting the processes of public opinion manipulation. In the course of this study, the tasks were set to analyze the skills of working with information in the student environment, determine the dependencies between the level of students' media competence and such variables as the gender of respondents, the status of the university, the profile and level of education. The identified assessments in the target groups of respondents do not have clearly expressed significant differences. Some variational differences (for example, lower assessments of information skills among master's students compared to bachelor's students) can serve as a basis for further research. During the questionnaire survey, it was found that students assess the level of their media competence quite highly for most parameters. An exception is the students' statement about using a narrow range of sources in the process of searching for information, as well as the limited use of information skills during training. The factors that determined these negative trends are the following: dysfunctions of knowledge control, lowered teacher requirements, simplified assignment format, distorted understanding of digital ethics standards.

Keywords: student, higher education, media competence, digital literacy, information skills.

1. Introduction

Digital literacy and media competence of an individual are mutually complementary components of a student's professional development. This fact makes their formation a significant goal of students' educational training. In addition, the relationship between digital literacy and media competence of an individual is due to the large-scale digitalization of all spheres of public life, the penetration of digital technologies into the sphere of economy, culture, leisure and education. Search, analysis, interpretation and production of media texts in modern conditions is not possible without skills of working in the digital space. Thus, digital communication often displaces other forms of communication and feedback. This trend implies not only the presence of knowledge, norms of digital ethics, but also skills of contact communication, network interaction. Similarly, in many educational organizations, training is based on digital technologies, the use of digital platforms and digital data (Hase, Kuhl, 2024).

The lack of an appropriate level of media competence and digital literacy among student youth provokes the presence of risks for personal development and initiates the formation of educational destruction (Tyurikov et al., 2022). It can be assumed that inequality in access to information and digital technologies becomes the trigger point for social exclusion, limits an individual's ability to achieve personal and professional success, and provokes the risks of

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victimization in the digital environment. Mastering media competencies is of particular importance in the transition from education to work. Professionalism in modern conditions implies mastering the skills of working with information in a networked, digital and globalized environment. Despite the efforts of universities to develop these skills in students, research results indicate that there are gaps between the competencies acquired during education and the skills that are in demand in the labor market (Pažur Aničić et al., 2023).

2. Materials and methods

The materials presented below continue the series of publications devoted to the study of various aspects of the formation of students' media competence (Frolova, 2024; Rogach, 2024). In this article presents some empirical data to assess the level of development of students' information skills, their differentiated analysis by a number of variables. The dependent variables are: respondents' gender, university status, profile and level of education. The selection of this list of variables is determined by their possible influence on the formation of students' media competence depending on: stereotyping of gender characteristics (respondents' gender), opportunities of the educational environment of the university (capital or regional university), content of the educational program (profile and level of education). The specified logic of the study allowed us to determine the list of methods used to collect information (analysis of scientific sources, sociological methods), form the design of the study, and formulate research hypotheses.

The objectives of the study are defined as follows:

1. Conduct self-diagnosis of students' level of digital literacy development.
2. Assess the presence of certain information handling skills in students.
3. Establish a relationship between students' assessments of information handling skills and dependent variables.

The key research method is a questionnaire survey of students (N=633). Using a spontaneous sample, the author selected students studying in Moscow (78.6 %) and regional (21.3 %) universities. The low representation of students from regional universities is due to the organizational difficulties of obtaining feedback from respondents. Of the resulting sample, more than half were girls (59.4 %); young men – 40.6 %. All respondents were distributed among 4 educational profiles: humanitarian profile (17.2 %), technical specialties (24.2 %), socio-economic (26.1 %) and natural science (32.5 %) training profiles. Since the sample was spontaneous, the proportions by levels of education were not observed: students in bachelor's and master's degrees were 61.9 % and 6.0 %, respectively; in specialist's degrees – 32.1 %. The uneven representation of different categories of respondents in the sample can be considered as a certain limitation of this study. At the same time, the obtained empirical material allows us to test the hypotheses of the study and evaluate the media competence of a modern student.

In order to verify the obtained data and adjust the hypotheses, the focus group research method was used. Students of the capital's universities of the socio-economic profile (Russian State Social University and Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation) and technical profile (MIREA – Russian Technological University) were invited to participate in the focus groups. In total, 2 focus groups were held with the number of participants $n_1 = 9$ and $n_2 = 11$. The distribution of informants in the focus groups by gender and levels of education have equal representation. The recruitment of informants was carried out by personally contacting students. General data on informants were obtained from the personal cards of students by contacting the dean's office of the university. All informants participated on a voluntary basis, without payment for their time of participation.

To process the research materials, comparative data analysis and contingency table analysis were used.

Research hypotheses:

1. The main problems of students' media competence include insufficient skills for systematic information search and recourse to a narrow range of sources.
2. The level of students' media competence is determined by the profile of training and the level of education.

3. Discussion

Russian scientists consider digital literacy as a fundamental component of media competence development. Digital literacy forms a conscious attitude towards digital security, lays down the

norms of digital ethics, and focuses on the consumption of legal digital content (Yefanov et al., 2020). Media competence of an individual in modern conditions is an integral attribute of the successful implementation of a person's life strategies, his/her integration into social and communication processes (Frolova, Rogach, 2022). Empirical studies have shown that digital interaction and interpersonal communication skills help overcome loneliness, receive social support, and establish sustainable social connections (Doman, Le Roux, 2012; Van Tonder et al., 2023). The spread of digital products and online communications actualize the importance of media competence of young people based on digital skills of working on the Internet (Wu et al., 2024). At the same time, basic skills for working with digital information become the foundation for developing an individual's research competencies (Mieg et al., 2024). The importance of digital literacy and a high level of media competence is recognized today not only by teachers, but also by students (Yu et al., 2023). Young people articulate their needs in this area, and they believe that modern university education should include not only the formation of basic professional knowledge, but also the skills of searching and exchanging information, and interacting in a digital society (Smith, Storrs, 2023).

According to foreign scientists, media competence in a narrow sense includes a set of knowledge and skills that allow not only to consume, but also to produce information. In a broad sense, media competence can include "language, technology, interaction, production and distribution, ideology and values, as well as aesthetics" (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2019). In the work of A.V. Fedorov, the multifaceted nature of personal qualities that determine the level of media competence is noted. These include the following: readiness to search for information; sociability in the communication process; mastery of the conceptual apparatus, the ability to emotionally and semantically reflect texts, interpret information, critically analyze and generalize it. Particular importance is attached to the skills of applying media knowledge in practice (Fedorov, 2012). Media competence in the context of digitalization and excess information allows an individual to maintain information hygiene, critically perceive large-scale information flows, and resist the imposition of opinions from outside (Troyanskaya, 2014). Effective practices for developing media competence can be considered as a factor in preserving the country's human capital, preserving cultural identity and traditions (Kamenev et al., 2019).

Modern students, who are essentially digital natives, have a very good level of digital literacy when entering university. Students actively use digital tools in everyday life and communication, but scientists note a gap between the actual level of competence and social expectations in the professional sphere (Grant et al., 2019; Kennedy, Fox, 2013). In addition, research findings show that today's youth have difficulty assessing the reliability of online information (Frings et al., 2022). There are problems in using existing digital skills and competencies in the learning process (Öncül, 2021). An analysis of scientific literature on the development of media competence in young people draws attention to the need to study the level of digital literacy, which provides the ability to search, understand information in the digital space, as well as communications and cooperation. No less relevant are issues related to the factors of media competence development, basic determinants that affect the skills of systematic information search, its reflection, critical understanding of digital products.

4. Results

During the study, respondents were asked a direct question about their assessment of their level of digital literacy. A 5-point scale was used for assessment, where «1» point is a very low level, and «5» points is a high level of digital literacy. The results obtained indicate a fairly high self-assessment of modern students: 2/3 of them assessed their level of digital literacy at «4» and «5» points, respectively. Only 3-4 students out of 100 assess it as very low (in total, 3.5 % assessed the level of development of their digital literacy at «1» or «2» points). A quarter of respondents (24.6 %) are characterized by more restrained assessments, which can be expressed as an average level of digital literacy.

The focus group materials confirm the high assessment judgments of most students.

Young men, bachelor's degree: "Today, the ability to use digital devices is not some super rare skill. Even if you didn't know something initially, you quickly develop it... no, not at the university, they don't teach this here, it's, well, more for everyday life, for business, work or leisure."

Girl, bachelor's degree: "I easily use digital gadgets, now everything is digital, this is the base or something. You asked about understanding modern technologies, probably yes, I understand and can use them effectively. For study and for my personal life."

During the questionnaire survey, students were asked to assess the availability of a number of skills for working with information. For this purpose, they were asked to express agreement or denial with a number of judgments (Figure 1). According to the data obtained, 9 out of 10 students note that they have the skill of systematically searching for data necessary for study on information platforms. At the same time, 87.7 % of respondents agree that they use only a narrow range of Internet resources in the process of searching for information; and 57.5 % mainly use information from social media. Thus, the research materials posed new research questions: do students really know how to carry out a systematic search for information, is access to a small number of sources and social media a sufficient norm for organizing their educational process or are these signs of low media competence?

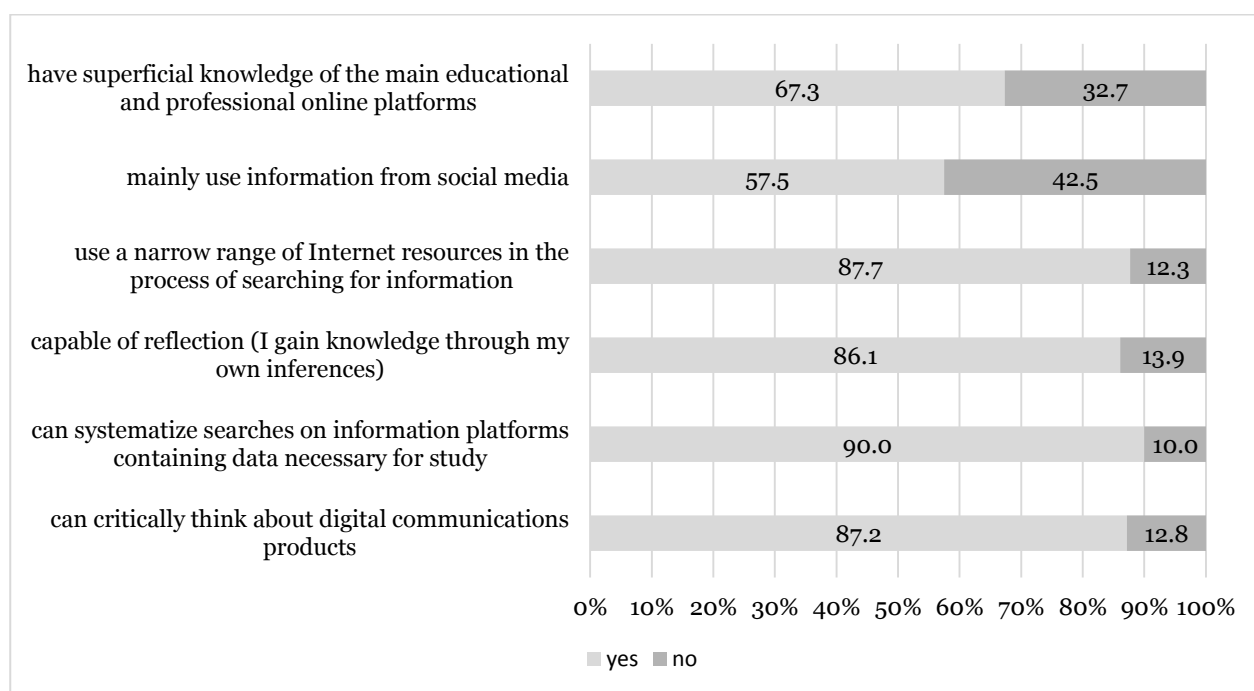


Fig. 1. Distribution of responses to the question: "Assess whether you have the following skills for working with information...", %

During the focus groups, an attempt was made to clarify these points:

Girl, specialist's degrees: "No, I don't look for information for my studies on social networks, unless I need some kind of shock content... But I don't strain myself too much for my studies, I won't leaf through a ton of literature to write an essay or something else, it's not necessary, I go out, give a speech, no one really listens or checks, why waste time?"

Young men, master's degrees: "Two or three sources, that's the maximum, if I immediately find something more or less suitable, then I definitely won't dig further."

Young men, master's degrees: "The assignments are such that I google and immediately find something suitable from the first link, insert a picture [in the essay] and that's it."

The results of the focus group study allow us to conclude that students, if they have the skill of systematic information search, are not inclined to use it during their studies. Selecting a source based on the primary criterion of compliance with the topic of the task does not allow students to "immerse themselves" in the information space of the educational environment and develop the skills of selecting and comparing information data, their critical understanding and generating new knowledge. Perhaps the dysfunctions lie not only in the reduced motivation of students ("*this is not required*", "*why waste time*", "*nobody listens*", etc.), but also in the design of the educational tasks themselves. The key task for the student essentially becomes the search for information by keywords, and not its analysis.

The results of the questionnaire survey indirectly indicate that students see the problem in the quality of the assignments, and not in their abilities. In particular, 87.2 % of respondents believe that they have the skill of critically understanding digital communications products. Moreover, 86.1 % of respondents expressed the opinion that they are capable of reflection and gain knowledge through their own conclusions. Thus, students demonstrate a high self-assessment of their ability to critically understand, process and generate new knowledge. However, during the focus groups, students were not able to clearly explain how this can be done using only a narrow range of information sources:

Young men, master's degrees: "Maybe I don't understand reflection correctly, but if I immediately found the information and realized that it is suitable, then I have understood it? You can draw a conclusion not only based on scientific literature, everything is visible in practice, in experience and what is around [in professional circles]."

A number of informants turn to the capabilities of artificial intelligence in their responses, thereby shifting responsibility for searching and processing information for study.

Girl, bachelor's degree: "I don't want to waste time and sort through a mountain of literature, now it [artificial intelligence] will do everything and give you the most necessary. Of course, I will critically look at what I got, and sometimes when I understand that it's not quite right, I set up a different search... experience probably allows me to draw conclusions, information from practice, so to speak, so there is no need to look for a lot of information, I can comprehend it from experience."

At the same time, there is reason to believe that students in general do not find it difficult to obtain additional information about assignments from the teacher and do not express sufficient interest in educational information resources. Indirect evidence is the fact that 2/3 of respondents have superficial knowledge of the main educational and professional online platforms. Low interest of students in familiarization with the digital infrastructure of the university can be caused by a number of factors from disappointment in the chosen specialty, to a certain degree of laziness and inability to self-organize. These questions were not asked in the study, so clarifying wording was asked during focus groups.

Young men, bachelor's degree: "Does the DLS [distance learning system] count? Then I know something <laughs>... but it hangs all the time, you need to load a lot, and if everyone starts, the system crashes."

Young men, specialist's degrees: «I sometimes watch open online lectures from other universities, I don't know exactly how useful it is in my studies, but I watch what interests me more for my profession».

In the course of the questionnaire survey, we attempted to establish differences in students' assessments of the availability of skills for working with information, according to some variables. First of all, we introduced the variable – student's gender (Table 1). This is related to stereotypes of gender characteristics in the analysis and processing of information. According to the data obtained, in general, gender does not play a role in students' assessments: the existing discrepancies do not exceed the possible sampling error (< 5 %). Slightly more men believe that they have developed skills for reflecting on information and the ability to generate knowledge based on their own conclusions. In the remaining responses, it is women who demonstrate slightly more positive choices. The assessment of such a skill as "use a narrow range of Internet resources in the process of searching for information" stands out from the relatively heterogeneous responses. Women more often than men (91.0 % versus 82.9 %) believe that they have it.

The introduction of the second variable allowed us to consider the presence of students' skills in working with information depending on the status of the university (Table 2). It has been established that the assessments of their skills received from a student differ significantly depending on where they receive their education, in a capital city university or in a region. It is significant that students from Moscow higher education institutions rate their ability to critically comprehend digital communications products more highly (11.1 % higher than students from the region), and more often note the ability to reflect (10.6 % higher than students from the region). However, it is worth paying attention to one more aspect: the spread in students' assessments is higher where an assessment of information analysis and reflection skills is required. Where the skills to one degree or another relate to access to information sources, the difference in responses does not go beyond the limits of a possible sampling error. Students from the regions, just like the capital's youth, use a narrow range of Internet resources in the process of searching for information

(85.2 % and 88.4 %, respectively), have superficial knowledge of the main educational and professional online platforms (69.6 % and 66.7 %, respectively) and believe that they can systematize the search on information platforms (85.9 % and 91.2 %, respectively). The exception is the use of social media in the search for information; among students from the regions, the share of negative answers is 7.1 percentage points higher.

Table 1. Distribution of responses to the question: “Please rate your level of information handling skills...?”, depending on the respondent’s gender, %

<i>Rate your level of information handling skills</i>	<i>The respondent’s gender</i>	
	<i>young men</i>	<i>girl</i>
can critically think about digital communications products		
yes	86.8	87.5
no	13.2	12.5
can systematize searches on information platforms containing data necessary for study		
yes	89.9	90.2
no	10.1	9.8
capable of reflection (I gain knowledge through my own inferences)		
yes	88.3	84.6
no	11.7	15.4
use a narrow range of Internet resources in the process of searching for information		
yes	82.9	91.0
no	17.1	9.0
mainly use information from social media		
yes	56.0	58.5
no	44.0	41.5
have superficial knowledge of the main educational and professional online platforms		
yes	66.9	67.5
no	33.1	32.5

Table 2. Distribution of responses to the question: “Please rate your level of information handling skills...?”, depending on the status of the university, %

<i>Rate your level of information handling skills</i>	<i>Please indicate the status of your university</i>	
	<i>capital university</i>	<i>regional university</i>
can critically think about digital communications products		
yes	89.6	78.5
no	10.4	21.5
can systematize searches on information platforms containing data necessary for study		
yes	91.2	85.9
no	8.8	14.1
capable of reflection (I gain knowledge through my own inferences)		
yes	88.4	77.8
no	11.6	22.2
use a narrow range of Internet resources in the process of searching for information		
yes	88.4	85.2
no	11.6	14.8
mainly use information from social media		
yes	59.0	51.9
no	41.0	48.1
have superficial knowledge of the main educational and professional online platforms		
yes	66.7	69.6
no	33.3	30.4

The third variable was the profile of the specialty in which the students are studying (Table 3). It is worth noting that the profile of study had no effect on the students' assessment of the skills of critical understanding of digital communications products, the skills of searching and reflecting on data necessary for study. However, in the skills that can be attributed to the choice of channel (information platforms / social media), the assessments of students of different profiles showed significant differences. In particular, among students of the humanities, the proportion of those who mainly use information from social media is significantly higher (66.1 %), while the lowest figure was noted among students of the natural sciences profile – 51.9 %. Students of the socio-economic profile more often than in the sample as a whole note that they have superficial knowledge of the main educational and professional online platforms (74.5 %), while among students of technical specialties the proportion of positive answers is lower than the average for the sample and is 62.1 %.

The fourth variable was the level of education. In the general sample of students, the proportion of master's students is significantly smaller, so the obtained estimates should be approached with a certain degree of assumption and not extended to the entire general population.

Table 3. Distribution of responses to the question: “Please rate your level of information handling skills...?”, depending on the specialty profile, %

Rate your level of information handling skills	Please indicate your specialty profile			
	natural science	humanitarian	socio-economic	technological
can critically think about digital communications products				
yes	86.4	88.1	86.7	88.2
no	13.6	11.9	13.3	11.8
can systematize searches on information platforms containing data necessary for study				
yes	87.9	90.9	90.3	92.2
no	12.1	9.1	9.7	7.8
capable of reflection (I gain knowledge through my own inferences)				
yes	84.0	86.2	87.9	86.9
no	16.0	13.8	12.1	13.1
use a narrow range of Internet resources in the process of searching for information				
yes	87.4	86.2	89.1	87.6
no	12.6	13.8	10.9	12.4
mainly use information from social media				
yes	51.9	66.1	61.2	54.9
no	48.1	33.9	38.8	45.1
have superficial knowledge of the main educational and professional online platforms				
yes	64.1	69.7	74.5	62.1
no	35.9	30.3	25.5	37.9

At the same time, for further research directions, the study of the following features seems promising (Table 4). Among bachelors, the proportion of respondents who noted that they had such a skill as “I gain knowledge through my own inferences” was higher (87.5 %), while among master's students this figure was lower than the sample average by 7.2 % (78.9 %).

It is worth noting that the largest gaps in the distribution of respondents' answers are observed between the bachelor's and master's degrees, while the frequency of choosing the "yes" answer (even if it concerns the lack of skills) is higher among the first group. An example is the following distribution: bachelors mainly use information from social media (61.7 %), while for master's students this share is only 50.0 %.

Table 4. Distribution of responses to the question: “Please rate your level of information handling skills...?”, depending on the level of study, %

Rate your level of information handling skills	<i>The level of study</i>		
	bachelor's degrees	master's degrees	specialist's degrees
can critically think about digital communications products			
yes	87.0	89.5	87.2
no	13.0	10.5	12.8
can systematize searches on information platforms containing data necessary for study			
yes	91.3	92.1	87.2
no	8.7	7.9	12.8
capable of reflection (I gain knowledge through my own inferences)			
yes	87.5	78.9	84.7
no	12.5	21.1	15.3
use a narrow range of Internet resources in the process of searching for information			
yes	88.5	86.8	86.2
no	11.5	13.2	13.8
mainly use information from social media			
yes	61.7	50.0	50.7
no	38.3	50.0	49.3
have superficial knowledge of the main educational and professional online platforms			
yes	68.9	63.2	65.0
no	31.1	36.8	35.0

Among bachelors, the share of those who note that they have superficial knowledge of the main educational and professional online platforms is higher (68.9 % and 63.2 % in the master's degree).

5. Conclusion

The results of the study showed that students generally highly assess both their level of digital literacy and media competence in such parameters as the skill of systematically searching for data necessary for study on information platforms, the ability to reflect on information, and critically understand digital products. Along with positive assessments, most students noted that they use only a narrow range of sources in the process of searching for information. Thus, the hypothesis put forward during the study about the insufficient level of media competence of students was only partially confirmed. The skill of systematically searching for information, despite the high level of self-assessment for this parameter, is not used by students in the learning process. During the focus group, the reasons for this problem were established: dysfunctions of knowledge control, a simplified assignment format, a distorted understanding of the norms of digital ethics. In the context of reduced teacher requirements for the quality of assignments, students tend to reduce their time spent on searching and analyzing information. Information skills are limited to searching by keywords, there is no reflection, critical understanding, and generation of new knowledge. The second reason is related to the specificity of the tasks, which do not require deep processing of information. In addition, the vagueness of the norms of digital ethics allows students to turn to artificial intelligence when preparing tasks. These factors together reduce students' motivation to study and their readiness to use their existing skills in working with information.

The second hypothesis related to the definition of determinants of students' media competence formation was partially confirmed. The variability of the presented data does not allow us to answer the question about the influence of the profile of study and the level of education of students on their skills of working with information unambiguously, however, the established differences give grounds to conclude that there are other determinants (quality of education, students' motivation, etc.) that are formed in this area. Therefore, further directions of research on this topic may be: analysis of factors of students' motivation formation when working with media; definition of the design of educational tasks that allow forming skills of systematization of

information, its comprehension, generation of new knowledge; analysis of the influence of the digital infrastructure of the university on the development of students' media competence.

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Published in the USA
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Issued since 2005.
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 1994-4195
2025. 21(1): 112-120

DOI: 10.13187/me.2025.1.112
<https://me.cherkasgu.press>



Older Women, Younger Men: Romantic Autonomy and Gender Constraint in the Film's Narratives

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Abstract

This study examines gender inequalities and societal biases in age-gap relationships, specifically focusing on the film's narratives entitled *The Idea of You* directed by Michael Showalter launched in 2024. This film portrays an older woman who has a romantic relationship with a younger man. The age gap is sixteen years old difference. This research employs a qualitative approach and works within the theoretical framework of gender and feminist studies focusing on the character interactions, dialogues, and societal reactions toward age-gap relationships. The result shows that the age gap difference does matter when the women in relationships are older than men. They face much more social criticism compared to older men dating younger women, exposing the persistent societal biases that limit women's romantic autonomy. This research demonstrates how societal expectations continue to impose restrictive norms on women's autonomy, enforcing judgment and control over their relationship choices. By critically examining the narrative of the film, the study highlights the complexities of gender inequality within romantic relationships. This research contributes in giving better understandings for the viewers how media representations on romantic relationships are influenced by social norms, social expectations, and ideologies. This study is important for media literacy in supporting gender equality.

Keywords: age gap relationships, romantic autonomy, gender constraint, social expectation.

1. Introduction

Relationships with significant age differences have long intrigued society with the focus predominantly on older men with younger women. This neglects the equally compelling older women with younger men. Age differences in relationships often reflect broader societal structures, where men are typically older than women in couples, and it captures the gendered power dynamics (Bergström, 2018). Moreover, scholarly attention remains largely skewed, creating a notable gap in understanding romantic relationships with obvious age gap differences (Masenya, 2017). Unfair assumptions and skepticism are common responses to age-gap relationships with older women. Society tends to romanticize the "older men" while judging older women for engaging in similar relationships which leads to what is called a double standard. In this matter, the double standard refers to the perception of one society in addressing a romantic relationship with an obvious age gap difference. It seems to be normal and accepted if the men in older than the women but it is unacceptable when women are older than men. Then it creates social expectations and gender norms within a culture (Milhausen, Harold; Lehmiller, Agnew, 2011). These double standards stem from ingrained patriarchal values that prioritize male agency in romantic decisions

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while diminishing women's rights to pursue love freely, regardless of age. These biases are reflected not only in academic studies but also in media representations, where older women are frequently caricatured as "cougars" or "desperate," reducing their relationships to mere opportunism or vanity. People generally feel more accepting if the older person in a relationship is a man (Lehmiller, Agnew, 2011).

Society's view or stigma towards such relationships labels them as something unacceptable and socially challenging (Sela et al., 2018). The role of societal expectations and the like has contributed to forming or even limiting deeper relationships (Chopik, Edelstein, 2014). This perception is what the film *The Idea of You* (2024) brings to the screen. The film is about a 40-year-old single mother named Solène Marchand. Her life changes drastically when she goes to a music festival with her daughter. There, she meets Hayes Campbell, the lead singer of the famous boy band August Moon, who is 24 years old. A moment where what was initially just a temporary relationship turns into a romantic relationship that challenges social norms and age-related stereotypes in the stigma of society.

The film explores the complexities of their relationship, focusing on Solène's internal conflict as she balances her desires with the judgmental gazes of those around her. Hayes, on the other hand, must navigate the intense scrutiny of fame and his insecurities about their age difference. The film doesn't shy away from portraying how external pressures, including media sensationalism, fan backlash, and family dynamics influence such relationships. It also explores the impact of fame on personal lives and the struggle to protect intimate moments in public.

Relationships between people with significant age differences have long been a topic of social and academic interest. However, research tends to focus more on relationships between older men and younger women, while older women's relationships with younger men are less studied (Tembo, Mambwe, 2021: 353). As a result, many aspects of the development and sustainability of these relationships are not fully understood, especially the gender injustices experienced by women in such relationships. Thus, this research explores how *The Idea of You's* film portrays the struggles of age-gap relationships while challenging the double standards inherent in modern perceptions of love. It aims to show the biases and inequalities captured by traditional norms through the lens of gender and feminism.

This research is important for media literacy particularly to help individuals to critically analyze and understand how media shapes perceptions of social norms. Moreover, it empowers viewers to challenge the conventional understanding of gender and age gap differences in romantic relationships. This research highlights how the representation of romantic relationships with age gap differences can either reinforce or disrupt stereotypes. This helps empower individuals to recognize the biases and at the same time have a better understanding of how media representations are influenced by societal structures such as social norms, social expectations, and ideologies.

Further, this research has formulated research questions: How does age gap difference on romantic relationships present in the film? How does the film reveal the gap between the age gap difference romantic relationships and women's romantic autonomy? And how does the film challenge the social expectation of age gap romantic relationships?

2. Materials and methods

The method used in this research is qualitative. The qualitative method can be interpreted as a study of things that occur naturally (Busetto et al., 2020). The corpus used in this research is a film entitled *The Idea of You* launched in 2024 with data collection in the form of direct observation of the film and focusing on the narratives of the film. The technique used to analyze the narrative is close textual analysis which the researcher focuses on the text that brings the issues of age gap difference. Further, this applies to gender and feminism theories focusing on gender inequality for investigating age gap differences in the film.

The philosophy of feminism, men and women should have equal rights in terms of politics, decision-making, employment, and parenthood. It is made up of several social, cultural, and political movements that aim to provide men and women equal rights (Asnani, 2020 as cited in Mohajan, 2022). Depending on their personal views, background, and culture, feminists have as many different definitions of feminism as there are feminists; yet, gender equality is a universal concept (Haradhan, 2022). Feminism is a socio-political movement with the goal that women should be treated equally (Delaney, 2005 as cited in Haradhan, 2022). Gender inequality is defined as hierarchy between men and women's position, strength, and financial assets (Ridgeway, 2011).

These concepts are relevant to reveal society's views and stereotypes about age gap differences in romantic relationships and how they relate to gender issues.

3. Discussion

The idea that love overcomes societal norms and expectations is explored in depth in *The Idea of You's* film, which examines the intricacies of age-gap relationships, particularly from the standpoint of gender roles and social judgment. Hayes, a 24-year-old rising music star, and Solène, a 40-year-old woman, explore the complexities of their unconventional relationship in this movie. Social expectations, individual fears, and the emotional toll of outside criticism all play a part in their story as it develops.

Examinations about age differences in relationships are common, but women are usually criticized more than men in the same situation (McKenzie, 2021). In this film, we can see how unfair rules still exist in society. If an older man dates a younger woman, he is often praised. But if an older woman dates a younger man, she is often marginalized. This shows how strong patriarchal rules are that make people have certain views about relationships and love.

The film explores themes of gender inequity, societal pressure, and the emotional difficulties that arise in age-gap relationships. Through the experiences of the main characters and deep conversations, we are invited to think about our own prejudices. This film also invites us to see how existing social rules can affect people's relationships, especially for women attempting to find independence and love in a critical society.

The Idea of You provides a detailed look at how age differences shape romantic relationships, showing societal expectations and personal challenges. The dialogue between the main characters, Hayes and Solène, illustrates how they struggle to balance their relationship with the realities imposed by their age difference. In this example, Hayes, who is a much younger celebrity, tries to normalize their relationship despite external pressures saying:

Hayes: *"It would just be me, and we could hang out like normal people."*

Solène: *"Um, yeah, it's not gonna work for me. This was fun, but now it's, uh, not."* (The Idea of You, 1:14:53).

Much has changed in this conversation. Solène's response shows an internal conflict, which is a result of social stigma and personal pressure caused by being in a relationship that goes against societal standards. This pressure to conform is stronger for women because age differences often judge them. Older men are often praised in such relationships, while women are often considered desperate or inappropriate (Collisson, De Leon, 2020). Media portrayals further compound these pressures, framing older women in age-gap relationships as predatory or unworthy of love (Sontag, 2018).

Solène's decision to end the relationship later in the film illustrates the emotional burden she faces. She says:

Solène: *"I can't do this anymore. Us, our relationship, I ... I can't do it anymore. It's Izz. It's too much for her. I mean, it's ... insane."*

Hayes: *"Okay, let me just, um, think about this for a second."* (The Idea of You, 1:39:05)

This dialogue reveals how Solène's role as a mother and societal judgment clash, leaving her feeling as though her desires must take a backseat to her daughter's emotional well-being. Inter-generational relationships are often complicated by family obligations and the difficulty younger partners face when integrating into the older partner's established life (Simsekli et al., 2020). For Solène, the sacrifices required to maintain the relationship are too great, particularly when it begins to affect her daughter, Izz. This highlights a recurring societal expectation where women, especially mothers, are expected to prioritize their families above their happiness (Barr et al., 2023).

Additionally, the film explores how gendered double standards amplify the challenges in age-gap relationships. While older men dating younger women are often perceived as distinguished or desirable, older women in similar relationships face criticism and marginalization (Rudman, Glick, 2021). Women like Solène face an unequal burden because of these perceptions or stigmas. They must deal with judgments about their choices about relationships and the emotional consequences of these perceptions on their families and children. The influence of social pressure explains Solène's decision to end the relationship.

Their relationship is further complicated by Hayes' widespread popularity. Their relationship has become a public concern in an increasingly connected world, making Solène fear the dire consequences for herself and her daughter. This is related to the opinion of Simsekli et al. (Simsekli et al., 2020) that society often exaggerates the problems faced by a relationship that is not in line

with existing standards, making personal problems into social debates. Solène does not want to continue her relationship, indicating that she wants to protect herself and her daughter from further judgment, even if it means sacrificing her happiness.

Romantic relationships with obvious age gap differences somehow invite social rejection. This leads to gender inequality that manifests in various ways, including stereotypes formed from social context and social structures (Gurieva et al., 2022: 66). These stereotypes then construct certain expectations in romantic relationships. *The Idea of You* (2024) has presented how age gap romantic relationship does matter in patriarchal society where their relationship is underestimated, especially in terms of sexuality and attractiveness. Older men are frequently perceived as attractive or authoritative, while older women are often negatively judged and considered to have lost social value (Liu, 2023: 178). This injustice is reflected in how Solène's relationship with Hayes is perceived. When a man in his 40s dates a younger woman, it is rarely seen as strange or problematic. However, when an older woman, like Solène, enters a romantic relationship with a younger man, she becomes an easy target for harsh criticism.

"If the roles are reversed you think anyone else would give a shit? would judge?" (The Idea of You, 1:16:38)

Hayes' dialogue strongly suggests that men have greater freedom in choosing romantic partners than women, who face intense social scrutiny. When a man in his 40s dates a younger woman, people rarely raise an eyebrow. But when an older woman like Solène is romantically involved with a younger man, she immediately becomes a target of harsh criticism. This attitude not only affects women's self-confidence but also reinforces gender norms that disadvantage and restrict women from expressing their romantic or sexual preferences (Vanderheiden, 2021). Gender-role asserts that gender representation in society is largely shaped by the distribution of social roles based on biological differences (Eagly, Wood, 1991). Women are often associated with being weak and in need of protection due to their biological ability to give birth, while men are perceived as strong and responsible (Gurieva et al., 2022: 66). Men are considered to be in charge of earning a living and making important decisions, while women are responsible for caring for the household and children (Gewirtz-Meydan et al., 2024). These views form the unwritten rules of romantic relationships, where men are expected to be older and dominant.

Age gap relationships (older women, younger men) are considered inappropriate in society and unlikely to succeed (Sela et al., 2018), a perspective directly contested by the film. The narrative underscores this inequality by juxtaposing two contrasting relationships. Solène and Hayes experience constant social pressure and uncomfortable interactions because of their age difference, with Solène being judged more harshly as the older woman. In stark contrast, Daniel and Eve –where the man is older –face no such criticism. This indicates that there is a potential for men's responses to women who support traditional gender roles to be more positive than when women challenge them (Domen et al., 2022). In other words, when women conform to established norms, men feel more comfortable, which is why Daniel and Eve's relationship is freer from social stigma because it is perceived as conforming to established social expectations. It also highlights the deeply rooted gender patriarchal nature in how we perceive romantic relationships.

Social norms influenced by patriarchy play an important role in shaping gender roles in relationships, especially romantic relationships. Patriarchy can be defined as a male-dominated hierarchical structure, where men are culturally and socially placed in a higher position than women (Chairunnisa, Hafizh, 2024). This structure creates certain expectations regarding the ideal relationship. A common expectation in romantic relationships is that men should be older, dominant, and take the lead, while women are seen as being younger, supportive, and submissive. This belief aligns with the traditional patriarchal view, where men are often associated with independence, power, and authority, while women are expected to be nurturing, supportive, and follow their partners' lead (Rosalind, 2017). In the relationship between Solène and Hayes, where Solène is the older woman, their relationship contradicts these social expectations. These social norms become a trigger for external pressure on women to conform to gender and age stereotypes considered ideal. This is evident in the dialogue between Hayes and Solène:

Hayes: So, when can I see you again?

Solène: I can't do this

Hayes: Why?

Solène: Because you're you and I'm me and we just don't fit (The Idea of You, 47:52)

When Solène says, “Because you're you and I'm me and we just don't fit,” it can be interpreted as a result of societal views that dictate men must be older and women younger, thereby potentially viewing their relationship as inappropriate. Individuals who do not follow traditional relationship norms living in societies with lower gender equality tend to receive less social support (Lys, Adamczyk, 2024). The phrase “don't fit” explains that Solène feels their relationship does not align with social norms. The patriarchal culture underlying these rules creates inequality between men and women. This inequality is normalized, indirectly pressuring women to conform to these norms. In romantic relationships, women often have to sacrifice their desires to meet long-established social expectations (Siva et al., 2023: 4). Therefore, Solène and Hayes's relationship, which does not follow this pattern, is considered unusual. Solène's rejection of her relationship with Hayes can be seen as a consequence of deeply rooted social pressures. She was raised in an environment with unwritten rules about how a romantic relationship should proceed, and consequently, her personal choices are indirectly influenced by these social constructs.

Not only does the age difference impact the relationship and society, but it can also affect the individuals in the relationship. Women were rarely willing to date younger men, but they were willing to date a man up to ten years above them (Lehmiller, Christopher, 2008). This statement shows that women in relationships will feel more comfortable publishing the relationship if the partner is older, and tend to be shy about being open if the partner is younger. In the movie *The Idea of You*, there is a scene when they fight shows that Solène feels embarrassed if people know she is dating Hayes who is 16 years younger than her.

Hayes: “So what you're um you're ashamed with me? is that it?”

Solène: “I am ashamed.” (The Idea of You, 1:16:51).

This scene highlighted that age difference can be a factor that makes individuals feel embarrassed and also fearful of other people's judgment on their relationship. In this case, people feeling uncomfortable or judging women who date younger men shows that society expects men to be older, more experienced, or in charge in relationships. In this case, the equality in the sexual field has not been completely achieved (Gómez-Berrocal et al., 2022). Even if society doesn't judge relationships with a big age difference, people in those relationships can still feel upset if someone personally criticizes them, this is supported by research that says people in age-gap relationships may still feel hurt by personal criticism, even if society as a whole doesn't have a negative view of such relationships. (Smisek, 2019, as cited in Scolpino, Steele, 2024).

According to other studies, those in age-gap relationships who experienced greater societal rejection or judgment were more likely to end their relationship (Lehmiller, Agnew, 2006, quoted in Scolpino, Steele, 2024). In the movie, the characters also broke up for that reason.

Izzy: “Mom, why would you break up with a talented, kind feminist?” (The Idea of You, 1:26:25).

This scene shows that even though they wanted each other, the insults they received from Hayes friends made Solène feel offended and finally decide to break up. Here, societal expectations about relationships like the idea that men should be older than their female partners still have a powerful influence on Solène's feelings and decisions.

This claim is backed by research showing that rejection by one or more partners of an age-gap relationship by their social network was more destructive to the relationship than rejection by society at large. This suggests that people in age-gap relationships might be more resilient to social stigma than to criticism from friends and family (Lehmiller, Agnew, 2006, as cited in Scolpino, Steele 2024).

Age-gap relationships between older women and younger men often go against traditional social expectations, showing how personal and societal pressures can shape relationships. Society usually expects men to be older than their partners, linking age with qualities like wisdom, stability, and financial success (Utomo, 2014). For these reasons, relationships where the woman is older are often judged unfairly and seen as unusual. This anxiety might happen because people feel they need to change themselves to fit into a relationship that is not widely accepted (Roberts et al., 2005 as cited in Chopik, Edelstein, 2014). At the same time, being in a committed, long-term relationship can help reduce these feelings by creating a sense of safety and support (Davila et al., 1999 as cited in Chopik, Edelstein, 2014).

Women in these relationships often feel uncomfortable and self-conscious about how others view them. Many said they feel embarrassed when people find out about the age difference. Smolak, Murnen (2002) argue that “the societal pressure women face to conform to traditional romantic roles can lead to negative self-perception and emotional stress when they break from

these norms.” This is in line with past studies, which show that women are judged more harshly than men when they date younger partners. Another research about Ambivalent Sexism Theory said that traditional sexism is divided into two types, hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. The hostile component can mean a negative stigma of women because it is assumed that those who do not follow traditional roles, such as being a possible threat to male dominance and masculinity (Glick, Fiske, 2001, as cited in Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2020). Solène, who is older in a relationship, is potentially more dominant, and it causes negative stigma from people. This happened to Solène, who was criticized by many for having a nontraditional relationship with Hayes due to their age difference. Meanwhile, her ex-husband was free to cheat on her, and everyone knew it, but they chose to keep it a secret.

The role of men in this kind of relationship is also impacted by social stigma. They can also feel uncomfortable with the societal stigma of being a younger individual, where usually men are expected to be a masculine leader who is generally older. Stigmatization of age-gap relationships can impact those people’s mental health negatively (Silva, 2019 as cited in Scolpino, Steele, 2024). The fact that Hayes also feels sad and stressed by people around him who indirectly criticize his relationship shows that he is affected by the stigma. This idea is supported by research that states that individuals in relationships may face stigma from others and that stigma and stereotyping increase the risk of mental health problems such as stress, anxiety, and depression. (Cupach, Spitzberg, 2011; Lehmler, Agnew, 2006; Smisek, 2019). This shows that societal pressure and criticism from the closest people can have a bad influence on these relationships.

There is a scene in the film where Solène and Hayes openly express their relationship despite society’s scorn for them. The scene, with a song playing in the background (The Idea of You 1:30:04 –1:30:33), depicts Solène’s decision to no longer let societal expectations control her actions. This scene shows how Solène finally decides to continue her relationship with Hayes, she also believes in her decision and goes against the norms that exist in society. This scene is very contrasting with the previous scene in the film, where Solène can laugh freely and cover her shame, this also illustrates the process of her self-development. She also shows the audience how important it is to put your desires first and choose happiness over fear of criticism from society.

Although there is no dialogue in the scene, the depiction of Solène smiling and holding Hayes’ hand in public provides powerful evidence. It defies the idea that women should adapt themselves to societal expectations about relationships and age. It also shows that people can overcome strong gender stereotypes. Negotiations between societal expectations and personal desires often reflect personal decisions in relationships, and the role of the individuals is crucial in coping with external pressures (Sánchez et al., 2017: 6-8).

Solène’s choice to end her relationship with Hayes to make Izz, her daughter, a priority in her life can be said to be a critique of patriarchy and not to be inferior to social expectations.

Solène: “I can’t do this anymore. Us, our relationship, I can’t do it anymore. It’s Izz”

Hayes: “Okay, um ...”

Solène: “It’s just too much for her. I mean, she didn’t sign up for any of this, and it’s too much for her. And I have to put her first.”

Hayes: “Okay.” (The Idea of You, 1:39:04)

The dialogue spoken by Solène shows that she is more concerned with her child than her relationship with Hayes. Although the relationship between the two couples ran aground, the cause was not the existing social expectations, but it was a decision she thought was best for all their conditions. From this, it means that she is a woman who despite responding to social expectations, still has control over her own life, which can be said as a criticism of patriarchy which often considers women do not have the right to manage their own lives (Khaerati, Iskandar, 2023: 52). Patriarchy places women in a more passive role as if they do not have the freedom to make choices in their lives, especially in relationships (Pillado, 2023). Studies on values in relationships show that people who uphold the value of caring for others tend to have happier relationships (van der Wal et al., 2023) It is not because they sacrifice themselves but because they understand exactly what matters to them. Solène is one of them. She doesn’t stay in a relationship just to maintain a certain image or avoid the gaze of others. She chose to walk away from her romantic relationship with Hayes because she knew that there were more important things than just maintaining a relationship that was no longer in line with her priorities. By ending the relationship with Hayes for the sake of her child, Solène proves that she is not inferior to existing social expectations by determining what is best for herself without feeling bound by the roles that have been chosen by society.

4. Results

The study reveals that age-gap relationships, as depicted in *The Idea of You*, highlight the subtle balance between societal expectations and personal struggles. The film emphasizes how societal norms and stereotypes heavily influence relationships where the woman is older. Solène, the main character, faces societal judgment and internal conflict, which highly depicts the challenges women in such relationships often experience. These findings align with (Sánchez et al., 2017), who argue that relationship dynamics are shaped by external social pressures, especially when the couples can't live up to expectations. Since women are supposed to put their families and society's approval above their happiness, the movie does a good job of showing how these pressures significantly impact them.

Other studies show that social expectations manifested through patriarchy can influence how a romantic relationship where women who are older than men are judged by society. The patriarchy that exists in society assumes that men should lead and be dominant in a relationship, and women should complement men (Li, 2025) which then leads to the belief men should be older than women when in a romantic relationship. From this patriarchal understanding, social expectations are formed that create inequality, where relationships between older men and younger women are accepted without much question, while the opposite relationship, where the woman is older, is often criticized. As stated by Rosida and Soraya (Rosida, Soraya, 2017: 4) "In patriarchal culture especially, women are subordinate as a result of social construction." These social expectations do not come for free but are contributed by cultural norms. As a result, women in these relationships are burdened by the pressure of fulfilling social expectations, even though this is often contrary to their feelings and desires. Women are also more limited in their emotional and social freedom in relationships.

This research also shows how societal expectations and personal struggles affect age-gap relationships, especially when the woman is older. The age gap in a relationship can make a person feel ashamed of the criticism and views of those closest to them, especially if the woman is older. This is illustrated in the problems experienced by Solène during her relationship with Hayes who is much younger than her. Solène felt embarrassed when everyone found out about her relationship. Research supports this opinion and states that people in such relationships face more criticism, such criticism hurts both the person and the relationship (Smisek, 2019, as cited in Scolpino, Steele, 2024). The end of Solène's relationship with Hayes happened partly because of negative comments from Hayes' friends, even though they both loved each other. This shows how much social pressure can influence decisions in age-gap relationships. This phenomenon shows that disapproval from loved ones is more damaging than societal disapproval.

5. Conclusion

The Idea of You (2024) film has shown how social expectations and gender norms have a significant role in romantic relationships. This critique of the double standards where older men are favored over older women. The unfair treatment of older women reflects how embedded patriarchal values can create social pressure for older women in romantic relationships with younger men. Social norms and expectations seemingly lead to gender inequality where older women with younger men in romantic relationships are unaccepted within society. This film highlights romantic autonomy but at the same time shows that social norms and expectations are much more powerful than individual love. This research contributes to media literacy education by encouraging viewers to question why society often holds double standards: why is an older man with a younger woman more widely accepted, while older women with younger men are often subject to ridicule or suspicion? By fostering critical thinking, viewers recognize the complexities of the portrayals of relationships between older women and younger men. Also, this research facilitates individuals to think critically about the messages conveyed through media representations, promotes a more inclusive media landscape, and creates an understanding of romantic autonomy.

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Published in the USA
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Issued since 2005.
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 1994-4195
2025. 21(1): 121-137

DOI: 10.13187/me.2025.1.121
<https://me.cherkasgu.press>



Digital Media Literacy in Higher Education: A Curriculum Analysis of Undergraduate Media Programs in Pakistan

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of digital communication and media technologies has highlighted the critical necessity of incorporating digital media literacy into higher education curricula globally. This study investigates how undergraduate Media and Communication programs in Lahore, Pakistan, address digital media literacy through their curricula. Focusing on three public and three private universities, this research employs a quantitative content analysis to identify gaps and opportunities for equipping students with essential digital competencies. The findings reveal significant disparities between public and private institutions, with private universities allocating a greater proportion of their curricula to digital media literacy than their public counterparts, where progress remains gradual. Despite these efforts, the overall integration of digital media literacy remains below international benchmarks, hindering students' preparedness for the demands of an evolving digital landscape. This study highlights key challenges, including outdated curricula, inadequate faculty training, and limited resources, which inhibit effective digital literacy education in Pakistan. It emphasizes the need for the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan to prioritize reform through improved curricular standards, innovative teaching practices, and faculty development. This research provides actionable recommendations that enhance the discussion on aligning higher education curricula with global standards, encouraging critical thinking, ethical content creation, and responsible digital engagement among students.

Keywords: digital generation, digital media literacy, curriculum, pedagogy, media education.

1. Introduction

As the digital landscape evolves rapidly, digital literacy has shifted from a narrow focus on technical proficiency to a multifaceted framework integrating critical analysis, ethical reasoning, and participatory engagement with digital technologies. Scholars argue that embedding digital literacy into educational curricula is imperative to equip learners with the skills to navigate the complexities of the 21st century (Livingstone, Helsper, 2007; Buckingham, 2015). A systematic review conducted by C. Audrin and B. Audrin (Audrin, Audrin, 2022) delineates six fundamental dimensions of digital literacy within the educational context: information literacy, digital competency, digital learning, information and communication technology skills, engagement with social media, and competencies pertinent to the 21st century. Building on this, R. Hobbs (Hobbs, 2011) advocates for a holistic media literacy pedagogy that empowers students to critically evaluate, ethically create, and responsibly share digital content. Recent studies further emphasize the role of

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digital literacy in fostering digital citizenship, where learners engage in civic participation and uphold ethical standards online (Hinrichsen, Coombs, 2013; Ng, 2012). For instance, C. Hague and S. Payton (Hague, Payton, 2010) highlight the importance of critical digital literacy in addressing misinformation and algorithmic bias, while R.H. Jones and C.A. Hafner (Jones, Hafner, 2012) stress the interplay between digital tools and sociocultural practices in shaping learning environments. These evolving perspectives underscore the need for interdisciplinary approaches that bridge technical skills with sociopolitical awareness, ensuring learners become informed, ethical, and proactive participants in digital society.

The proliferation of digital media has dramatically reshaped traditional media landscapes, democratizing content creation and distribution (Jenkins, 2006; Couldry, 2012). Advancements in high-speed internet technologies, such as 4G and 5G, have facilitated real-time communication and provided unrestricted access to global digital platforms, fostering unprecedented connectivity and engagement (van Dijck, 2013). This transformation has particularly empowered younger generations, enabling them to transition from passive consumers to active creators of media content (Livingstone, 2004; Westlund, Ekström, 2018). However, the democratization of media also presents significant challenges, including the proliferation of misinformation and the growing necessity for robust critical evaluation skills (Buckingham, 2019). These dynamics highlight the urgent need for education systems to prioritise digital literacy as a fundamental aspect of curricula, in order to equip individuals for both the opportunities and the risks inherent in the digital media landscape.

In response to these challenges, educational initiatives are increasingly emphasizing media literacy to prepare students for the complexities of the digital world. For example, a recent study highlighted how U.S. teachers actively incorporate media literacy into their classrooms to address disinformation, acknowledging that U.S. teenagers face difficulty differentiating between news, advertisements, and opinions (Allen et al., 2023). Integrating digital media literacy into curricula has shown measurable benefits. Another study demonstrated that a 10-week digital media literacy course significantly improved primary school students' ability to critically assess and engage with digital content (Zhang et al., 2023). Similarly, E.E. Smith and H. Storrs (Smith, Storrs, 2023) found that undergraduate students who received targeted media literacy instruction were significantly better equipped to navigate the complexities of digital environments, demonstrating enhanced critical evaluation skills and media awareness. These findings underline the urgency of equipping students with the skills to critically analyze and engage with digital content in an increasingly mediated world.

The shift from traditional to digital media has dramatically increased access to unfiltered content, reducing censorship and amplifying the need for digital media literacy, particularly among youth who primarily interact in digital ecosystems (Ashraf et al., 2020). Media literacy has been integrated into primary and secondary education as a core component of curricula, co-curricular activities, or elective subjects (Abbasi, Huang, 2020; Mihailidis, 2013). However, despite its growing importance in fostering critical thinking and responsible engagement, Pakistan lags in systematically embedding digital media literacy within its higher education system (Jamil et al., 2022). Studies have highlighted the benefits of media literacy education in improving students' ability to analyze, access, and produce media content critically (Robertson, Scheidler-Benns, 2016). Yet, challenges such as outdated curricula, lack of infrastructure, and insufficient faculty training persist (Shah et al., 2022). This gap is particularly pronounced in undergraduate Media and Communication programs, where the absence of targeted digital media literacy courses undermines the preparation of students for the complexities of the evolving media landscape.

This study addresses these challenges by conducting a comprehensive content analysis of undergraduate Media and Communication curricula offered by public and private universities in Lahore, Pakistan. The selected methodology thoroughly investigates how well concepts of digital media literacy – like critical evaluation, ethical content creation, and effective digital engagement – are incorporated into these programs. By identifying deficiencies, the research offers actionable recommendations to align academic programs with international standards and address Pakistan's unique sociocultural and technological contexts. Unlike previous studies discussing the need for media literacy, this research focuses on the structural and curricular gaps, providing a data-driven analysis to inform curriculum designers and policymakers. The findings highlight the urgent need for digital media literacy and propose practical solutions to enhance these programs and bridge the gap between academia and industry.

The Rising Importance of Digital Media Literacy: The exponential growth of digital media has reshaped communication, providing unprecedented access to information and posing significant challenges. Unfiltered content, misinformation, and cyber vulnerabilities have made digital media literacy essential for navigating today's complex information landscape. Media literacy, initially defined as the ability to access, comprehend, and produce communications (Aufderheide, 1997), has evolved to encompass digital media literacy, which includes the effective use of digital tools to solve information problems and thrive in an information society. Scholars emphasize its transformative potential, highlighting how media literacy education fosters critical thinking, ethical engagement, and the ability to analyze and create media responsibly (Burnett, Merchant, 2011).

Globally, these skills are increasingly integrated into primary and secondary curricula, preparing individuals for active participation in information-driven societies (González-Salamanca et al., 2020). In Pakistan, however, the integration of media literacy lags behind global benchmarks despite advancements in ICT use, e-learning, and mobile technology adoption (Shah et al., 2022). The Pakistani government recognized by the early 2000s that "Education for All" goals would require integrating new technologies into traditional education systems (Ahmad, 2011). However, recent studies show significant gaps in embedding media literacy into higher education curricula, leaving students ill-equipped to critically analyze media and resist misinformation (Jones-Jang et al., 2021). This gap is particularly concerning given the rising global demand for advanced digital skills, including AI, cybersecurity, and mobile app development, projected to drive future job markets.

The Role of Educators and Institutions in Fostering Digital Literacy: Educational institutions and teachers are pivotal in fostering digital literacy. However, many educators in Pakistan face barriers such as limited technical skills and inadequate resources (Ashraf et al., 2020). S.P. Karunanayaka (Karunanayaka, 2024) distinguishes between digital capability – using technology for accessing and sharing knowledge—and digital competence, which involves applying this knowledge critically and confidently in a digital society. Research has highlighted the importance of teacher training in bridging this gap. J. Baroud and P. Dharamshi (Baroud, Dharamshi, 2020) emphasize that educators are central collaborators in media literacy initiatives, while another study advocates for integrating information technology into teacher education to meet the demands of the digital era (Schmidt-Crawford et al., 2018). However, the disparity between "digital natives," adept at modern technologies, and "digital immigrants," who often rely on outdated methods, further complicates efforts to integrate media literacy into curricula.

In Pakistan, the National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) and the 2017 education policy highlight the need for ICT integration to enhance teaching and learning (Asad et al., 2020). Yet, infrastructural deficiencies, lack of faculty training, and misaligned curricula remain persistent challenges (Kundi, Nawaz, 2010; Murtaza, Hui, 2021). Teacher training in Pakistan often fails to account for the dynamic nature of digital media, limiting educators' ability to effectively engage with students and incorporate critical media literacy concepts into their teaching (Ashraf, Chaudhary, 2013). Addressing these deficiencies is essential to empowering educators and equipping students with the critical skills necessary for digital citizenship and participation in the knowledge economy (Lankshear, Knobel, 2008).

Digital Media Literacy in Higher Education: Addressing the Gaps: University curricula serve as a crucial platform for embedding digital media literacy, yet significant gaps remain in Pakistan's undergraduate Media and Communication programs. Studies reveal that media-related courses in Pakistan often lack a strong focus on digital literacy, treating it as an optional rather than foundational component (Jamil et al., 2022). While proficient in using media technologies, students often lack the evaluative and ethical skills necessary to critically engage with digital content (Ross et al., 2022). Media Literacy Theory (Potter, 2013), which emphasizes integrating concepts like media effects, content creation, and ethical consumption, offers a robust framework for addressing these gaps.

Globally, scholars have called for curriculum revisions to align with modern technological and ethical demands, particularly in journalism and media education (Kirchhoff, 2022; George, Dellasega, 2011). However, in Pakistan, the disconnect between academic curricula and industry needs highlights the urgency of such reforms (Muhammad et al., 2009). Research by A. Hicks and A. Graber (Hicks, Graber, 2010) highlights the democratizing impact of digital media, enabling new career opportunities with minimal resources. Similarly, a study by B. Gros and F.J. García-Peñalvo

(Gros, García-Peñalvo, 2023) highlights that digital tools and learning applications are transforming higher education worldwide, yet Pakistani institutions have been slow to adapt.

This study builds on these insights by conducting a content analysis of undergraduate Media and Communication programs in Lahore, Pakistan, to evaluate how digital media literacy is integrated into the curricula. This research identifies critical gaps and provides actionable recommendations by focusing on issues like misinformation evaluation, content creation, and ethical engagement. The findings aim to inform policymakers and curriculum designers, aligning higher education in Pakistan with global standards while addressing the unique challenges of its educational landscape.

RQ1: To what extent do undergraduate Media and Communication curricula effectively incorporate digital media literacy skills to prepare students for the demands of the digital media landscape?

2. Materials and methods

This research employed a quantitative content analysis approach to explore the extent to which digital media literacy is embedded in the curricula of undergraduate Media and Communication programs offered by selected universities in Lahore, Pakistan. Quantitative content analysis is a widely used exploratory method for systematically identifying patterns, themes, and categories within textual or multimedia data (Neuendorf, Kumar, 2015). Content analysis provides a rigorous framework for extracting insights from data while maintaining replicability and validity. The focus was on analyzing course content, learning objectives, and instructional materials to determine the extent to which they foster critical digital media literacy skills such as information evaluation, content creation, and ethical digital engagement. The study focused on reviewing curricula to uncover gaps, opportunities, and improvement areas that help align undergraduate education with the global need for digital skills.

The study population included undergraduate BS Media and Communication programs from universities across Pakistan, with a specific focus on public and private universities in Lahore. To ensure relevance and focus, the sample consisted of curricula from six universities' Media and Communication departments—selected based on their ranking among the top ten institutions for Media and Communication Studies in Lahore (see Table 1). These universities were chosen to represent both public and private sector institutions, providing a balanced view of curricular practices across different types of educational establishments. The following are the details of the universities:

Table 1. Name of sample public and private universities

Type of University	Name of Universities		
Public Universities	LCWU, Main campus [Mass Communication Department]	UoP, [School of Communication Studies]	GCU, Main Campus [The Department of Mass Communication]
Private Universities	UCP, Main Campus [FMMC]	UMT [School of Media and Communication Studies]	FCCU, Main Campus [Department of Mass Communication]

The unit of analysis is the courses of the curricula of undergraduate programs in Media and Communication of the selected three public and private universities of Lahore, Pakistan. After examining the data collected, a set of five categories was drawn to code the curricula of the undergraduate programs of Media and Communication at the selected three public and three private universities in Lahore, Pakistan. The categories are as follows:

- Fundamental concepts of Media
- Critical Analysis
- Audio-Visual Skills
- Digital Content Creation
- Others

The operational definitions of the categories are detailed below. [Table 2](#) illustrates how these categories are regarded in this study.

Table 2. Operational Definitions of Categories

Categories of Courses	Definition
Fundamental Concepts of Media	The fundamental concepts of media include an overview of introductory courses, different media channels, various types of media, and the principles behind the relevance of different media specializations.
Critical Analysis	Critical analytical thinking is the capacity to envision concepts, recognize patterns, understand abstract ideas, solve problems, develop procedures, adapt, derive meaning, and comprehend how systems, programs, and ideas interrelate skills.
Audio-Visual Skills	This domain encompasses audio recording and editing, digital photography, software for image and graphics manipulation, web authoring tools, animation software, video recording, editing, and production, along with 3D creation, audio quality, sound effects, layout design, color theory, typography, and the use of images to communicate messages. It also covers visual design principles, video shots, the rule of thirds, transitions, and timing.
Content Creation	Skills in digital content creation include strategizing, researching, developing content, generating ideas, brainstorming, structuring content, creating content, managing SEO, overseeing social media, and promoting content networking.
Others	This category includes courses that are not specifically focused on digital media, like languages, mathematics, social sciences, gender studies, history, and religion studies.

The curricula have been coded into five categories based on the important skills of digital media. The courses have been categorically identified by their respective categories. After completing the coding phase, the researcher trained two coders to code the courses into five categories to obtain reliable results. To check the consistency among coders, the researcher calculated Cohen's Kappa statistics to evaluate inter-rater reliability. Inter-coder reliability for this study was $Kappa = k = 0.861$ ($k > 0.7$). Hence, the results obtained for content analysis are significantly reliable.

Data Analysis: Once the curricula have been coded into the categories, the data is analysed to address the research questions of the study. Initially, for the quantitative analysis of the data, the frequency of courses within each individual category is calculated. Subsequently, the frequencies of courses for each category are assessed to analyse the cumulative quantitative results.

3. Discussion

This study investigates the integration of digital media literacy into undergraduate Media and Communication curricula across six universities in Lahore, Pakistan, revealing significant disparities in institutional prioritization of digital competencies. A comparative content analysis demonstrates that private institutions (e.g., UCP, FCCU, UMT) dedicate 26–44.7 % of their curricula to digital media courses, whereas public universities allocate only 20–30 %, with such content predominantly confined to advanced semesters or niche specializations. These findings resonate with scholarship underscoring the pivotal role of curriculum design in advancing digital literacy ([Jamil et al., 2022](#); [Leaning, 2019](#); [Yeşilyurt, Vezne, 2023](#)), particularly in higher education contexts where resource allocation shapes pedagogical outcomes. The establishment of a dedicated digital media department at Punjab University (PU) reflects broader global efforts to align curricula with the demands of a digitized media ecosystem ([Blau et al., 2020](#); [Kirchhoff, 2022](#)). However, the sampled programs collectively fall short of international benchmarks, indicating that Pakistani institutions lag in systemic integration compared to Global North counterparts ([Rennó, Novaes, 2024](#)). This disparity underscores the nascent stage of curricular reform in Pakistan, mirroring challenges observed in other Global South contexts where infrastructural and ideological

barriers hinder equitable adoption of digital literacy frameworks (Amjad et al., 2024; Maphosa, 2022; Ofosu-Asare, 2024).

These findings are consistent with earlier research highlighting the disparity between public and private institutions adapting to digital trends (Hafeez, Nauman, 2020; Keshavarz et al., 2022). While private universities demonstrate a proactive stance by offering comprehensive digital media courses, public universities adopt a more traditional approach, reflecting systemic challenges such as resource constraints and slower institutional adaptation (Mexhuani, 2024). This supports observations by M.S. Ullah (Ullah, 2016) that infrastructural deficiencies and mismanagement hinder the effective integration of digital tools in the education system. Furthermore, the results reinforce the relevance of Potter's Media Literacy Theory (2013), which emphasizes critical analysis, media effects, and ethical content creation as foundational components of media education (Nash, 2024; Pavlounis et al., 2023). Similarly, digital content creation and essential courses of analysis in private universities align with a previous study, Digital Media Framework (Reyna et al., 2018), which advocates for a holistic approach to developing digital skills. However, the findings also reveal gaps, particularly in public institutions, in embedding comprehensive digital literacy courses that address emerging challenges like misinformation, cybersecurity, and digital ethics.

The results of this study reveal a growing but uneven integration of digital media courses in undergraduate Media and Communication programs across public and private universities in Lahore, Pakistan. Among public universities, Punjab University (PU) demonstrates the highest inclusion of digital media courses, with 38 % of its BS Journalism curriculum and 60 % of its BS Digital Media curriculum dedicated to digital media literacy, reflecting a strong institutional commitment to this domain. In contrast, Lahore College for Women University (LCWU) and Government College University (GCU) allocate only 19 % and 17 % of their curricula, respectively, to digital media education. While these figures indicate efforts to modernize programs, they fall short compared to private universities, where curricula exhibit a more robust emphasis. For instance, the UCP devotes 45 % of its BS Film, TV, and Digital Media curriculum to digital media, followed by Forman Christian College University (FCCU) at 30 % and the University of Management and Technology (UMT) at 26 %.

These findings align with previous research highlighting disparities in media literacy education between public and private sector universities in Pakistan, where private institutions often provide more comprehensive digital media education due to better resources and infrastructure (Ikram, Hameedur Rahman, 2023). The results also support the Media Literacy Theory (Potter, 2013), which emphasises the significance of imparting conceptual, functional, and audio-visual skills to cultivate critical thinkers and content creators (Pavlounis et al., 2023). Public universities' slower adoption of digital media courses aligns with systemic challenges identified in earlier studies, such as resource constraints, outdated curricula, and limited technological infrastructure (Asad et al., 2021; Vicente et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the inclusion of specialized courses at institutions like PU reflects global trends, where universities are restructuring programs to meet the demands of evolving media landscapes.

Digital media literacy encompasses more than just technical skills. It is a cognitive framework that enables individuals to analyze, evaluate, and create media content critically (Gillern et al., 2022; Mihailidis, Thevenin, 2013; Wright et al., 2023). This study highlights the importance of integrating these competencies into curricula, aligning with prior research that identifies digital media literacy as vital for fostering critical thinking and responsible engagement (McGowan-Kirsch, Quinlivan, 2024; Pérez-Escoda et al., 2017; Shetye, Indrakanti, 2023). As technological advancements redefine communication behaviors and expectations, incorporating courses that cover media's conceptual and functional aspects is crucial. D. Belshaw (Belshaw, 2011) emphasizes that new literacies are context-specific and evolve with societal needs. Similarly, T. Koltay (Koltay, 2011) outlines core principles of media literacy education, including understanding the constructed nature of media, recognizing diverse interpretations, and critically evaluating the motivations behind media messages. These principles are increasingly relevant as universities seek to prepare students for the complexities of modern media ecosystems.

Despite progress, the findings suggest significant room for improvement in ensuring standardized integration of digital media literacy across universities in Pakistan. Scholars emphasise the importance of education in promoting media literacy, particularly for journalism and communication students (Jamil et al., 2022). However, resource gaps, policy misalignments, and limited faculty training hinder broader adoption (Ikram, Hameedur Rahman, 2023). Updated

curricula with a focus on conceptual, functional, and critical media skills can enhance universities' roles as key contributors to societal progress (Gammon, White, 2011). By aligning their curricula with international standards and frameworks like Potter's Media Literacy Theory, higher education institutions in Pakistan can more effectively prepare students with the digital skills necessary for professional and civic engagement in today's digital landscape.

4. Results

In this study, content analysis of curricula of six universities in Lahore, Pakistan, offering undergraduate programs in Media and Communication has been conducted. The curricula have been coded into five formulated categories (Table 3). The courses falling under the operational definition of each category have been coded into the respective categories after which frequencies, i.e., the number of courses related to each particular category, have been calculated together with the sum of all courses coded for all categories that represent the total number of courses for each category.

Table 3. Categories of courses for the undergraduate Media and Communication curricula

Categories of Courses	
1.	Fundamental Concepts of Media
2.	Critical Analysis
3.	Audio-Visual Skills
4.	Digital Content Creation
5.	Others

In the BS Film, TV, and Digital Media program at the Faculty of Media and Mass Communication, UCP, Punjab, 44.7 % of the 47 courses are directly related to digital media (see Table 4). The courses cover fundamental concepts of media, critical analysis, audio-visual skills, and content creation. The remaining courses fall into the "Others" category, covering subjects like English Language, Islamic Studies, Quantitative Reasoning, and Pakistan Studies.

Table 4. Frequencies of Courses for categories under institute "Department of Film, TV and Digital Media, UCP"

Categories of Courses	Overall courses	Digital Media Courses	Percentage
Fundamental Concepts of Media	2	2	100 %
Critical Analysis	5	2	40 %
Audio-Visual Skills	11	11	100 %
Content Creation	13	6	46.1 %
Others	16		34 %
Total	47	21	44.7 %

N = 47

The BS Media and Communication Studies Program at the UCP consists of 66 courses, with 20 focusing on digital media (see Table 5). Within the curriculum, 7 courses cover fundamental media concepts, with 3 of these including digital media topics. There are 18 courses in the "Critical Analysis" category, with 4 directly related to digital media, making up 22.2 % of the category. Table 5 shows that 3 out of 4 courses in the "Audio Visual Skills" category focus on visual communication, audio and video editing, and animation. In the "Content Creation" category, 10 out

of 18 courses are related to digital media. The remaining 19 courses fall into the "Others" category, covering various subjects like International Relations, Psychology, and Entrepreneurship.

Table 5. Frequencies of Courses for categories under the department of Media and mass Communication, UCP

Categories of Courses	Overall courses	Digital Media Courses	Percentage
Fundamental Concepts of Media	7	3	42 %
Critical Analysis	18	4	22.2 %
Audio-Visual Skills	4	3	75 %
Content Creation	18	10	55.5 %
Others	19		28.78 %
Total	66	20	30.3 %

N = 66

Out of 50 courses in the BS Media and Communication Studies curriculum at the University of Management and Technology, 13 (26 %) are related to digital media (see Table 6). These courses cover fundamental concepts, critical analysis, audio-visual skills, and content creation. Additionally, 17 courses fall into the "Others" category, including subjects like economics, mathematics, international relations, and sociology.

Table 6. Frequencies of Courses for categories under institute "University of Management and Technology"

Categories of Courses	Overall courses	Digital Media Courses	Percentage
Fundamental Concepts of Media	8	3	37.5 %
Critical Analysis	10	2	20 %
Audio-Visual Skills	5	2	40 %
Content Creation	10	6	60 %
Others	17		34 %
Total	50	13	26 %

N = 50

In the BS (Hons) in Mass Communication program at Forman Christian College University, out of 30 courses, 9 (30 %) are related to digital media (see Table 7). The courses are organized into four main categories: "Fundamental Concepts of Media," "Critical Analysis," "Audio Visual Skills," and "Content Creation." Each category features courses pertaining to digital media, including Introduction to Mass Communication, Media Systems, Documentary Making, and Online Journalism. The other courses are grouped under the "Others" category, which encompasses topics such as English, Thesis, and Internship Reports.

Table 7. Frequencies of Courses for categories under institute “Forman Christian College University”

Categories of Courses	Overall courses	Digital Media Courses	Percentage
Fundamental Concepts of Media	6	1	16.6 %
Critical Analysis	10	3	30 %
Audio-Visual Skills	4	2	50 %
Content Creation	6	3	50 %
Others	4		13 %
Total	30	9	30 %

N = 30

Out of 78 courses in the BS Mass Communication Studies curriculum at Lahore College for Women University, 15 (19.2 %) are related to digital media (see [Table 8](#)). These courses cover fundamental media concepts, critical analysis, audio-visual skills, and content creation. Specifically, there are 7 courses related to fundamental media concepts, 12 courses related to critical analysis, 3 courses related to audio-visual skills, and 16 courses related to content creation, with 40 courses falling under "Others" category covering subjects such as Literary Reading, Islamic Studies, Mathematics, Pakistan Studies, Statistics, Gender Studies, Economics, and International Relations.

Table 8. Frequencies of Courses for categories under institute “Lahore College for Women University”

Categories of Courses	Overall courses	Digital Media Courses	Percentage
Fundamental Concepts of Media	7	3	42.8 %
Critical Analysis	12	3	25 %
Audio-Visual Skills	3	1	33.3 %
Content Creation	16	8	50 %
Others	40		51 %
Total	78	15	19.2 %

N = 78

In the BS Media & Communication curriculum at Government College University, out of 53 courses, 9 (17 %) are directly related to digital media (see [Table 9](#)). The courses are categorized as follows:

1. Fundamental Concepts of the Media: 8 courses, 2 (25 %) related to digital media.
2. Critical Analysis: 14 courses, 4 (28.5 %) related to digital media.
3. Audio Visual Skills: 5 courses, 2 (40 %) related to digital media.
4. Content Creation: 9 courses, 1 (11.1 %) related to digital media.

Additionally, there are 17 other subjects falling into the "Others" category, such as English Language, Islamic Studies, Maths, Geography, Pakistan Studies, Managerial Communication, Business Writings, Business and Marketing Communication, and Organizational Behavior.

Table 9. Frequencies of Courses for categories under institute “Government College University”

Categories of Courses	Overall courses	Digital Media Courses	Percentage
Fundamental Concepts of Media	8	2	25 %
Critical Analysis	14	4	28.5 %
Audio-Visual Skills	5	2	40 %
Content Creation	9	1	11.1 %
Others	17		32 %
Total	53	9	17 %

N = 53

In the BS Digital Media curriculum at Punjab University, 28 out of 46 courses are directly related to digital media. Three courses cover fundamental media concepts, while seven focus on critical analysis of digital media. These courses aim to equip students with a solid understanding of digital media concepts and the ability to evaluate global media content critically. Table 10 indicates that all 3 courses in the "Audio Visual Skills" category are directly related to digital media, including Graphic design and Animation, Web Development and SEO, blockchain, AI, & Machine Learning. The "Content Creation" category features 15 courses focused on digital media, addressing topics like Digital Video & Podcast Production, Digital Content Monetization, Data Journalism, Digital PR Advocacy & Content Marketing, E-Commerce, Digital Entrepreneurship, and others. There are also 15 courses categorized as "Others," which include subjects such as Introduction to Biology, Fundamentals of Economics, Introduction to Statistics, Functional Urdu, English Comprehension, and Media and Psychology.

Table 10. Frequencies of Courses for categories under institute “Department of Digital Media, Punjab University”

Categories of Courses	Overall courses	Digital Media Courses	Percentage
Fundamental Concepts of Media	3	3	100 %
Critical Analysis	10	7	70 %
Audio-Visual Skills	3	3	100 %
Content Creation	15	15	100 %
Others	15		32.6 %
Total	46	28	60.9 %

N = 46

In the BS Journalism curriculum at Punjab University's Department of Journalism, 38.2 % of the 34 courses are directly related to digital media (see [Table 11](#)). The courses cover fundamental concepts of media, critical analysis, audio-visual skills, and content creation. Courses include Introduction to Mass Communication, Contemporary World Media, Research Methods, Media Information Literacy, Audio and Video Production, Editing, Data Journalism, Mobile Journalism, Photojournalism, Media Management and Entrepreneurship, and Multimedia Journalism. The remaining courses cover various subjects such as Quran Class, English Writing, History of Journalism, Statistics for Social Science, Functional Urdu, and English Comprehension.

Table 11. Frequencies of Courses for categories under institute “Department of Journalism, Punjab University”

Categories of Courses	Overall courses	Digital Media Courses	Percentage
Fundamental Concepts of Media	1	1	100 %
Critical Analysis	10	5	50 %
Audio-Visual Skills	2	2	100 %
Content Creation	9	5	55.5 %
Others	13		38.2 %
Total	34	13	38.2 %

N = 34

In the BS Advertising and Public Relations curriculum at the Department of Advertising and PR, Punjab University, out of 51 courses, 14 are directly related to digital media (see [Table 12](#)). There are 3 courses related to the category "Fundamental concepts of media," with only 1 directly related to digital media, which is "Introduction to Mass Communication." Additionally, there are 16 courses related to the category "Critical Analysis," out of which 5 are directly related to digital media. [Table 12](#) shows that 2 courses, Digital Design Software (Adobe Suite) and Photography (PR & Ad), fall under the category "Audio Visual Skills" and are directly related to digital media. In the category of "Content Creation," out of 10 courses, 6 are directly related to digital media. The remaining 20 courses fall under the "Others" category, including subjects like Sociology, Statistics, Functional Urdu, English Composition, Social Psychology, Philosophy, Ecology, Geography, and Pakistan Studies.

Table 12. Frequencies of Courses for categories under institute “Department of Advertising and PR, Punjab University”

Categories of Courses	Overall courses	Digital Media Courses	Percentage
Fundamental Concepts of Media	3	1	33.3 %
Critical Analysis	16	5	31.2 %
Audio-Visual Skills	2	2	100 %
Content Creation	10	6	60 %
Others	20		39.21 %
Total	51	14	27.4 %

N = 51

In the BS Development Communication curriculum at Punjab University, 12 out of 57 courses are directly related to digital media (see [Table 13](#)). These courses cover topics such as Introduction to Mass Communication and Digital Media & Development. Additionally, courses in audio-visual skills and content creation are also offered. The remaining courses cover various other subjects.

Table 13. Frequencies of Courses for categories under institute “Department of Development Communication, Punjab University”

Categories of Courses	Overall courses	Digital Media Courses	Percentage
Fundamental Concepts of Media	5	1	20 %
Critical Analysis	26	7	26.9 %
Audio-Visual Skills	2	2	100 %
Content Creation	10	2	20 %
Others	14		24.56 %
Total	57	12	21 %

N = 57

Table 14 presents the percentages of digital media courses in BS Media and Mass Communication programs at various Lahore universities. The results show that the UCP and the University of Management and Technology offer around 30 % of digital media courses, while Forman Christian College University offers 30 %. Table 14 shows the inclusion of digital media courses in the undergraduate Media and Communication program at three public sector universities. Results show that Lahore College for Women University (LCWU) and Government College University (GCU) offer fewer digital media courses than private sector universities. The analysis of BS programs at Punjab University's School of Communication Studies shows that digital media is a significant focus. The BS Advertising and PR program has 27.4 % of its courses related to digital media, while the BS Journalism program has 38.2 %. The Department of Development Communication's BS program includes 21 % of courses relevant to digital media. The BS Digital Media program offered by the Department of Digital Media is entirely dedicated to digital media studies, with 60.8 % of its courses focused on digital media education.

Table 14. Percentage of Digital Media Literacy courses in UG Media and Communication studies curriculum in sample universities

University	N	Frequency	Percentage
Department of Film, TV and Digital Media, UCP	47	21	44.7 %
Department of Media and Communication Studies, UCP	66	20	30.3 %
University of Management and Technology	50	13	26 %
Forman Christian College University	30	9	30 %
Lahore College For Women University	78	15	19.2 %
Government College University	53	9	17 %
Department of Digital Media, Punjab University	46	28	60.9 %
Department of Journalism, Punjab University	34	13	38.2 %
Department of Advertising and PR, Punjab University	51	14	27.4 %
Department of Development Communication, Punjab University	57	12	21 %

Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the findings of the content analysis of the Undergraduate Media and Communication studies curriculums of the selected universities. Furthermore, Content analysis answers the first research question of the study. It provides statistics derived from first-hand data, illustrating the degree to which undergraduate Media and Communication programs in both public and private universities in Lahore, Pakistan, focus on equipping students with digital media literacy skills.

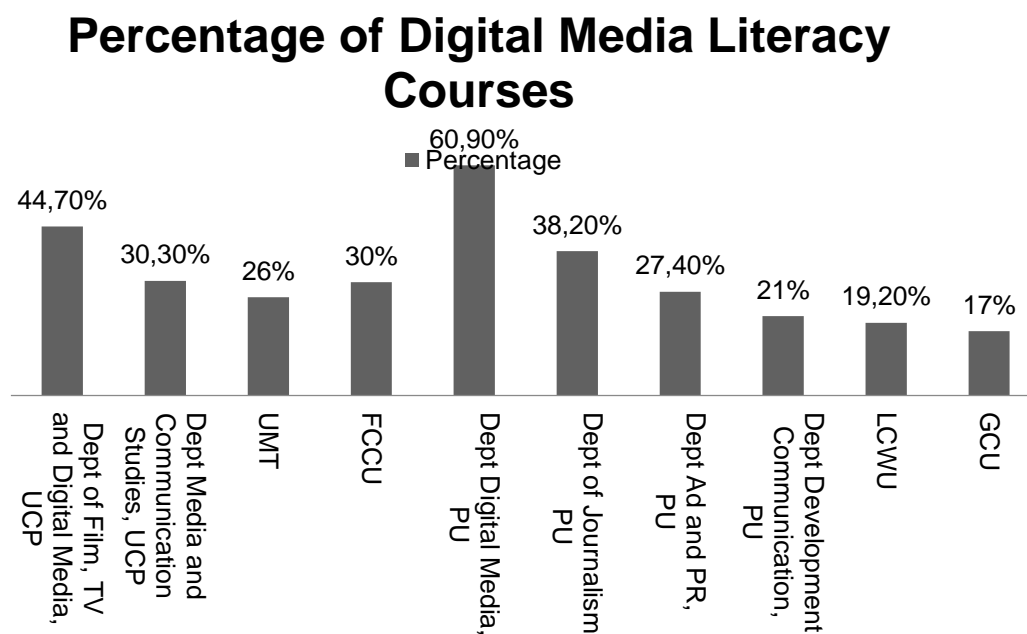


Fig. 1. Proportion of Digital Media Literacy Courses within the Undergraduate Media and Communication Studies curriculum at selected universities

5. Conclusion

This study examined media education and how digital media literacy is incorporated into undergraduate Media and Communication programs in Lahore, Pakistan. The findings reveal that while public and private universities have made efforts to include digital media courses, the extent of integration remains limited, with an average of 20–30 % of curricula dedicated to digital media literacy. Private universities demonstrate a stronger emphasis, reflecting greater flexibility and responsiveness to global educational trends than public institutions. The study also highlights the challenges universities face: resource constraints, limited faculty training, and the lack of standardized curricula aligned with international benchmarks. Despite these challenges, this research identifies opportunities to enhance digital media literacy education, emphasizing the importance of faculty development, practical training, and the introduction of dedicated undergraduate programs.

This study, while contributing valuable insights, is subject to certain limitations. First, the research focused exclusively on the curricula of Media and Communication programs at universities in Lahore, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions in Pakistan. Second, the analysis focused on curriculum documents but ignored practical aspects like teaching methods and student outcomes. Third, the research mainly targeted undergraduate programs, overlooking other educational tiers such as primary, secondary, and intermediate education. Lastly, while the study employed a strong content analysis approach, it failed to capture a complete view of students' and educators' attitudes toward digital media literacy education.

To address these limitations and build upon this research, future studies could explore the integration of digital media literacy in curricula at primary, secondary, and intermediate educational levels. Expanding the geographical scope to include universities from other cities and provinces in Pakistan would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the national landscape. Additionally, qualitative research, including interviews and focus groups with students,

educators, and administrators, could offer deeper insights into the practical challenges and successes of implementing digital media literacy courses.

From a policy perspective, the government should prioritize increasing the education budget to address resource constraints and invest in faculty training programs that focus on modern digital media tools and teaching techniques. Universities ought to partner with global academic institutions to create standardized curricula that reflect international best practices, enabling students to develop the necessary skills to succeed in the global digital media environment. Additionally, the implementation of specialized undergraduate programs concentrating on digital media literacy could greatly expand and enrich digital education. By promoting practical, hands-on learning opportunities, universities can prepare students with the essential skills required to excel in a progressively digital world.

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Published in the USA
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Issued since 2005.
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 1994-4195
2025. 21(1): 138-152

DOI: 10.13187/me.2025.1.138
<https://me.cherkasgu.press>



Navigating Online Hostility: Online Gendered Harassment of Indian Women Journalists and the Need for Media Literacy

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Abstract

Indian women journalists have been vocalizing their encounters with gender trolls on social media and public platforms through interviews, deliberations, and continuous writing, for over a decade. They seek attention to their plight on national and international platforms like the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), and the Editors Guild of India (EGI). While numerous media reports have documented the severe trolling faced by women journalists, these instances, despite gaining traction in public discourse, often go unreported and rarely result in legal action. This qualitative study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the perspectives of women journalists on the effectiveness of legal recourse as a potential remedy for trolling, as well as the role of media literacy training in enhancing their legal awareness and empowerment. Insights derived from interviews suggest that three key factors contribute to the underreporting of online harassment: (1) legal knowledge deficit, (2) inadequate emphasis on media literacy training, and 3) the dismissive stance of law enforcement agencies and organisations. Moreover, the anticipation of enduring physical, emotional, and financial distress serves as a deterrent. The study contends that the normalization of trolling within the realm of professional online discourse compels women journalists to downplay its impact, leading them to prefer non-legal strategies over formal legal interventions. It recommends the integration of legal education into media literacy training at the organizational, governmental, and educational levels to challenge the normalization of online incivility and foster greater confidence in the legal system as an effective mechanism to combat online harassment.

Keywords: Gender trolling, Indian women journalists, legal recourses, online harassment, online violence, legal awareness, media literacy.

1. Introduction

The proliferation of social media platforms has significantly facilitated women in articulating their dissent against gender-based violence and discrimination within their respective communities, positioning these digital spaces as catalysts for societal transformation (Gurman et al., 2018). Media literacy plays a pivotal role in facilitating the effective use of social media for advocacy by enhancing women's awareness, critical thinking skills, and ability to navigate digital platforms strategically (Tamuli, Mishra, 2022). Media literacy extends beyond merely recognizing the advantages of digital platforms; it also encompasses the ability to critically assess and mitigate the potential risks associated with their use. While many women have garnered substantial support and recognition for their courage in voicing their concerns online, they have also become targets of hostility from segments of society that resist strong, opinionated female voices. Thus, despite

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serving as a conduit for unrestricted expression, inherent gendered nature of internet becomes evident through the manifestation of male hegemony, notably exemplified by the phenomenon of gender trolling (Plan International, 2019). This aligns with existing research indicating that the affliction faced by women on online platforms is an expression of inequality (Norris, 2018). Thus, digital platforms have evolved into an extension of the offline world for women, where they are compelled to confront misogynists and patriarchs in order to forge ahead (Ghosh, 2020; Rego, 2018). Within this context, the role of media literacy becomes even more critical, equipping women with the skills to recognize, resist, and respond to online harassment while fostering a more inclusive and equitable digital environment.

Feminist scholars have also related the phenomenon of online harassment by contextualizing it within the framework of identity-based aggression (Jane, 2014; Vera-Gray, 2017). The nomenclature "gender trolling" was introduced by Mantilla in her work entitled *How Misogyny Went Viral*, wherein she defines it as a systematic onslaught of gender-based insults or threats, articulated in offensive language relentlessly at a woman in a well-coordinated manner (Mantilla, 2015). The overarching objective of gender trolls, according to Mantilla, is to assert male dominance within online spaces by undermining and subverting feminist voices.

Due to their gender and professional roles, female journalists are also facing online violence. They are constantly under attack by negative online actors commonly known as trolls. Underlining the motivations of miscreants, a survey by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) highlighted that "Online violence against women journalists is designed to: belittle, humiliate, and shame; induce fear, silence, and retreat; discredit them professionally, undermining accountability journalism and trust in facts; and chill their active participation (along with that of their sources, colleagues and audiences) in public debate" (Posetti, 2021: 6). Another survey conducted by UNESCO-ICFJ (International Center for Journalists) revealed that a staggering 73 % of women journalists have been subjected to severe online trolling while performing their professional duties (Posetti, 2020).

Notable personalities such as journalist Gauri Lankesh, who encountered persistent trolling even after her death, Rana Ayyub, who faced a barrage of abuse, sexist slurs, and threats, along with Sagarika Ghose, who is constantly targeted by trolls, sometimes dragging her family into the harassment, and Patricia Mukhim, who received death threats on Facebook and had her house petrol bombed, serve as poignant examples. Ayyub's experience extended beyond verbal attacks, with trolls manipulating her images onto the bodies of pornographic actors and disseminating them on social media platforms, amplifying her distress and embarrassment. While delivering the keynote address at IJF 22 at Perugia, Rana recounted how her trolling has resulted in panic attacks and severe depression. The toll on her personal life was not insignificant, as she expressed a sense of responsibility for endangering her family due to her chosen profession (Basu, 2022). Similarly, Patricia Mukhim in an interview for a report shared "they write such awful things about me. Of course, they don't target my children. But they'll write such awful things about me that the children automatically feel enraged" (Dutta, Sharma, 2022: 27). In an article, CPJ awardee Neha Dixit recounted waking up to text messages discussing her being raped. She also noted an alarming increase in the frequency of incitements to stone pelting, accompanied by pictures of her family members and her residential address on social media platforms (Dixit, 2021). While these women refuse to succumb to the intimidation posed by trolls, it is essential to acknowledge that many others, lacking the same fortitude, opt for silence or withdrawal from online public discourse. Instances of effect of hostility on self-expression have been documented earlier as well (Jane, 2015). Such hostility is widely regarded as a direct attack on an individual's right to freedom of speech and expression. When individuals refrain from exercising their fundamental rights, it is not merely a personal loss but a societal one (Schauer, 1978 as cited in Ferrier, Garud-Patkar, 2018), and in case of a journalists, self-censorship impacts operation of free press. One contributing factor to this phenomenon is the variation in media literacy among individuals. Despite the rapid expansion of internet access in India, media literacy training has not been implemented with the same intensity. As a result, individuals with higher media literacy are better equipped to defend themselves against online harassment, while those lacking such skills often become more vulnerable to digital threats. Moreover, media literacy also enables them to leverage digital platforms for knowledge acquisition and staying informed about their rights. However, in the absence of adequate media literacy training, a significant proportion of journalists are unable to

harness the full potential of digital platforms and are often reluctant to pursue legal recourse against online perpetrators.

National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report (The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) annually publishes data on reported crimes throughout India. The statistics provided above represent the total number of registered cases and are not exclusive to crimes reported by women journalists) for the year 2022, states a total of 423 cases were officially registered under Section 66E of the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000, pertaining to the infringement of privacy. The ambit of cases expands to include 1931 instances, with 34 originating from Delhi, specifically under Section 67A of the IT Act, 2000, specifically targeting the publication or transmission of material containing sexually explicit acts. However, the report raises concerns, as 469 cases were registered nationally, under Section 469 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Indecent Representation of Women Act, which encompass crimes related to defamation and morphing. Strikingly, none of these cases were registered within the jurisdiction of Delhi. Furthermore, Section 354D of the IPC was invoked in 1471 cases, specifically addressing instances of cyberstalking or bullying directed towards women or children (NCRB, 2023). The discernible pattern in these statistics suggests a disconcerting discrepancy between the number of registered complaints and the actual incidence of trolling incidents. This incongruity underscores the need for a comprehensive examination of the factors contributing to underreporting.

Thus, it is evident that despite facing threats and humiliation, internet users, including journalists, often hesitate to pursue legal remedies, instead opting to endure online trolling (Gudipaty, 2017; Yadav, Jonjua, 2022). This study argues that a deficit in media literacy plays a significant role in this reluctance, as media narratives heavily influence how users interpret online harassment. Thus, study underscores the importance of media literacy training in enabling women journalists to distinguish between legitimate criticism and targeted abuse, ultimately fostering critical awareness, ethical engagement, and responsible digital behavior along with greater trust in legal mechanisms as a means of protection.

2. Materials and methods

This qualitative study employs in-depth interviews with twenty women journalists working in different media outlets in Delhi NCR, print (3), electronic (8), and digital (9)(independent journalists interviewed for the study are associated with digital platforms) media platforms. The data was analysed using thematic analysis, to address five fundamental inquiries:

1. What are the perceptions of women journalists regarding the phenomenon of trolling?
2. How do women journalists in Delhi view existing legal frameworks as potential solutions for addressing trolling?
3. To what extent are women journalists cognizant of laws pertinent to online harassment, and what role does this awareness play in the reporting of trolling cases?
4. How does the perceived attitude of law enforcement agencies, particularly the police, towards trolling influence the inclination of women journalists to seek legal redress?
5. What is the potential of media literacy training as an intervention strategy to address trolling?

(Note: To safeguard participant privacy and confidentiality, they are referred to as Case 1, Case 2, etc., in the study).

The sample for this study was selected using the purposive sampling technique within the non-probability sampling framework. Women journalists were approached through various channels, including Twitter, email, and personal contact numbers, to inform them about the research and encourage their participation. All interviews were conducted in October 2024, with each session lasting between 40 minutes and one hour. (Refer to Table 1 for a summary of the respondents' profiles.)

The research employed thematic analysis method to systematically scrutinize the amassed data, focusing on two overarching themes derived through an inductive approach. These themes were delineated as (1) Unveiling the Gendered Web: Insights into How Women Journalists Perceive Online Trolling and (2) Decoding Hesitation: Unveiling the Journalists' Rationales Behind Legal Inaction Against Trolls. Maxwell (Maxwell, 2014: 480) has articulated that "the use of numbers is a legitimate and valuable strategy for qualitative researchers when it is used as a complement to an overall process orientation to the research."

Table 1. Disaggregated data of interviewees

Gender/ Case Numbering	Age Group	Professional Designation	Experience as Journalist in Years	Followers Count (Twitter)	Engagement on Twitter (Avg. Per day)
Female Case 1	35–40	Senior Correspondent (Digital Platform)	12 +	80K	5-7 Tweets
Female Case 2	40–45	Managing Director/ Anchor	20+	9K	1 Tweet
Female Case 3	35–40	Independent Journalist	15 +	91k	1-2 Tweets
Female Case 4	25-30	Correspondent (TV News Channel)	4+	106K	7-8 Tweets
Female Case 5	35-40	Founder of News Website	13 +	155K	3-4 Tweets
Female Case 6	30–35	Anchor (TV News Channel)	12+	13K	2-3 Tweets
Female Case 7	30-35	Correspondent (TV News Channel)	9+	37K	2-3 Tweets
Female Case 8	40-45	Founder and Managing Editor (E-Magazine)	15+	6K	1-2 Tweets
Female Case 9	25-30	Correspondent (Magazine)	8 +	113K	1-2 Tweets
Female Case 10	30-35	Anchor (TV News Channel)	11+	107K	4-5 Tweets
Female Case 11	30-35	Principal Correspondent (Print)	10 +	46K	1 Tweet
Female Case 12	30-35	Principal Correspondent (Digital Website)	9 +	5K	1 Tweet
Female Case 13	25-30	Correspondent (Print)	9+	5K	1-2 Tweet
Female Case 14	35-40	Independent Journalist	13+	55K	1-2 Tweets
Female Case 15	30-35	Anchor/ Sr. Correspondent (TV News Channel)	11+	100K	3-4 Tweets
Female Case 16	35-40	Associate Editor (TV News)	16+	77K	3-4 Tweets
Female Case 17	35-40	Independent Journalist	14+	114K	3-4 Tweets
Female Case 18	35-40	Independent Journalist	14+	67K	2-3 Tweets
Female Case 19	25-30	Digital Journalist	3 +	13.5K	3-4 Tweets
Female Case 20	35-40	Anchor (TV News Channel)	12 +	55K	3-4 Tweets

Thus, in this study also numerical data was incorporated into sub-themes identified through thematic analysis to bolster the credibility and validity of the findings.

3. Discussion

The narratives emerging from interviews with 20 women journalists provide critical insights into the prevalence of gender-based trolling and the available legal remedies. The first research question explored women's perceptions of trolling in journalism. The findings highlight the deeply

gendered nature of online spaces in India and the dismissive societal attitude toward this form of harassment (Claesson, 2023). Women journalists often experience what has been described as "double prosecution" (CFWIJ, 2021), wherein they are targeted not only for their journalistic work but also for their gender. Trolls extend beyond the confines of the comment section, frequently infiltrating direct messages where they send explicit content, solicit sexual favours, and subject individuals to derogatory remarks, all without apprehension. The alarming trend of women journalists being subjected to abuse, objectification, and even "auctioning" on online platforms underscores the severity of the issue. Such harassment has a direct impact on psychological well-being (Henry, Powell, 2015; Posetti et al., 2021) and job satisfaction (Carlson, Witt, 2020). Additionally, consistent with findings from a UNESCO survey, factors such as caste and religion intersect with gender identity, influencing the likelihood and severity of trolling (Posetti et al., 2020). According to Waisbord (Waisbord, 2020), "the safety of [female] journalists is one of the most formidable challenges for press freedom and democracy around the world." Despite growing scholarly attention to this issue, the normalization of gendered online violence remains a troubling trend. Furthermore, organizational indifference plays a pivotal role in the precarious conditions faced by journalists, corroborating Claesson's (Claesson, 2023) findings that restrictive newsroom environments limit opportunities to address online violence effectively.

The second research question examined how women journalists perceive the legal framework as a potential remedy for trolling. Despite acknowledging the adverse effects of gendered trolling, most respondents preferred to ignore misogynistic comments rather than pursue legal recourse. It was found women journalists are frequent internet users (Gudipaty, 2017), yet they possess limited knowledge of relevant cyber laws. A majority of participants expressed a lack of confidence in existing legal frameworks, as current laws fail to adequately address severe cybercrimes against women (Bhangla, Tuli, 2021). Consequently, women facing online abuse often choose to endure the prevailing culture of harassment to preserve their agency rather than seek institutional support (Gurumurthy et al., 2019).

The third research question directly addressed the role of legal awareness in reporting online abuse. The findings reveal a pervasive lack of awareness, leading many journalists to remain silent or attempt to handle incidents independently. Instead of seeking legal recourse, immediate coping measures such as reporting, blocking, comment moderation, restricting direct messages, disabling comments, and utilizing the mute function on social media platforms are commonly employed (Pillai, Ghosh, 2022). These strategies, however, only provide temporary relief rather than long-term solutions.

The fourth research question focused on the perceived attitude of law enforcement agencies toward gendered trolling. Respondents reported delayed police responses, noting that authorities typically act only when a case garners significant public attention, involves a well-known victim, or is escalated by higher authorities. Moreover, women journalists frequently face secondary victimization when interacting with police, as they are often blamed for the harassment they experience, particularly when addressing sensitive topics on social media. These experiences align with Ghosh's (Ghosh, 2020) observation that Indian women are frequently held responsible for the trolling they endure. To circumvent harassment, women journalists are often advised to ignore online abuse or temporarily disengage from social media, discouraging them from formally reporting incidents. Additionally, respondents perceived the legal process from filing a complaint to attending court proceedings as exhaustive, time-consuming, and emotionally draining. The pursuit of justice is characterized as a spiral of suffering, requiring substantial time, financial resources, and emotional investment.

The fifth research question examined role of media literacy as an effective intervention strategy to address trolling. Dame Adjinn-Tettey (Dame Adjinn-Tettey, 2022) suggests that media literacy fosters critical thinking and self-expression, empowering individuals to exercise their democratic rights. The findings reveal that media literacy training integrated with legal education helps women understand existing cyber laws, complaint procedures, and law enforcement responsibilities, enabling them to seek justice more effectively. Thus, study recommends organising mandatory media literacy trainings at organisational and educational level.

The findings indicate that in case of being trolled women journalists feel compelled to exhibit resilience in such situations, choosing to deny trolls the attention and entitlement they seek. Many fear that seeking legal assistance could not only signal vulnerability to their harassers but also negatively impact their professional standing within their organizations. Notably, most media

organizations lack formal mechanisms to support journalists facing online abuse, aligning with Zviyita and Mare's (Zviyita, Mare, 2023) observation that newsroom safety measures remain inadequate for women journalists. Instead of offering institutional backing, superiors often advise journalists to ignore trolling and focus on their work. In response to this organizational neglect, women journalists have increasingly turned to "alliance networks" (Bhat, 2023), forming peer support systems to help navigate online harassment.

The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma has documented the serious psychological toll of online violence, emphasizing that even in the absence of immediate physical threats, such harassment can create stressful, disruptive, and invalidating work environments. In severe cases, these pressures can impair journalists' ability to perform their duties effectively (Dart Center, 2014, as cited in Ferrier, Garud-Patkar, 2018). Given the detrimental impact of trolling, it is imperative to sensitize newsroom leadership to this issue. The tendency to dismiss trolling as either a consequence of journalistic success or as inconsequential is neither an appropriate response nor an effective strategy.

Furthermore, there is a critical need for targeted media literacy training sessions to enhance legal awareness among journalists. Instead of viewing legal action as a burdensome process, journalists should be empowered to see digital media as a viable tool for protection and redress. On the level of law enforcement, structured training programs including media literacy education should be implemented to equip police personnel with the necessary knowledge, skills, and sensitivity to address online violence against women journalists effectively (Sati, 2023). Addressing these gaps in organizational and legal support structures is essential to ensuring that women journalists can work in a safer and more equitable digital environment.

4. Results

The online wilderness: unmasking gender trolling through women journalists' eyes:

In a parallel progression to the overarching digitization of various societal facets such as finance, education, healthcare, entertainment, and government services, this study discerns the digitization of patriarchy. In this contemporary context, patriarchal forces seek to assert dominance over women by subjecting them to offensive and disgraceful language (Dutt, 2017). It is argued that women journalists' encounter online trolls owing to their gender, work, and visibility in the digital sphere. The thematic analysis of the 20 interviews conducted for this study is encapsulated in Table 2, delineating the emergent sub-themes that illuminate the multifaceted dimensions of the trolling experiences encountered by women journalists.

Table 2. Women Journalists' Perception of Trolling

S/N	Sub-theme	In-depth Interview No. of Participants (n = 20)
1.	Ideology enforcement tool (Derailing discourse, disagreement, discrediting)	12
2.	Misogynistic (Sexist, character assassination)	20
3.	Silencing tool	12
4.	Virtual violence (Direct personal attacks, Targeting, attacks on vulnerable groups, threats of physical assaults)	19
5.	Psychopaths act (Inflicting pain, venting anger, nihilism, sadist)	11

Source: authors

Use of trolling as an ideology enforcement tool: all the journalists interviewed for the study have acknowledged their experiences with trolls. These experiences vary from uncomfortable comments to orchestrated attacks. As defined in Table 2, a majority of respondents, constituting

60 % (12 individuals), perceive trolling as a tool employed for the enforcement of ideological perspectives. This encompassing ideology manifests through various tactics, including the derailment of discourse, discrediting, and expressing disagreement using offensive language. Case 17, an independent journalist, provided insights into this phenomenon, stating, *"If trolls disagree with something, even if it holds factual veracity, their approach involves diverting attention from the content by discrediting journalists or propagating false claims."* The assertion aligns with prior research by Buckles et al. (Buckles et al., 2014), which posited that trolls aim to hijack online conversations, steering focus away from the main topic and resorting to personal attacks.

Prevalent misogyny: "society does not celebrate a vocal woman": 75 % (15 respondents) of respondents asserted that they face gender trolling, while 25 % contended that trolling is a gender-neutral phenomenon. Although they denied the notion that trolls target individuals based on their gender, there was consensus that the trolling of females is inherently gendered. This resonates with the observations of Kovacs et al. (Kovacs et al., 2013), who argued that assertive women frequently face denigration through sexist remarks targeting their gender and physical attributes. Trolls undermine them by casting doubts on their loyalty and intelligence, aiming to discourage women from active participation in online discussions and fostering a broader climate of sexism. This underscores that interviewees perceive trolling as an inherent cost of their online presence, intricately intertwined with the patriarchal structures prevalent in the offline world. Unequivocally it is demonstrated that, while online attacks affect journalists across genders, female journalists bear the brunt of this menace due to factors such as their gender, and professional standing. The Managing Editor of a digital magazine (Case 8), noted, *"society does not celebrate a vocal woman. Their trolling is much nastier and more personal."* Echoing this sentiment, Case 12, a principal correspondent at a digital platform, emphasized, *"the way a woman is trolled on social media immediately becomes very sexual, reflecting the societal norms we navigate."* This differentiation in the trolling experiences of male and female journalists is substantiated by the research of Trionfi and Luque (Trionfi, Luque, 2020).

Case 3 further expounded on this perspective:

"Males are called 'corrupt' and 'paid media' but when a female journalist gets trolled, she is called 'slut' or 'sex worker', so, that is the difference. When a woman is labelled as a sex worker, others immediately start to question her character and intent, attempting to stigmatise her presence and passing moralistic judgments on her. I have been subjected to hate campaigns on multiple occasions, where trolls abuse me and discuss ways to rape me."

Similarly, when elucidating the misogynistic dimension of trolling, Case 11, a principal correspondent, remarked, *"women are denied agency even in trolling. They drag our partners into the fray and assail them for not reining us in or permitting us the liberty to express our thoughts."* In this context, there is minimal disparity between the challenges encountered by women in the offline and online realms.

Trolling as silencing tool: In the intricate landscape of gender-based aggression, misogynists and patriarchal entities employ a myriad of techniques to stifle women's voices, with trolling emerging as a prominent tool in their arsenal. As articulated by Case 19, *"being a woman, the responsibility falls upon us; if we dare to write, we should also be prepared for the consequences."* She further elucidated, *"I have encountered aggressive campaigns, much like many of my colleagues. This is orchestrated to silence us by either depicting us as 'bad women' or instilling the notion that our perspectives lack merit."*

Lumsden and Morgan (Lumsden, Morgan, 2017) have highlighted the ascension of "lad culture" in society, wherein sexist and misogynistic language is not only tolerated but also celebrated, with trolling serving as a mechanism to propagate this culture on online platforms. Women often find themselves accused of "narcissistic victimhood" (West, 2015), with additional harassers mobilized for coordinated attacks (Jane, 2016; Owen, 2017). In cases of sustained trolling, women are often compelled to abandon online platforms altogether (Blum, 2018) or resort to self-censorship to mitigate potential repercussions (Feiner, 2019; Yadav, Jonjua, 2022; Zviyita, Mare, 2023). Case 1 illuminated the broader impact of such experiences, stating, *"It's not just me who suffers. My partner and parents advise me to refrain from engaging on social media because they are emotionally affected and apprehensive about my safety."*

Trolling is virtual violence: A noteworthy parallel surface between virtual violence and the daily challenges encountered by vulnerable groups. Female journalists contend with a heightened degree of virulent trolling in comparison to their male counterparts, a phenomenon rooted in the perception of

their supposed vulnerability and presumed susceptibility to silencing. This ideology is encapsulated in the fourth sub-theme, wherein an overwhelming 95 % (19 respondents) characterized their experiences with trolling as synonymous with 'virtual violence.' Minorities, spanning gender, religious, or ethnic dimensions, disproportionately bear the brunt of reduced representation on social media platforms, becoming frequent targets of troll attacks (Gardiner, 2018).

Drawing from her personal encounters, Case 5, the founder of an online media platform, remarked, *"often, when women express their opinions on social media, they are reduced to their gender identity. Any derogatory language can be directed at them, and if the woman hails from a marginalized community, the intensity amplifies."* Case 20, a national channel anchor, echoed similar sentiments: *"in the case of male journalists, their religion and ideology become targets, whereas female journalists are subjected to rape and death threats."* Such threatening messages aim to instil fear and make them nervous for their safety. In many cases it results in self-censorship or toning down the content. This indicates, while social media platforms assert a commitment to fostering free speech, for women journalists, it becomes an additional battleground to exercise their constitutional rights.

Psychopaths act: A substantial majority of respondents, constituting 55%, associate trolling with psychopathic traits. Their motivations, as articulated by Case 15, stem from a desire *"to inflict pain on others."* Adding to this perspective, Case 9, an anchor at a mainstream Hindi news channel, characterizes trolls as *"mentally disturbed individuals who exhibit erratic behaviour when confronted with differing opinions."* The sentiments are encapsulated further by Case 7, who contends that *"their intention is to harm targets physically or psychologically."* These perspectives align with the conclusions drawn by Golbeck (Golbeck, 2014) that trolls possess dark tetrad personality traits and can go to any extent to get a response.

The persistent threat of trolling and doxing has rendered Twitter a precarious space for female journalists, introducing an element of constant risk. Despite the escalating nature of the problem, concrete solutions remain elusive. Existing countermeasures, though documented on paper, have failed to instil trust among the affected individuals. The ensuing themes delve into women journalists' perspectives on legal recourse, endeavouring to bridge the existing gap in this domain and media literacy as a possible way of empowerment.

Journalists struggle with legal knowledge deficit:

One pivotal inquiry addressed in this research pertains to the level of awareness among women journalists regarding laws related to online harassment. The findings revealed a dichotomy, with 30 % of respondents asserting awareness of laws, while a substantial 70 % acknowledged a lack of clarity concerning the procedures involved in filing complaints related to trolling. This uncertainty extends to determining the applicable laws and sections for filing a complaint or First Information Report (FIR) in cases of gender trolling. Participants also highlighted the confusion about whether to approach the cyber cell exclusively or also consider the nearest police station when trolled. Case 6 candidly admitted, *"even as a journalist, I don't know which kinds of trolling on a regular basis amount to cyberbullying."* Others asserted their awareness of the issue but admitted to a limited understanding of the relevant laws. Intriguingly, these individuals, despite claiming awareness, have never approached a cyber cell or the police to file a complaint.

Case 3, voicing discontent, stated that there has been no effort made to clarify the legal processes involved. In contrast, Case 8 while acknowledging authorities' responsibility to act in such situations, emphasizes a broader societal lack of awareness. She contends that *"as journalists, there is a tendency to underestimate the impact of trolling."* It can be deduced from above perspectives that in addition to lack of legal awareness, journalists lack motivation and acceptability of problem. Such scenarios prompt journalists to overlook instances of abuse rather than proactively seeking legal recourse.

"I don't want to be a liability in office": compulsion of managing the professional image:

Engaging in a legal battle poses a formidable challenge. Within the Indian context, where the judiciary grapples with an existing burden, seeking redressal becomes an intricate challenge for victims of online harassment. A substantial 50 % of participants emphasized that initiating the process of filing a First Information Report (FIR) demands a significant investment of time, energy, and financial resources. These factors emerge as primary deterrents, discouraging victims from pursuing legal action against the trolls. Case 5, who has personally experienced character assassination, abuse, sexist slurs, and threats, expresses, *"I am acquainted with the laws, but motivation eludes me. It's an everyday ordeal for me and I don't have time and energy for it."*

Adding to this sentiment, Case 12, notes, *"filing a complaint creates another mental tab for me, adding to the already demanding responsibilities of stories and other work."* It can be deduced from foregoing quotes that journalists perceive the prospect of pursuing legal action against trolls as an additional burden, further complicating their multifaceted responsibilities. The implications extend beyond the psychological realm, impacting the professional domain, as filing an FIR entails visits to police stations and court hearings. In the competitive landscape of journalism, where journalists are constantly engrossed in chasing stories, allocating time for legal procedures risks missing out on valuable and significant journalistic opportunities. There is a constant danger of framing oneself as unreliable and self-centred. Case 4 explains, *"As women, we find ourselves compelled to go the extra mile in showcasing our capabilities. Despite facing the gender trolling, I am determined not to request time off specifically to file a complaint. Such a request might raise concerns with my superiors. I don't want to look like a liability, it is imperative for me to maintain a professional image."*

The severity of trolling experienced by journalists varies significantly, ranging from mild to severe. Case 3, who contends with severe trolling on a regular basis, raises pertinent question, *"How many complaints shall I register? Because if I keep on following those 300 threats, even 30 every day, when will I do my work?"*

Intersection of social media into traditional media has undoubtedly brought about positive outcomes for the media industry. However, the absence of adequate support mechanisms and trainings when confronted with the negative aspects of digitization has left journalists somewhat hesitant about its extensive use. At a time when there is constant discussion over providing a safe online environment for female journalists worldwide (Chen et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2021), Indian newsrooms ought to be proactive, at least, to ensure the safety of their female journalists. Unfortunately, Indian newsrooms have not been very successful in this regard. Respondents share that organizations appear reluctant to support employees facing such challenges, viewing them more as liabilities than assets to the editorial and managerial echelons. In discussing the issue of organizational support, Case 13 posits, *"if journalists receive adequate organizational support, I am confident that the reporting of trolling cases will witness a significant increase."* This underscores the crucial role that organizational backing plays in empowering journalists to address and confront incidents of online harassment.

"No precedent that could serve as a deterrent to trolls":

When inquired about the effectiveness of existing laws in combating trolling, a mere 20 % of respondents (4 out of 20) suggested that current laws suffice to address the menace, while 80 % asserted the necessity for more robust and stringent legal frameworks. The prevalent sense of impunity among trolls, who are emboldened by the absence of significant repercussions, was identified as a key factor fuelling their online harassment activities. Trolls, motivated by a desire for attention, remain fearless in their pursuits, leveraging the inflammatory nature of their actions to elevate their status in online spaces (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2014).

Highlighting the perceived inadequacies of the legal landscape, Case 14 remarked, *"who would take the pain? Our cyber system is ill-equipped to handle such complaints, and the procedural intricacies make it even more difficult."* This sentiment was echoed by respondent 14, who emphasized, *"our legal system lacks strength. Can anyone cite an instance where a troll is currently incarcerated? People harbour scepticism regarding the efficacy of cyber cells; there's no precedent that could serve as a deterrent to trolls."*

There is no legislative framework to directly address the trolling cases. Nevertheless, codified laws within the Indian Penal Code, 1860, and the Information & Technology (IT) Act, 2000, can potentially be utilized to prosecute trolls. But ambiguity surrounds them. Impunity, coupled with the absence of specific legislation addressing trolling incidents, stands as a compelling factor contributing to the proliferation of trolling phenomena. Case 2 a managing Editor of a mainstream media channel expressed her concern that *"the existing laws lack appropriateness and stringency to address the issue adequately. Despite ongoing discussions, a tangible resolution has yet to materialize, contributing to a pervasive apprehension among journalists about engaging in the redressal process"*. Respondents recommended a re-evaluation of legislative interventions by national policymakers to effectively tackle this pressing issue. Case 18 suggests, *"it's high time, government should come up with strict laws to protect us from online humiliation."* *"Strengthening the existing laws and their application will definitely help"*, added Case 13.

Calls for prompt action from intermediaries were also voiced, Case 10 decried *“the laid-back approach of tech giants in responding to complaints about threatening and gendered comments portrays them as a facilitator of discrimination, where one gender holds an advantage over the other.”* While new IT rules have sought to delineate the roles of social media platforms, the translation of these regulations into tangible implementation remains elusive, further underscoring the challenges and gaps within the current legal landscape.

Law enforcement lapses:

While some laws are in place, their efficacy relies heavily on the actions of enforcement agencies. A substantial 70 % of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the police's approach to trolling incidents, contending that they are often perceived as dismissive and fail to treat the matter with the seriousness it warrants. Notably, five interviewees recounted personal experiences with the police, shedding light on the challenges faced. Case 5 whose website voice the concerns of marginalized section of society emphasized the reluctance to initiate FIRs. She stated, *“I receive so much abuse that technically, I could request the filing of an FIR for all of them. However, I refrain because registering an FIR is akin to winning a war.”* Sharing her disheartening encounter, she revealed, *“when attempting to register an FIR against trolls for using caste slurs, the police immediately refused. They were willing to file a complaint but not an FIR.”* Eventually, she resorted to utilizing social media to voice her struggle and disappointment, leading to the registration of her FIR. Case 1 echoed a similar narrative, experiencing both doxing and gender trolling. Reflecting on her ordeal, she questioned:

“How much time can one devote to registering a single complaint? When you are working, it becomes impractical to visit the police station every day. Knowing that they won't register your complaint in a single day, and understanding the likelihood that they won't investigate it, you eventually grow tired and abandon the idea of registering a case.”

Both journalists' experiences underscore the dismissive attitude of the police toward trolling incidents. Establishing contacts within the police department becomes a requisite for filing a complaint, and in some cases, even this is insufficient. This sentiment resonates with the perspective of Case 18, who aptly notes, *“they might take swift action in the case of a celebrity or minister, but not for the common man or a small-time journalist.”* In a similar vein, Case 16 articulated, *“I refrained from seeking police assistance as I knew it would be futile.”* However, leveraging media literacy to amplify awareness and engage a broader audience emerged as an effective strategy. Utilizing digital platforms to tag relevant Twitter handles and authoritative entities ensures that grievances are publicly acknowledged, thereby reducing the likelihood of authorities disregarding complaints. This approach streamlines the redressal process, making it more accessible and efficient.

While Case 14, hailing from minority community differs in her viewpoint, stating that she has had positive experiences with the cyber cell, noting, *“I have registered multiple complaints, and they not only registered them but also acted by tracking and summoning the culprit to the cyber cell to explain themselves.”* She, however, clarified that while she had successfully registered complaints, filing an FIR is a much more complicated process. Police often exhibit a lack of awareness regarding the severe consequences of cyberviolence on the victim, perceiving it as an unnecessary complication imposed by individuals on themselves and the police force. This tendency to attribute blame to victims for the trolling further acts as a deterrent for female journalists contemplating legal action (Ghosh, 2020). As articulated by Case 19, *“the first thing they ask you is, why did you write? Then they advise you to stop writing and ignore the trolls.”*

While 30 % of interviewees expressed sympathy toward the police, acknowledging their existing workload, a significant 70 % of respondents articulated expectations from cyber cells and the police to demonstrate increased responsibility. They emphasize the need for setting examples through swift action to instil trust among the populace and fear in trolls. The role of empathy, awareness, and proper training:

Insufficient expertise among frontline officers remains an acknowledged challenge in addressing cybercrime (Dodge, Burruss, 2019). Brown (Brown, 2015) asserts that a lack of confidence in police effectiveness serves as a deterrent for victims to report incidents, thereby hampering an efficient response. The Indian police force grapples with a staff shortage, and with limited resources, registering a case for online intimidation proves to be a challenging endeavour (Duggal, 2017). The severity of cybercrime often eludes the understanding of the police, compelling

women complainants to navigate resistance and ignorance to secure the registration of a cybercrime (Khybri, 2018).

In the realm of policing, a lack of empathy can be classified as an inadequacy (Inzunza, 2013), and ineffective responses from the police serve as motivation for cyber offenders to persist in their offensive online activities (Holt et al., 2019). Sensitization, the cultivation of social skills such as empathy (Bloksgaard, Prieur, 2021), and systematic training of police personnel encompassing the correct procedures, technical knowledge, and understanding of the personal elements of trolling are crucial for improvement. Victims also require proper guidance on reporting cybercrimes (Curtis, Oxburgh, 2020; Holt et al., 2019).

The determination of journalists to report the incident and the commitment of the police to register and investigate the case may send a stern message to trolls. Consequently, the credible threat of prosecution will act as a deterrent, discouraging trolls from exercising their toxic masculinity on the digital landscape.

The scope of media literacy trainings:

Livingstone (Livingstone, 2004: 18) defines media literacy as the “ability to access, analyze, and evaluate” messages, emphasizing its role in fostering critical thinking. While respondents in this study acknowledged the importance of media literacy in navigating digital spaces, they reported a lack of formal emphasis on such training at both organizational and individual levels. Some participants suggested that integrating legal education into media literacy training would enhance their understanding of cyber laws, thereby equipping them with the necessary tools to address online harassment effectively.

Given the pervasive nature of trolling in journalism, there is a pressing need to incorporate cyber law education into media curriculum. This will help media students in understanding intricacies of media literacy for their benefit rather than just having surface level information. Moreover, not all trolling incidents necessitate legal intervention; some can be managed effectively through a deeper understanding of social media platforms. Media literacy training can enable journalists to leverage platform policies, report abusive content, and advocate for improved moderation mechanisms. Case 15, an anchor, stressing on the importance of media literacy suggested pre-emptive measures before resorting to legal action, *“advocating for actions such as blocking or muting trolls”*. Dove tailing her views, Case 2 shared her focus on self-empowerment through media literacy. She said, *“I prefer to block and report them than rounding up the police station. Understanding of platforms reduces my dependency on external support.”* Thus, in response to trolling, women journalists often prefer adopting these self-help measures rather than seeking legal intervention.

The overall sentiment among respondents highlights the critical need for media organizations, educational institutions, and government bodies to integrate media literacy training into professional development programs. Specifically, journalists should receive structured guidance on managing their digital presence, countering harassment, and engaging with audiences constructively while mitigating the risk of escalating conflicts.

The emphasis on media literacy extends beyond a basic understanding of digital tools to the development of skills that enable individuals to leverage this knowledge for empowerment. This perspective underscores the role of digital confidence in enhancing self-efficacy and improving women's lives. By equipping journalists with the ability to navigate online spaces safely and effectively, media literacy training fosters both professional resilience and broader societal empowerment.

5. Conclusion

This study sheds light on three crucial findings. Firstly, it establishes that women journalists are indeed confronting gender trolling, with trolls not only seeking to silence them but also attempting to assert dominance by dictating the narrative and topics women journalists should address. Fuelled by toxic masculinity and regressive beliefs, trolls aggressively target women journalists, believing that they can be easily intimidated into stepping back to preserve their 'modesty.' The ethnicity of a woman further becomes a trigger for trolling, highlighting the intersectionality of online harassment. Secondly, despite enduring unwelcome experiences in the digital realm, women journalists often choose to overlook instances of trolling. Fearful of jeopardizing their professional standing, they are compelled to ignore these experiences. The lack of support mechanisms within organizations, coupled with a dismissive attitude from superiors,

further contributes to forced ignorance. The prevailing advice given to everyone is often, 'Don't feed the trolls.' Thirdly, the study underscores the significant factor of legal unawareness leading to the underreporting of trolling incidents. Both women journalists and the police require proper training to handle online trolling complaints effectively. Participants with firsthand experience with the police and trolling reveal the demotivating experiences of overcoming resistance within enforcement agencies to register cases. Consequently, awareness programs focusing on safe internet usage and existing laws for all sections, including online users and agencies, are crucial to address the problem more effectively. The current situation calls for strengthening mechanisms by imparting media education at the individual, legislative, and organizational levels. It is imperative to recognize that online violence is a risk faced by every internet user, making it a societal concern that demands comprehensive solutions.

Media literacy serves as a crucial tool in mitigating the problem of online trolling by fostering critical awareness, ethical engagement, and responsible digital behavior. Thus, to address this issue comprehensively, there is an urgent need to enhance media literacy and legal awareness among online users. Organizations can contribute by integrating media literacy and legal awareness workshops into their safety protocols, ensuring institutional support for affected journalists. Moreover, the government must play a proactive role in launching media literacy campaigns to promote usage of digital platforms for legal awareness among citizens. Recognizing the gravity of the situation, the government of India has introduced the Digital India Act, 2003 emphasizing the need for stringent laws to combat online harassment. The proposed law sets to replace Information Technology (IT) (Amendment) Act, 2008 and aims to create a safer online environment, free from fake news, trolling, gaslighting, and abuse (Chauriha, 2024; Som, 2022). While these initiatives hold promise for the future, the current sentiments of the interviewees reflect a pervasive lack of faith in institutional support, with many preferring non-legal strategies over legal recourse. Bridging this trust gap will be crucial for fostering a culture of accountability and empowering victims to come forward and report cases of online harassment.

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Published in the USA
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Issued since 2005.
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 1994-4195
2025. 21(1): 153-167

DOI: 10.13187/me.2025.1.153
<https://me.cherkasgu.press>



Integrated Framework of Attitude Formation and Attitude Change Theories: Contextualizing Educational Advertising and Media Literacy in Controversial Product Campaigns in South Asia

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Abstract

This study analyzes attitude theories within the context of controversial product advertisements in the South Asian region, with a focus on their educational, cultural, and media literacy implications. Attitude theories are broadly classified into two competing streams: attitude formation theories, which propose that attitudes are learned predispositions developed through information or direct experience, and attitude change theories, which suggest that attitudes can be altered in response to persuasive messages. Theoretical frameworks, including the Theory of Reasoned Action, Theory of Planned Behavior, Uses & Gratification Theory, Psychological Reactance Theory, and Elaboration Likelihood Model, are examined to understand their contributions to these perspectives. This study highlights the mechanisms through which attitudes are formed and changed, emphasizing the role of cultural insights, persuasive communication, media literacy, and consumer education in influencing perceptions. By bridging the gap between attitude formation and change theories, the paper offers a comprehensive understanding of how advertising influences consumer attitudes. The findings hold significant implications for marketers aiming to design advertising strategies that incorporate educational components and promote media literacy to help audiences critically engage with advertising content, fostering awareness and acceptance while respecting cultural sensitivities.

Keywords: attitude change, attitude formation, attitude theories, controversial products, advertising, South Asia, media literacy, media education.

1. Introduction

“Attitude” towards advertising has long been a major concern for advertising professionals and academic scholars (Aaker et al., 2001; Ajzen, Fishbein, 1975; Alsharif et al., 2024; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2022), especially for advertisers in South Asian countries where advertising controversial products is a significant challenge (Jangbar, 2023; Koumans et al., 2020). Consumers in the South Asian region are strongly influenced by their cultural and religious beliefs; therefore, advertisers must put great effort into managing consumers’ favorable attitudes toward advertising controversial products (Zaki, Elseidi, 2023). Media literacy plays a crucial role in this process, enabling consumers to critically engage with advertising content, differentiate between misinformation and factual messaging, and develop informed perspectives on controversial products. Education is pivotal in addressing misconceptions, raising awareness, and fostering

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informed attitudes toward these products. By incorporating media literacy-focused educational campaigns into advertising strategies, marketers can mitigate resistance and promote cultural sensitivity. Failure to do so can result in negative reactions from consumers, including negative publicity, product boycotts, and demands for banning advertisements (Yeung, 2022).

Controversial products are defined as “products, services, or concepts that for reasons of delicacy, decency, morality, or even fear, tend to elicit reactions of distaste, disgust, offense, or outrage when mentioned or openly presented” (Amy, Thierry, 2015; Lee et al., 2020). Personal hygiene/sexually oriented products such as sanitary pads and condoms are widely discussed as ‘controversial products’ (Banyte et al., 2014; Ekici et al., 2020; Prendergast et al., 2002). In this context, media literacy helps consumers navigate the discourse surrounding these products, enabling them to assess advertising messages critically rather than reacting based solely on cultural taboos. Educational initiatives, such as public health awareness campaigns, can play a critical role in normalizing discussions about these products and reducing cultural resistance. By emphasizing their necessity and benefits through media-literate educational content, marketers can improve acceptance and encourage positive attitudes.

The concept of attitude has been a mainstay in social psychology since the 1920s, and in advertising literature, attitude-based theories have been adopted from psychology (Dillard, Pfau, 2002; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2022; Liu, 2020; Zhao, 2018). There are competing theoretical considerations about attitude in advertising. As proposed by Attitude Formation Theories, attitude is a learned predisposition formed favorably or unfavorably towards some psychological object (Ajzen, Fishbein, 1975, 1980; Tiwari et al., 2023). However, Attitude Change Theories suggest that attitudes can be changed in response to persuasive advertisements (Brehm, 1966, 1981). Both theoretical approaches emphasize the importance of education in shaping attitudes, whether through initial learning or through cognitive shifts triggered by persuasive messaging. Media literacy serves as a moderating factor in this process, equipping consumers with the ability to critically assess persuasive techniques used in advertising and resist manipulation. For example, informative advertising that incorporates educational elements can help build consumer trust and alleviate skepticism toward controversial products.

To analyze the advertising attitude theories in the context of controversial product advertisements in the South Asian region, this paper uses a systematic literature review methodology (Lee et al., 2020; Liew, Karia, 2024). This study aims to bridge the gap between attitude change theories and attitude formation theories. Considering the advertisements of controversial products, this study seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of cultural insights and their influence on consumers in the South Asia region. Additionally, the study highlights the role of media literacy and consumer education in fostering informed attitudes, reducing cultural resistance, and enabling the effective communication of product benefits. The findings of this research offer valuable implications for advertising professionals and academic scholars, emphasizing the need for media literacy integration to navigate the complex landscape of controversial product advertising in South Asian countries.

2. Materials and methods

This paper employs a systematic literature review methodology to explore advertising attitude theories in the context of controversial product advertisements in the South Asian region (Liew, Karia, 2024; Pfajfar et al., 2023). The review focuses on the dichotomy between Attitude Formation and Attitude Change theories, analyzing their relevance and application to advertising of controversial products (Dolnicar, Demeter, 2023). Additionally, the study examines the role of consumer education and media literacy as a tool for fostering informed attitudes and reducing resistance to controversial advertisements. Educational elements within advertising were evaluated for their potential to enhance understanding and reshape cultural perceptions. The primary data sources for this review include academic journals Scopus and Web of Sciences. The keywords used in the search are, “*attitude formation theories, attitude change theories, advertising attitudes, controversial product advertisements, digital advertising, South Asian consumer behavior, cultural influences in advertising.*” Table 1 summarizes the inclusion and exclusion criteria followed for data extraction.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Data Collection

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Type of Studies	Peer-reviewed articles listed in Scopus and Web of Sciences	Non-peer-reviewed articles, Peer-reviewed articles not listed in Scopus and Web of Sciences
Content	Studies addressing attitude theories in advertising	Studies not available in English.
Focus Area	Papers on consumer attitudes towards controversial products	Research focusing on regions outside South Asia without transferable insights
Context	Studies focusing on the South Asian context or providing significant cultural insights	Publications before 2000, unless they are seminal works
Publication Date	Publications from 2000 onwards	Published before 2000

Following the systematic literature review methodology (Lima et al., 2024), the study selection process included several stages, comprising identification of studies, removal of duplicates, screening, and assessment of full-text research studies. In total 1,050 studies were identified initially, with 1,000 through database searching and 50 through other sources. Later on, the studies were categorized into those addressing attitude theories, attitude change theories, attitude formation theories, and controversial products. After removing duplicates, 900 unique studies were retained for further screening. This step ensured that the analysis was based on distinct and non-redundant data. The 900 studies were screened for relevance. Studies that were non-peer-reviewed or not listed in Scopus and Web of Science were excluded, resulting in 700 studies being filtered out. During this stage, special attention was given to studies examining educational components and media literacy in advertising strategies. This rigorous screening ensured the inclusion of high-quality research only. The full texts of the remaining 200 studies were assessed for eligibility. Only peer-reviewed articles listed in Scopus and Web of Science that addressed relevant attitude theories in advertising, cultural education, and consumer attitudes towards controversial products, analyzed in the context of consumers' education or media literacy pertinent to the South Asian context were included.

The systematic literature review method ensures that the research findings are grounded in insightful research data, offering valuable insights for marketers and advertising professionals in the South Asian region. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of integrating media education into advertising frameworks to navigate cultural sensitivities effectively. Table 2 summarizes the studies searched, selected, and analyzed by theoretical focus and controversial products.

Table 2. Stages of Studies Search, Selection, and Analysis

S. No	Stage	Total Studies	Attitude Theories	Attitude Change	Attitude Formation	Controversial Products
1.	Total studies identified	1,050	250	200	300	300
	Through database searching	1,000	240	190	280	290
	Through other sources	50	10	10	20	10
2.	Studies after duplicates removed	900	210	180	270	240
3.	Studies screened	900	210	180	270	240
	Non-peer-reviewed articles, peer-reviewed	700	160	140	210	190

S. No	Stage	Total Studies	Attitude Theories	Attitude Change	Attitude Formation	Controversial Products
	articles not listed in Scopus and Web of Sciences excluded based on initial screening.					
4.	Full-text peer-reviewed articles listed in Scopus and Web of Sciences articles included in the study	200	50	40	60	50

3. Discussion

Integrating attitude formation and attitude change theories provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and influencing consumer attitudes towards controversial products in advertising research. Attitude formation theories, such as the Theory of Reasoned Action, the Theory of Planned Behavior, and UGT elucidate the cognitive and social processes through which individuals develop attitudes based on beliefs, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Fauzi et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2020; Rutledge, 2024). These theories offer insights into the initial formation of attitudes towards controversial products, highlighting the importance of individual perceptions, social influences, and past experiences (Dillard, Pfau, 2002; Ilias et al., 2021; Ofosu Ampong, 2024). Education plays a vital role here by enhancing awareness and providing factual, stigma-free information that facilitates informed attitude formation, especially about culturally sensitive products. Educational and media literacy campaigns can serve as a bridge between consumers' perceptions and advertisers' messaging, helping to align consumer beliefs with product benefits.

On the other hand, attitude change theories, including Psychological Reactance Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model, focus on the mechanisms through which existing attitudes can be modified or altered in response to persuasive messages (Amarnath, Jaidev, 2020; Dillard, Pfau, 2002; Petty, Cacioppo, 1986; Zhang et al., 2023). These theories emphasize factors such as message content, source credibility, and audience receptivity in facilitating attitude change (Amarnath, Jaidev, 2020; Kurdi, Charlesworth, 2023; Massey et al., 2013). Incorporating media education into persuasive strategies enhances message effectiveness by equipping consumers with the knowledge needed to critically assess product information and overcome cultural biases. For instance, advertisements with an educational focus can reduce psychological resistance by addressing misconceptions directly and building trust by employing techniques such as fear appeals, social proof, or cognitive dissonance reduction, advertisers can strategically influence consumers' attitudes towards controversial products.

The integration of attitude formation and attitude change theories enables advertising researchers to develop comprehensive strategies for managing consumer attitudes towards controversial products. When combined with educational approaches, these strategies become more impactful by addressing not only the cognitive and emotional aspects of attitudes but also the informational gaps that often fuel resistance to controversial products. By understanding the interplay between these theoretical perspectives, marketers can tailor advertising messages to resonate with consumers' existing beliefs and values while strategically employing persuasive communication techniques to influence attitudes. This integrated approach facilitates a detailed understanding of how advertising influences consumer attitudes and provides valuable insights for designing effective advertising campaigns that drive desired outcomes in diverse market contexts.

In the cultural context of the South Asian region, particularly concerning controversial product advertisements (Amul, 2020), understanding both attitude formation and attitude change becomes crucial due to the unique socio-cultural dynamics at play (Ansari, Hyder, 2023; Shah et al., 2022). Attitudes in South Asian societies are often deeply rooted in cultural norms, religious beliefs, and societal values, which significantly influence consumers' perceptions and behaviors

towards controversial products (Raza et al., 2018). Education and media literacy in this context can help bridge cultural divides by fostering open dialogue and creating awareness about the benefits of these products while respecting societal values. For example, health education campaigns addressing the necessity of sanitary products can reduce stigma and encourage acceptance.

Attitude formation in the South Asian context is heavily influenced by cultural factors, such as collectivism, respect for authority, and traditional gender roles (Arora et al., 2023). For instance, attitudes towards products related to personal hygiene or sexuality may be shaped by cultural taboos and societal expectations surrounding these topics (Sierra et al., 2021). Advertisers need to consider these cultural insights when developing advertising strategies to ensure that messages resonate with the target audience while respecting cultural sensitivities (Yeung, 2022). Incorporating educational and media literacy elements into these strategies allows advertisers to address cultural taboos more effectively by offering scientific explanations or social endorsements, making such products more socially acceptable.

Moreover, the process of attitude change in South Asia requires careful navigation of cultural norms and values (Hosain, Mamun, 2023). Persuasive messages that challenge existing attitudes towards controversial products must be culturally sensitive and contextually relevant to avoid resistance or backlash from consumers (Jangbar, 2023). Advertisers may need to adopt indirect or subtle persuasion techniques that align with cultural norms, such as storytelling, symbolism, or appeals to social conformity (Ali, 2021; Braca, Dondio, 2023). Educational campaigns that incorporate culturally relevant narratives or role models can further support these messages, making them more relatable and impactful.

Furthermore, the role of social influence and interpersonal communication is paramount in the South Asian context (Shafi et al., 2023). Consumers often rely on word-of-mouth recommendations and social networks for product-related information and decision-making (Azemi et al., 2020). Therefore, advertisers can leverage social norms and peer influence to facilitate attitude change towards controversial products, emphasizing social acceptance and endorsement within the community (Olmedo et al., 2020). When combined with consumer educational campaigns, such strategies can enhance credibility and encourage group-level acceptance by fostering informed discussions within communities.

However, it's essential to recognize that attitudes towards controversial products in South Asia may be resistant to change due to deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and societal taboos (Narayan, Oru, 2024). Advertisers must approach attitude change with sensitivity and caution, acknowledging the complexities of cultural identity and the potential for unintended consequences (Khalid et al., 2023). Educational advertising campaigns can act as a buffer to these challenges by providing a gradual, knowledge-based approach to altering perceptions while respecting cultural boundaries.

Incorporating attitude formation and attitude change theories into controversial product advertisements in the South Asian region requires a comprehensive understanding of cultural dynamics and consumer behavior. When paired with educational advertising and media literacy initiatives, this integration becomes even more effective, as education empowers consumers with the knowledge to make informed decisions and reduces resistance stemming from cultural taboos. Advertisers must navigate the delicate balance between challenging existing attitudes and respecting cultural sensitivities to effectively influence consumer perceptions and behaviors. By integrating cultural insights into advertising strategies, marketers can foster positive attitudes towards controversial products while mitigating the risk of cultural backlash or regulatory scrutiny.

4. Results

The theories identified in the full texts of filtered out 200 studies included in the final analysis encompassed both attitude formation theories and attitude change theories in the context of consumers' literacy about controversial product advertisements. Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), and Uses & Gratification Theory (UGT) were identified as *Attitude Formation Theories* and Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Psychological Reactance Theory (PRT) were identified as *Attitude Change Theories*. Mainly, consumers' education emerged as a context influencing both the formation and change of attitudes, as it equips consumers with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions, particularly about culturally sensitive products. After the article selection process, the themes were extracted following the Grounded Theory for in depth analysis (Bryant, Charmaz, 2019; Charmaz, 2014; Connor et al., 2018).

Open codes were labeled initially by breaking down the text to identify fundamental concepts. Open codes were then organized into broader categories, known as axial codes, to highlight the relationships between concepts. Finally, themes were extracted that encapsulate the core theoretical constructs and their implications for attitude formation and change, particularly for controversial products in South Asia. Media literacy and Educational dimensions, such as public awareness initiatives and culturally informed learning strategies, were integrated into these themes, reflecting their potential to enhance understanding and mitigate resistance. [Table 3](#) summarizes the themes extracted.

Table 3. Theme Extraction Based on Grounded Theory

Open Codes	Axial Codes	Themes	TRA	TPB	UGT	ELM	PRT	# of Papers
Cognitive evaluation, social norms, behavioral intentions	Cognitive and Social Processes	Cognitive and Social Processes	✓	✓				45
Belief outcomes, social pressures, normative beliefs	Beliefs, Attitudes, and Norms	Beliefs, Subjective Norms	✓	✓				38
Personal beliefs, peer expectations, societal norms	Personal and Social Influences	Individual Perception and Social Influences	✓	✓				30
Previous interactions, learned responses, habitual behaviors	Experience-based Attitude Formation	Past Experiences	✓					28
Cultural prohibitions, social acceptability, traditional norms	Cultural and Societal Norms	Cultural Taboos and Societal Expectations	✓	✓				25
Group loyalty, deference to authority, societal hierarchy	Social Hierarchy and Collectivism	Collectivism and Respect for Authority	✓	✓				22
Gender norms, role expectations, societal gender beliefs	Gender-based Attitude Formation	Traditional Gender Roles	✓	✓				20
Perceived ease, control beliefs, self-efficacy	Behavioral Control	Perceived Behavioral Controls		✓				40
Peer communication, social integration, interpersonal feedback	Interpersonal Influence	Social Influence and Interpersonal Communication	✓	✓	✓			18
Peer recommendations, social media influence, community discussions	Social Networks and Word-of-Mouth Influence	Word of Mouth and Social Networks	✓	✓	✓			35
Narrative techniques, symbolic meanings, cultural	Narrative Persuasion	Storytelling and symbolism			✓			32

Open Codes	Axial Codes	Themes	TRA	TPB	UGT	ELM	PRT	# of Papers
references								
Message quality, source trustworthiness, expertise	Persuasive Message Content	Message content and source credibility				✓		28
Attention, interest, willingness to engage	Audience Engagement	Audience receptivity				✓		36
Threat perception, conformity, peer influence	Persuasive Techniques	Fear appeals and social proof					✓	34
Discomfort, attitude-behavior consistency, resolution strategies	Dissonance Mitigation	Cognitive dissonance reduction					✓	26
Subtle messaging, indirect cues, non-directive influence	Subtle Persuasion	Indirect persuasion techniques	✓	✓				29
Social validation, community approval, peer endorsement	Social Endorsement	Social acceptance and endorsement					✓	24

Educational and media literacy campaigns were identified as cross-cutting themes, particularly in areas such as cognitive and social processes, cultural taboos, and interpersonal influence. By integrating education and awareness into strategies aligned with these themes, advertisers can promote informed decision-making and reduce resistance to controversial products.

The integration of Attitude Formation and Attitude Change theories provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and influencing consumer attitudes towards controversial products in South Asia. While Attitude Formation theories like TRA, TPB and UGT emphasize the role of cognitive and social processes, beliefs, and subjective norms (Bagozzi, 1986; Fauzi et al., 2023; Warraich et al., 2024), Attitude Change theories such as ELM and PRT focus on the mechanisms of persuasive communication and resistance to change (Brehm, 1966; Petty, Cacioppo, 1986). Media literacy campaigns complement these theoretical frameworks by fostering awareness, reducing misinformation, and encouraging a more open dialogue around controversial products.

The debate between Attitude Formation and Attitude Change theories highlights the dynamic nature of consumer attitudes (Kumar et al., 2023). While attitudes are initially formed through cognitive and social processes, they can be altered through persuasive messages that leverage cultural insights and social influences (Yoon, Lee, 2021). Cognitive and social processes are fundamental to both the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Bagozzi, 1986; Fauzi et al., 2023). The findings of this research confirm that attitudes are shaped through cognitive evaluations of expected outcomes and perceived social pressures. The dominance of this theme, reflected in 45 papers, features its broad applicability in understanding consumer attitudes towards controversial products. In South Asian cultures, where social norms and collective behaviors are paramount, educational and media literacy campaigns can play a transformative role by creating culturally resonant messages that align with societal values. For example, health education campaigns addressing the use of sanitary products or contraceptives can demystify these products and mitigate cultural resistance. Educational advertising campaign incorporated with media literacy initiatives efforts also amplify the effectiveness of persuasive techniques by providing a factual basis for message content, increasing audience receptivity, and building trust. This theme also resonates with the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), which emphasizes the active role of media consumers in seeking content that satisfies their cognitive and social needs (Blumler, Katz, 1974; Warraich et al., 2024).

Beliefs and subjective norms, central to TRA and TPB, directly influence attitudes and behavioral intentions (Zahari, Zain, 2024). This theme, addressed in 38 papers, highlights the significance of

individual beliefs about product outcomes and the social expectations that shape these beliefs. In the South Asian context, societal norms and community expectations heavily impact consumer behavior, making this theme critical for designing culturally resonant advertising messages.

Individual Perception and Social Influences encompass the personal and societal factors influencing attitude formation, aligning with both TRA and TPB (Saleem, Mirza, 2023). The 30 papers focusing on this theme highlight the complex interplay between personal beliefs and social expectations. In South Asian societies, where collective behavior and social conformity are highly valued, understanding these influences is crucial for managing consumer attitudes towards controversial products.

Past experiences play a significant role in shaping current attitudes, as noted in 28 papers. This theme aligns with the Experience-based Attitude Formation, suggesting that previous interactions and learned responses are crucial in the formation of attitudes towards controversial products (Bessen, Connell, 2024). In South Asia, past experiences are often intertwined with cultural and societal norms, reinforcing existing attitudes.

Extracted from 25 papers, cultural taboos and societal expectations themes is critical in shaping attitudes towards controversial products (Badewi et al., 2022). This theme highlights the importance of cultural prohibitions and social acceptability in attitude formation, particularly relevant in South Asian societies where cultural norms and traditional values are deeply entrenched.

Collectivism and Respect for Authority explored in 22 papers, emphasizes the influence of group loyalty, deference to authority, and societal hierarchy on attitude formation (Cantarero et al., 2021). In South Asian cultures, the collective nature of society and high regard for authority figures significantly impact consumer attitudes towards controversial products.

Traditional gender roles, addressed in 20 papers, shape attitudes towards certain controversial products (Gurrieri et al., 2016; Yaseen et al., 2020). This theme highlights the influence of societal gender beliefs and role expectations, which are particularly strong in South Asian cultures, affecting consumer perceptions and behaviors.

Perceived behavioral control, a core component of TPB (Vamvaka et al., 2020), is critical in understanding attitude formation, as noted in 40 papers. This theme reflects the importance of perceived ease, control beliefs, and self-efficacy in shaping attitudes towards controversial products.

Social influence and interpersonal communication, explored in 18 papers, emphasize the role of peer communication, social integration, and interpersonal feedback in attitude formation. This theme aligns with both TRA and TPB, as well as UGT (Abbas Naqvi et al., 2020; Wu, Kuang, 2021), highlighting the significance of social interactions in shaping consumer attitudes in South Asia.

The influence of word of mouth and social networks, addressed in 35 papers, is crucial in shaping consumer attitudes. This theme reflects the importance of peer recommendations, social media influence, and community discussions, aligning with TRA, TPB, and UGT (Kim, Cake, 2024).

Storytelling and symbolism, explored in 32 papers, are effective in narrative persuasion, a key component of UGT (Shagba et al., 2023). This theme highlights the power of narrative techniques and cultural references in influencing consumer attitudes towards controversial products.

Message content and source credibility, critical in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), are essential for persuasive message content (Ibrahim et al., 2024). This theme, noted in 28 papers, highlights the importance of message quality and source trustworthiness in changing attitudes.

Audience receptivity, a focus of ELM, is crucial in determining the effectiveness of persuasive communication (Xiao, Burke, 2024). This theme, addressed in 36 papers, highlights the role of attention, interest, and willingness to engage in attitude change.

Fear appeals and social proof, explored in 34 papers, are persuasive techniques that can influence attitudes by highlighting threat perceptions and leveraging peer influence. This theme aligns with Psychological Reactance Theory (PRT), emphasizing the use of fear and conformity in changing attitudes (Boukamcha, 2024; Quick et al., 2023).

Cognitive dissonance reduction, a focus of PRT, is crucial for resolving discomfort and maintaining attitude-behavior consistency (Vaidis et al., 2024). This theme, noted in 26 papers, highlights the strategies for mitigating dissonance to facilitate attitude change.

Indirect persuasion techniques, explored in 29 papers, emphasize subtle messaging and indirect cues to influence attitudes (De Vooght, Hudders, 2023). This theme aligns with both TRA and TPB, highlighting the effectiveness of non-directive influence in changing attitudes.

Social acceptance and endorsement, addressed in 24 papers, are crucial for gaining community approval and peer endorsement (Sutia et al., 2023). This theme highlights the importance of social validation in facilitating attitude change, hence aligned with PRT.

Moreover, the integration of attitude formation and attitude change theories offers a robust theoretical framework. Derived from multiple theories highlighting the complex interplay of cognitive, social, and cultural factors that influence both the attitude formation and attitude change of consumer, this research conceptualized a comprehensive theoretical model for understanding the interaction of attitude formation and attitude change theories, and their influence on consumer attitudes towards advertising of controversial products. Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical model built upon the insights derived from the systematic literature review of 200 articles, with each theory contributing distinct elements to the overall framework.



Fig. 1. Integrated Framework of Attitude Formation and Attitude Change Theories

The integration of attitude formation and attitude change theories offers a comprehensive approach to managing consumer attitudes towards controversial products. By understanding the cognitive and social processes underlying attitude formation and the mechanisms through which attitudes can be changed, advertisers can develop strategies that resonate with consumers' existing beliefs and values. This integrated approach facilitates an in depth understanding of how advertising influences consumer attitudes and provides valuable insights for designing effective educational advertising campaigns that drive desired outcomes in diverse market contexts.

The incorporation of educational initiatives into this theoretical framework provides advertisers with an actionable strategy for managing consumer attitudes towards controversial products. Education and media literacy serves as a unifying factor that supports both attitude formation and change by addressing cultural taboos, fostering informed discussions, and empowering consumers to make better-informed decisions.

In summary, the model demonstrates the complementary nature of attitude formation and attitude change theories, enhanced by education's transformative potential. Advertisers can leverage this integrated framework to navigate the complex landscape of controversial product advertising, ensuring their messages are not only culturally sensitive and persuasive but also educationally impactful.

5. Conclusion

In This study integrates Attitude Formation and Attitude Change theories by exploring their relevance and application to controversial product advertisements. Further, this research provides a comprehensive theoretical model by integrating these theories while incorporating education and media literacy as critical elements. This addition introduces a new dimension, emphasizing their transformative potential in shaping and modifying consumer attitudes. The theoretical model developed in this study is an original contribution to the existing body of knowledge, providing a baseline to understand how attitude formation and change theories interact within the digital advertising landscape of controversial products in South Asia.

Attitude Formation Theories, such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), and the Uses & Gratification Theory (UGT), elucidate the cognitive and social processes that underlie the development of attitudes (Bagozzi, 1986; Kim, Cake, 2024; Zahari, Zain, 2024). These theories emphasize the importance of individual beliefs, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in shaping attitudes (Banerjee, Ho, 2020). In the South Asian context, additional cultural factors such as collectivism, respect for authority, and traditional gender roles play a crucial role in attitude formation. Media literacy strengthens this process by empowering consumers to critically evaluate advertising narratives, distinguish between persuasive intent and genuine information, and make informed judgments rather than relying solely on cultural biases. Educational efforts can reinforce these processes by addressing misconceptions and creating awareness about controversial products, thereby enabling informed attitude formation.

Attitude Change Theories, including the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Psychological Reactance Theory (PRT), focus on the mechanisms through which existing attitudes can be modified (Ahn, Ham, 2022). These theories highlight the significance of message content, source credibility, and audience receptivity in facilitating attitude change (Dayton, Dragojevic, 2024). Media literacy enhances these mechanisms by equipping consumers with analytical skills to assess credibility, recognize manipulation tactics, and engage thoughtfully with advertising messages. In South Asia, culturally tailored educational and media literacy campaigns can address deeply rooted societal norms, reduce resistance, and promote acceptance of controversial products by fostering critical engagement with advertising content rather than passive reception.

The model demonstrates that an integrated approach, combining both attitude formation and change theories, enables advertisers to develop insightful strategies that resonate with consumers' existing beliefs and values while effectively influencing their attitudes. Media literacy complements educational campaigns by fostering trust, increasing consumer understanding, and addressing cultural taboos in a sensitive and informed manner. This comprehensive approach is particularly relevant in South Asia's culturally diverse and sensitive market, where societal values significantly impact consumer behavior. By enhancing consumers' media literacy skills, advertising strategies can promote transparency and empower consumers to interpret advertising messages with greater autonomy.

The integration of these theories provides valuable insights for advertising professionals and academic scholars to examine their interaction. Further, academic scholars can empirically test the theoretical model derived from this research. Media literacy-based educational initiatives can also serve as experimental platforms to validate the impact of integrating education and critical media engagement into attitude formation and change strategies. Moreover, advertising professionals can use these insights to design effective and ethically responsible advertising campaigns for controversial products. By leveraging the cognitive and social processes of attitude formation, the persuasive mechanisms of attitude change, and the informational power of educational and

media literacy campaigns, advertisers can create campaigns that are not only culturally sensitive but also equip consumers with critical thinking skills.

Additionally, the research calls attention to the pivotal role of cultural insights, persuasive communication strategies, and media literacy in shaping consumer attitudes in South Asia. Media literacy serves as a pragmatic tool to overcome cultural barriers by encouraging informed discussions, enabling consumers to decode advertising messages more critically, and reducing the impact of misleading or stigmatized portrayals of controversial products. Cultural norms and societal values exert significant influence on attitude formation, presenting distinctive challenges for advertisers. Keeping in view these cultural barriers, marketers can effectively shape consumer perceptions by integrating both cultural sensitivity and media literacy into advertising strategies.

Looking ahead, marketers must continue to integrate theoretical insights, media literacy, and educational strategies into their advertising campaigns while remaining attuned to cultural sensitivities. By incorporating media literacy-driven educational advertising campaigns as a foundational element, marketers can foster trust, build credibility, and empower consumers with the critical knowledge needed to navigate advertising messages effectively. This approach not only mitigates the risk of backlash or regulatory scrutiny but also creates a media-literate, informed consumer base. Ultimately, this study emphasizes the importance of a nuanced, culturally informed, and media literacy-driven approach to advertising in South Asia, enabling marketers to craft impactful, ethical, and socially responsible campaigns that resonate with consumers in this diverse and dynamic region.

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