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News literacy. Opposing new threats of propaganda.

To begin with, it should be noted that propaganda is nothing new in civilization. It lives from the time of Seleucids and Hellenism (Butkevich 2016; Dzevetsky 2017). Propaganda became news only because it infiltrated new assets of mass media and shaped itself in forms, that society did not yet grasp. Consequently, I believe, that effective opposition to the new threats of propaganda – is a task for us all, as addressees of mass media, and not purely the responsibility of politicians and journalists. We cannot entirely count on them.

A method of solving this problem is the creation of media competencies and information audiences, especially in relation to journalist's materials, which is called *news literacy* or *news media literacy.*

The essence of this essay will be the presentation of the concept of the European approach to the use of mass media, considering new dangers of propaganda, as well as the demonstration of advancements in the practical field of *news literacy* – the ology of critical perception of information from mass media. We shall use documents of the European Union and relevant thematic publications. The opinion, that the upbringing of personal critical competences in the field of media information is the only mandatory and sufficient form of action against the new dangers of propaganda, is accepted as the thesis.

1. European approach to mass media use and new threats of propaganda

Ten years ago, the European Commission (2007) prepared a document, defining the European approach to the use of mass media. Authors determined the given approach as the ability to understand and critically analyze various aspects of media and their contents in several contexts.

This must include: ease of use in all existing media, from newspapers to social networks; active utilization of mass media by means of TV, web search engines, engagement in virtual groups and better employment of mass media's potential in the field of entertainment, access to culture, intercultural dialogue, studies and daily uses (e.g. libraries, podcasts); the critical approach to mass media and its quality and contents (e.g. ability to evaluate information, reaction to an advertisement in different sources of mass information, intelligent search); creative employment of mass media, in a situation, where technological evolution of media and internet development allows more and more Europeans to create and publish images and information; notion of economy and difference between pluralism and property of mass media; understanding the concept of copyright, necessary for "legal culture", especially by the younger generation, which is the both the creator and consumer of news (ibid., p. 4).

Authors of the said document emphasized the importance of critical competencies in the reception of information, naming three main areas and associated practices of developing media skills: area of trade information, audiovisual and online media. Among practices are also mentioned specific skills and abilities, for example, aimed at creative development of trade information and critical attitude to information online (ibid., p. 6-9).

The need arose to enrich these recordings with new themes, associated with propaganda from ISIS/Daesz, Al-Qaeda and Russia. The European Parliament presented with such initiative (2016), stressing the importance of knowledge propagation, education, and skills to use internet based mass media in the EU and neighboring countries, so that citizens are able to critically evaluate information for the purpose of distancing themselves from propaganda. The European Parliament emphasizes the necessity of education at all levels and the attraction of people to an active population of conscious consumers of media services; defines the leading role of internet and social media, where it's easy to spread false information and initiate a misinforming campaign; reminds, that combating one propaganda with the help of another brings undesired effects, and understands, that the EU in whole and member-countries can fight propaganda in third world countries only by apprehending (bringing to light) the misinforming campaign, by means of positive communicants and information, and must also develop a strong fighting strategy against the forces, who generate the propaganda; reiterates, that the financial crisis and development of digital technologies is a seri0us challenge for professional journalists (ibid., p. 46).

A logical solution to improve the critical perception of information in the context of propaganda is once again media-education. The European Parliament (ibid., p.49) believes, that media-education will teach people to use their freedom of speech, critically perceive media-content and react to misinformation; therefore the parliament sees the necessity of misinformation awareness by means of schooling critical discernment of media on all levels, owing to a European information campaign on media and journalistic ethics, as well as close cooperation with social platforms for promoting joint initiatives on the topics of hatred, violence, and discrimination in the Internet.

Research about media in undemocratic countries, such as Russia, became an important stimulus for the commencement of media-educational actions. The analysis of critical perception of media among internet users in Russia shows discrepancies with the West. The analysis succumbed categories such as:

I)   Understanding of segmentation of the informational community
II) Processes of news creation
III) "Constructiveness" of political theses
IV) Roles of media in Russian society

Categories II and III are comparable to those, which are present in European countries. In countries with hybrid political systems – conjunction of democracy and authoritarianism – aspects I and IV are more strongly emphasized. Concerning category I, the media society of Russia's hybrid system is much more ideologically disorganized, in contrast to many European democracies. In modern Russia, ideological borders of media discourse with designated segments are clearly seen, which present reality within the confines of undemocratic ideology. Regarding category IV, the need to accentuate freedom of media and its role as the fourth authority is less seen compared to European countries. These topics – functioning of media in authoritarian, dictatorial or totalitarian societies – rarely

appear in media consumption educational programs in democratic society (Toepfl 2014, p. 75-80).

2. Formation of competence for critical perception of media information

An important question is the methods of formation of competence for critica perception of media information. One of them is information analysis. Information on events around the world is layered on the personal experience of youth and kids and actively forms their system of values. Educating critical perception of media information during classes in school, for example, where news and events are analyzed, help learn to better perceive information about the world. Also, what is even more important, help lower the sense of threat in kids and youth, especially in the context of serious news concerning catastrophes, terrorism, etc. Often, however, in political considerations, it is the teacher's preference to avoid contact with relevant news and their analysis (Moore 2013, p. 326).

You can name seven steps of effective critical perception of mass media education. They are used on different educational levels – from preschool to post-secondary education.

First step is to get students interested in media experience and ways of finding information. Second - analysis and understanding of information, including attention to its structure and form. Third - asking critical questions and finding their answers. Fourth - attention to the constructive character of news and contrast between media representation and reality. Fifth - a creative approach to information analysis, especially attentive to aspects, which we perceive as ordinary. Sixth – independent creation of news with the use of various genres and forms of media. Seventh step – noticing the difference between personal experience and of the given microcommunity, for example, a class, and information about the world, seeing tension and contradictions in messages of mass media (Hobbs 2010, p. 4-5).

News literacy is largely a science of critical mass media perception. Several levels of media education can be named, and the method of study is problematic education in the framework of media science:

The first level is uncritical acceptance of information as absolute truth.

Second level is understanding what is known and what is not.

The third level approaches the development of independent knowledge in oneself – the automatic distinction of given data from other.

The last level is contextual knowledge, the combination of complex concepts and the understanding of certain specific goals of information (Chen and Rattray 2017, p. 279).

Attempts of processing instruments for measuring the skills of mass media users are underway, especially in the context of product understanding and consumption of new information. These instruments concentrate on the comprehension of motives of news producers, various interpretations of media messages and discrepancies of reality and media presentation. These instruments are applicable in assessing the reliability of information sources and in

specific problems, for example, in evaluating information about the dangers of smoking (Ashley, Maksl, Craft 2013, p. 9).

We must also realize certain problems and limitations. *News media literacy* is an important educational goal, because the number of media consumers is growing, as is the need for people to be a part of a democratic civil society. The duty of a journalist is to tell the truth, but there are structural limitations that get in the way of journalism in meeting this debt. For the consumer, it becomes important to know the regulatory purposes of journalism and the mechanisms for influencing the content of news (ibid., p. 8).

We can name three problems in education in the field of *news literacy*. First is the lack of communication with journalistic practice, study of the theory of mass media without relations with a real functioning of journalism. Second problem is educating media information from the point of view of certain journalists, ignoring the influence of the capital on the process of news occurrence in some editorial offices. The third problem is overconcentration on the ideals of journalism (ethics, missions) and ignoring the real functioning of journalism, related to financial structures and ideologies (Hobbs 2010, p. 5-6).

Although consumers may have a good understanding of the media, they may be unaware of the actual mechanisms allowing its functioning. In practice, without knowledge of the system of mass media functioning, we find ourselves in different camps. Therefore, it is important to be a conscious press consumer and to deepen your knowledge of the regulatory purposes of journalism. In addition to the skills of reading media information, it is necessary to see the system of information media while considering its political and economic aspects (Ashley, Maksl, Craft 2013, p. 13).

Conclusions

The competence of the critical perception of mass media is defined as an important skill of a modern European. Formed in 2007, it requires constant updates due to new challenges of propaganda. This conclusion arose in new documents of the European Union, and is also visible in researches of the Russian audience. European democratic values need to be more widely rooted in the course of studying critical media perception.

An important problem is the correct choice of methods for critical media perception education, which we declared as the main element of a *news literacy* educated European. First, it is the analysis of relevant events around the world. Later you can talk about the succeeding steps in the advance of the level of critical perception of media, about educational steps in media education and measurement of the level of media perception.

It is important for the thesis set in this essay, that the formation of skills of critical perception of information from mass media is the necessary and sufficient form of opposition against new threats of propaganda. Research results testify to the limited function of modern journalism and mass media, since they are often directly dependent on economic and political processes. The desire for the objectivity of information thus falls on the shoulders of the

audience and users of mass media. Without the appropriate assistance from the state, non-governmental organizations (NGO) and international efforts, this science may not be successful.

In this context, the frequently used postulates about media education as a separate subject in schools receive new meaning. The drawbacks in its introduction as a new subject will be compensated by civil actions of NGO and IGO, but the complete realization of this postulate requires educational system reform in European countries.

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