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THE ROLE OF MEDIA LITERACY IN SHAPING THE NATIONAL CULTURAL IDENTITY OF YOUTH IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Pardayeva Madina Maqsud qizi
School Counselor, Secondary School No. 184
Chilonzor District, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Abstract. This article examines, in their interrelation, the enhancement of young people's media literacy and the preservation of national cultural identity within the digital media environment. The author characterizes media literacy not merely as a technical skill but as a means of critically perceiving and evaluating information and of strengthening moral immunity. The study considers the impact of the global information flow on the consciousness and values of the younger generation, the theoretical foundations of media education, and the practical opportunities available within Uzbekistan's education system. The author argues that media literacy is a key factor in ensuring a balance between national identity and globalization.

Keywords: media literacy, digital media, national cultural identity, youth, information security, media education, critical thinking, social networks, moral immunity, glocalization.

The rapid advancement of information and communication technologies in the twenty-first century has fundamentally transformed every sphere of human life. Today the digital media environment is not merely a space for obtaining information; it has become the principal arena in which people perceive the world, form values, and organize social relations. Young people in particular spend a substantial part of their day behind screens, immersed in the flow of social networks, video-hosting platforms, and messaging services. Under these conditions, a user's ability to perceive information critically, to analyze, evaluate, and consume it prudently — that is, media literacy — has become one of the most important competencies of the modern individual[1].

Although media literacy emerged as an independent field of study in the second half of the twentieth century, its relevance has grown to an unprecedented degree precisely in the digital age. Whereas in the era of traditional media the principal task was to teach audiences to "read" information, today — when every user is simultaneously a consumer and a producer of content — the meaning of media literacy has expanded considerably. This article approaches media literacy as a necessary condition for preserving and developing the national cultural identity of young people.

The concept of media literacy is interpreted in various ways in the scholarly literature. W. Potter defines it as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages[2]. D. Buckingham, in turn, regards media education not as a mere aggregate of technical skills but as a process of cultivating a culture of critical understanding[3]. According to S. Livingstone, in the context of new information technologies media literacy becomes a dynamic, continually renewed competency, since the technological environment itself is changing rapidly[4].

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[1]Potter, W.J. (2016). Media Literacy (8th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, p. 22.

[3]Buckingham, D. (2003). Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 4.

[4]Livingstone, S. (2004). Media Literacy and the Challenge of New Information and Communication Technologies. The Communication Review, 7(1), 3–14.

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In contemporary approaches, media literacy is understood as a complex structure composed of several interrelated layers. The first layer is technical-instrumental literacy — the ability to use digital devices and platforms. The second is cognitive-critical literacy — the ability to determine the reliability of information, evaluate its source, and detect hidden meanings. The third is creative-participatory literacy — the capacity to create meaningful and responsible content oneself. H. Jenkins describes the contemporary media environment as a "participatory culture" in which every user becomes an active creator[5].

One of the most serious challenges of the digital age is the sheer abundance of information and the absence of quality control over it. Each day the young user encounters flows of information arriving from dozens or hundreds of sources, yet not all of them are reliable, impartial, or useful. False information (disinformation), deliberately distorted material (manipulation), and emotionally charged content can shape mistaken perceptions in the minds of young people. It is precisely for this reason that media literacy is today regarded as an important component of information security[6].

The global information flow affects not only the level of young people's knowledge but also their cultural identity. Alongside local, traditional values, products of the popular culture of the West and of East Asia are widely disseminated within the contemporary Uzbek media environment[7]. On the one hand, this process enriches young people's worldview and acquaints them with a diversity of cultures. On the other hand, in the absence of adequate critical perception, the uncritical adoption of foreign values may lead to estrangement from national roots. The excessive influx of foreign-language borrowings into the speech of Uzbek youth on social networks is a linguistic manifestation of this same process[8].

It is precisely at this point that the intrinsic connection between media literacy and national cultural identity becomes evident. A young person possessing media literacy neither rejects global content outright nor accepts it blindly; instead, he or she reinterprets information through the lens of national experience, cultural code, and value system. The result is not mere imitation but conscious choice and creative synthesis. As UNESCO documents emphasize, media and information literacy is a fundamental competency that enables an individual's active and responsible participation in a democratic society.

Maintaining a balance between national identity and globality is a central concern of contemporary cultural policy[9]. In securing this balance, strengthening young people's internal critical capacity is a more effective path than prohibition or restriction. In other words, rather than obstructing the information flow, it is more expedient to cultivate in the younger generation a "moral immunity" toward it — that is, the ability to independently filter out and reject harmful influences. The concept of

[5]Jenkins, H. (2006). Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide. New York: New York University Press, p. 3.

[6]Ergashev, B. (2020). Mediata'lim va yoshlar ongini shakllantirish muammolari [Problems of Media Education and the Formation of Youth Consciousness]. Ijtimoiy fikr. Inson huquqlari, (2), 44–52.

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[8]Muhamedova, D. (2021). Zamonaviy o'zbek tilida ingliz tilidan o'zlashmalarning lingvomadaniy tahlili [A Linguocultural Analysis of English Borrowings in Modern Uzbek]. O'zbek tili va adabiyoti, (4), 18–25.

[9]Yo'ldoshev, Q. (2018). Milliy o'zlik va globallashuv: madaniy mutanosiblik masalasi [National Identity and Globalization: The Issue of Cultural Balance]. Tashkent: Ma'naviyat, pp. 102–110.

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"critical media literacy" proposed by D. Kellner and J. Share is likewise directed at precisely this: developing the skill of analyzing and evaluating the ideas and values transmitted through the media.

In recent years Uzbekistan has taken significant steps to enhance media literacy. Reforms aimed at improving state youth policy, digitalizing the education system, and ensuring information security are creating a legal and institutional foundation for this direction. At the same time, the consistent integration of media literacy into the general secondary education system and the professional development of teachers and school counselors in this field remain pressing tasks.

Several effective directions for cultivating media literacy in the school setting can be distinguished. First, developing in students the skill of verifying information sources and filtering facts. Second, teaching them to critically analyze content on social networks and to distinguish advertising and propaganda tools. Third, engaging students in responsible and creative content creation — for example, in projects that promote national culture, history, and art through the language of modern media. R. Hobbs emphasizes that media literacy should be understood not as theoretical knowledge but as a practical plan of action.

Such an approach not only protects young people from the negative influence of information but also transforms them into active ambassadors of national culture. A media-literate young person is able to present the rich heritage, traditions, and art of his or her people on digital platforms in a modern and appealing form. In this way, media literacy becomes not merely a means of defense but also an opportunity to promote national culture within the global media environment.

It should be emphasized that enhancing media literacy is not the task of educational institutions alone. This process requires the cooperation of the family, mass media, state bodies, and civil-society institutions. The family environment in particular is of decisive importance in shaping a child's worldview, and it is essential that parents themselves possess adequate media literacy. In this sense, media literacy should become a natural, integral component of lifelong learning.

In conclusion, in the digital age media literacy has become a necessary condition for preserving and developing the national cultural identity of young people. These two concepts are not opposed to one another but are, rather, mutually complementary phenomena: media literacy is the means by which national identity is protected and expressed in a modern form. Neither fearing the global information flow nor withdrawing from it entirely, but engaging with it consciously, critically, and creatively, is the most appropriate path for today's younger generation.

For Uzbekistan, the most promising strategy is to make media literacy an integral part of the education system, to strengthen moral immunity and critical thinking in the younger generation, and to render national content competitive. It is precisely such an approach that serves both to preserve national culture and to transform it into an equal and appealing participant in the global digital arena. In future research, it would be expedient to study more deeply the impact of media literacy on the values of young people on an empirical basis — through questionnaire surveys, content analysis, and pedagogical experiments.

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