

METHODS OF DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH IMPROVING MEDIA LITERACY

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Annotation. This article analyzes the basic concepts of media literacy, its role in the information world, and examines practical methods of using media literacy as one of the main factors in shaping critical thinking. The study also provides recommendations for developing essential skills such as receiving, analyzing, and evaluating information.

Key words: information and media literacy, cyberbullying, manipulative messages, CRAAP test, SIFT method, Prebunking and Debunking practice.

INTRODUCTION

In today's era of globalization and digital transformation, the speed, volume, and influence of information flow on users are rapidly increasing. As the world population continues to grow, the number of internet users is also rising. According to statistics from April 2025, 68.7% of the world's population uses social networks, which means that compared to the same period last year, the number of active social media users has increased by an average of 7.6% per second.

As a result, social networks have deeply penetrated people's daily lives and have become the main tool for spreading ideological influence, distorting public opinion, and altering social values through the exchange of information. Widely

used networks such as Telegram, Instagram, and WhatsApp are often exploited to distribute various types of information for personal gain, manipulate users, mislead them with fake news, and divert their attention.

Hidden criminal groups also use social networks to recruit members for religious extremist and terrorist organizations by spreading materials and nasheeds to deceive citizens. Moreover, the number of victims of hacker attacks is increasing daily: approximately 600 million cyberattacks occur worldwide every day, targeting not only individuals but also government institutions. Examples include phishing messages sent under the names of microfinance organizations, payment applications, charity institutions, and local brands. Many users, believing unverified rumors, unknowingly spread fake or hacker-generated messages themselves.

Thus, **improving media literacy and developing critical thinking** has become a pressing issue today. In recent years, excessive dependence on social networks, addiction to virtual communication, and the uncritical acceptance of information among young people have significantly increased. This leads to the rapid spread of manipulative news and false information, causing youth to become socially passive and negatively affecting their personal development. Developing **critical thinking** and **media literacy skills** not only broadens a person's intellectual horizon but also increases vigilance in processing information, improves analytical skills, and plays an essential role in ensuring information security in society.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODS

Today, understanding why and for what purpose information is disseminated has become a daily necessity. Media literacy plays a crucial role in comprehending the information environment. According to UNESCO publications on media and

information literacy, media-literate and critically thinking individuals are able to use relevant technologies freely, create, receive, evaluate, and distribute media content effectively. Moreover, they are aware of their rights and responsibilities when using mass media.

Such individuals analyze who sent the information, its content, and significance, which helps protect them from manipulative influence. Social media users not only consume information but also have the right to create and share their own content with wider audiences.

Media literacy is the ability to filter daily information received and transmitted through mass media, make correct decisions in any situation, and understand where, by whom, and for what purpose the information is transmitted, as well as whose interests it reflects. Media literacy consists of **three main skills**:

1. **Creating** – producing new media products based on different information sources;
2. **Using** – searching, filtering, sending, and editing existing media resources;
3. **Understanding** – critically analyzing the information received.

Critical thinking is a self-regulating, disciplined, and self-correcting form of thinking. This approach helps a person communicate effectively, not only in receiving information but also in personal development. It ensures accuracy and precision in decision-making, confidence in expressing opinions, understanding scientific theories quickly and easily, managing audiences appropriately, and achieving desired results.

The term **media** generally refers to mass communication channels such as newspapers, radio, television, and the internet, while media content includes

networks, daily news, advertisements, online games, films, and other audiovisual content. Based on these concepts, media literacy and critical thinking are interrelated:

- Media literacy provides the skills to search for, analyze, and correctly interpret information,
- While critical thinking deepens this process by forming logical reasoning and independent conclusions.

For example, a person with media literacy quickly understands and correctly interprets news, while critical thinking allows them to evaluate the source, determine its purpose, verify the authenticity of the information, and assess its social impact. This helps individuals recognize manipulative or false information and protect themselves from misinformation.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND METHODS FOR DEVELOPING MEDIA LITERACY AND CRITICAL THINKING

1. CRAAP Test

The **CRAAP test** is an effective tool for critically evaluating sources, widely used in libraries and among university students. CRAAP stands for **CURRENCY, RELEVANCE, AUTHORITY, ACCURACY, AND PURPOSE**. Given the huge amount of information on social networks, its reliability and authenticity often decrease, making users vulnerable to fake information.

Developed by librarians at **California State University**, this test allows users to freely evaluate important information by checking:

- When the message was published or updated,

- Who the target audience is,
- Spelling and stylistic accuracy,
- The intended purpose,
- And even the author or the credibility of the publishing site.

2. SIFT Method

Since not all websites are reliable, the **SIFT method**, introduced by digital literacy expert Mike Caulfield from Washington State University, helps evaluate sources correctly. The method effectively identifies fake and manipulative information, strengthens critical thinking, builds immunity against misinformation, and raises public media literacy.

SIFT stands for:

- **Stop** – do not trust the source immediately; pause and examine it carefully,
- **Investigate the Source** – gather detailed information about the website or author,
- **Find Better Coverage** – verify whether the same information is published in multiple reputable sources,
- **Trace Claims, Quotes, and Media to the Original Context** – find the original source of the information for verification.

3. Prebunking and Debunking Practices

The rapid increase in fake news worldwide has led to the development of effective methods such as **PREBUNKING AND DEBUNKING**. These practices help prevent the spread of fake, unverified, and manipulative information, increase public alertness, and improve critical evaluation of information.

Medialiterate and critically thinking individuals use fact-checking systems to verify suspicious links, messages, or sources, making it easier to recognize misleading information. These methods are especially effective in countering cyber threats.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

According to the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Informatization", information is considered a resource used in the process of informatization. In the current era of globalization, **information attacks** – manipulative processes aimed at influencing people's minds through media, social networks, and other communication channels—pose a serious threat.

The consequences of such attacks include:

- Undermining social stability,
- Spreading panic and distrust among the public,
- Discrediting state institutions and individuals.

Illegal groups with malicious intent use social networks primarily to influence young people. They act like a virus in the virtual world, targeting morally weak and overly trusting individuals, changing their worldview through constant online communication.

To prevent such traps, it is necessary to:

- Raise public awareness,
- Encourage active participation,
- And conduct special explanatory sessions for students in educational institutions.

Research shows that media-literate individuals possess well-developed critical thinking skills. Such users can search, filter, and correctly analyze information, draw independent conclusions, remain vigilant, and distinguish messages at first glance. They protect themselves from fake and manipulative information and encourage others to do the same. Critical thinking, being a practical expression of media literacy, deepens this ability by promoting evidence-based reasoning and analytical questioning.

When sharing information, media-literate individuals do so responsibly, considering its social consequences rather than forwarding it blindly.

CONCLUSION

The conducted research confirms that improving media literacy is one of the most effective ways to develop critical thinking. In today's context of increasing information flow, social networks are flooded with fake and manipulative news, making a conscious approach to information essential.

Expanding the number of media-literate individuals, especially among the youth, raising their vigilance, and encouraging them to become active evaluators of information is crucial. People should develop the habit of analyzing and comparing sources, evaluating the consequences of shared information, and becoming active social agents rather than passive consumers.

Manipulators often influence people's emotions to achieve quick results. For instance:

- **Companies** use advertising and PR tools, offering big discounts and promotions with phrases like *“Don’t miss the chance!”* or *“Only for you!”* to manipulate consumers.
- **Political campaigns** also use manipulation techniques during elections by making numerous promises to win votes.

Today, **mass media** plays an essential role not only as a bridge between the state and society but also as a key tool for delivering information, shaping public opinion, and clarifying social issues. In Uzbekistan, ensuring public access to information, its timeliness, reliability, transparency, and openness is under constant monitoring.

Thus, media literacy is an integral part of critical thinking and an important form of improving information culture in society.

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