Analytical note

«Media Literacy in Times of War and Global Transformations»

*Interactive links are marked in blue.

Partners' Word

The OSCE program currently operating in Ukraine supports the development of media literacy as one of the key areas in combating disinformation and propaganda. The topics discussed during the international media literacy conference by experts from various countries are highly relevant and significant. Given the ongoing war, we must develop strategies for advancing media literacy while adapting to constant changes. Therefore, it is crucial that other international partners, such as UNESCO, UNDP, and others, also actively contribute to this field.

I would like to highlight the issue of artificial intelligence, whose rapid development poses a significant challenge for all of us. AI and digitalization were among the key topics in our training program for higher education institutions, which has already been attended by more than 1,500 students nationwide. The OSCE training program has been incorporated into the core curriculum of nearly ten leading universities, including the Institute of Journalism at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Pylyp Orlyk International Classical University, Vasyl Karazin Kharkiv National University, Volodymyr Hnatyuk Ternopil National University, Ivan Franko Lviv National University, and others. We continue to expand this initiative and, in 2025, will launch new activities to ensure that even more students have access to our course.

At the same time, a comprehensive approach to shaping media literacy policy in Ukraine is essential. We hope that the insights shared by experts during the conference on international cooperation, research, engagement with diverse audiences, and the integration of AI into media literacy education will be valuable for all stakeholders.

Olga Prokopenko, Head of the Media Project «OSCE Support Programme for Ukraine»

The current global technological revolution, including artificial intelligence, such as large language models, createquite a few challenges for media literacy, as well as opportunities that need to be seized.

We seewhat happens, when populations lack media literacy, some people fall victim to disinformation in traditional media while otherscannot use AI products and social media safely. Raising the level of media literacy among various particularly vulnerable groups can be very difficult. However, significant progress has been made in recent years. Thanks to the efforts of various organizations, people are learning to recognize fake news, question sources, and identify propaganda. They do not always put this knowledge into practice, but the language of media literacy is becoming a part of the way we discuss and consume media.

In this context, one should not forget the consequences of artificial intelligence adoption. This tool is becoming increasingly accessible to everyone, which is often and rightly presented as a major concern. But let us also look at the positive side: AI can support media literacy, if it enables the production and consumption of quality content. It is important not only to make our audiences aware of potential bad actors using AI, but also to teach them how to use AI for their own purposes.

At DW Akademie, we have been working on media literacy for many years in different countries worldwide, including, of course, Ukraine. Here, we collaborate with the Public Media Academy and the Ukrainian Institute of Media and Communication. We offer various learning modules tailored for specific target audiences. **For example, in cooperation with UMCI, we have developed innovative programs for older generations. We firmly believe that media literacy must remain a key focus of our efforts in the future.**

Maxim Ryabkov, Head of Unit Europe at DW Akademie

Context

Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 completely transformed Ukraine's media landscape. First and foremost, the spread of disinformation and propaganda has intensified and become more aggressive. Since the first days of the invasion, Russia has accompanied its military operations with information warfare, using all available channels including social media and messaging apps to incite hatred against Ukrainians and encourage war crimes.

Additionally, media consumption patterns have changed drastically. Television, which had been the dominant source of news since Ukraine gained independence in the 1990s, has permanently lost its position. Instead, according to an annual media consumption study conducted by USAID/Internews[1], Telegram channels (many of them anonymous) and other social networks now set the news agenda. The decline in traditional media consumption is also linked to disruptions in daily life: many Ukrainians were forced to flee their homes due to the war, becoming internally displaced persons or migrating abroad. As a result, the habit of watching evening news on television became impractical, while Telegram channels offered continuous access to news via mobile phones, available anytime, anywhere[2].

These changes have led to increased information pressure on Ukrainian citizens. According to the USAID/Internews study, Ukrainians increasingly perceive information manipulation as a pressing issue affecting their lives.

Ukraine has implemented various sanctions and regulatory measures to curb the influence of propaganda and disinformation How Non-Institutionalized News Telegram-Channels Operate and Capture the Audience in Ukrainian Segment. For instance, the import of printed materials from Russia and Belarus, as well as the publication and sale of books authored by Russian citizens in Ukraine, have been banned. These restrictions extend the policy of limiting Russian content, which began in 2014. In terms of sanctions, since 2022, numerous Russian and pro-Russian journalists have been targeted, and several pro-Russian media outlets have been banned either before the full-scale invasion (such as TV channelslinked to pro-Putin politician Viktor Medvedchuk, who was convicted of treason in Ukraine and later exchanged for Ukrainian military personnel) or afterward.

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1   Ukrainian Media, Attitudes and Trust in 2024.

2   How Non-Institutionalized News Telegram-Channels Operate and Capture the Audience in Ukrainian Segment

Ukraine's vibrant civil society has also intensified its efforts in media literacy and counter-disinformation initiatives. The Ukrainian Media and Communication Institute (UMCI), in collaboration with international partners such as the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence, conducted assessments of media literacy before the full-scale invasion[3] and during the first year of the war[4].

These reports outline key trends that remain relevant as of 2024.

A significant milestone was the adoption of the **Media Literacy Development Strategy**[5] by the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine (now the Ministry of Culture and Strategic Communications), which outlines a framework for media literacy until 2026. Although experts initially hoped for a more comprehensive national strategy, its positive impact cannot be overlooked. The document defines an expanded set of competencies and identifies vulnerable audiences that require targeted interventions.

Recognizing these challenges, UMCI and its partners initiated an international conference on November 11, 2024, titled **«Media Literacy in Wartime and Global Transformations»**. One of its key objectives was to broaden the discussion beyond Ukraine's expert community by engaging international specialists. The conference aimed to explore ways to strengthen information resilience, enhance methodologies for working with diverse audiences, and address challenges posed by the rise of social media and artificial intelligence.

The conference was organized in partnership with **DW Akademie**, with financial support from the **German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)**, **the OSCE Support Programme for Ukraine**, **The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)**, and **ZINC Network**.

This report summarizes the **main conclusions and recommendations** drawn from expert discussions at the event.

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3   Media Literacy Sector Mapping in Georgia, Latvia, Moldova and Ukraine

4   Transformation of the Media Literacy Sphere in the Context of a Full-scale War in Ukraine

5   The Media Literacy Development Strategy

Summary

1. **The spread of disinformation and harmful content is a global challenge**. Strengthening international cooperation in media and information literacy is crucial. While exchanging best practices among different countries is essential, media literacy programs cannot be entirely universal. To maximize their effectiveness, they must be adapted to the cultural and social contexts of each country.

2. **A review of core media literacy terminology is necessary. The term "media literacy" no longer fully captures the challenges posed by contemporary conflicts, including the war in Ukraine**. Additionally, the term itself may alienate certain audiences. Experts and scholars should prioritize the development of a modernized terminology framework and redefine the essential competencies needed to foster information resilience.

3. **There is a lack of research on media behavior and consumption patterns across different target audiences, as well as effective tools for measuring the impact of media literacy initiatives**. To address this gap, stakeholders must create more opportunities for research institutions and think tanks to conduct studies in this field. Furthermore, Western research methodologies should be adapted to Ukraine's unique context.

4. **A unified approach to defining "vulnerable audiences" and establishing clear criteria for vulnerability is needed**. The absence of such a framework hampers the development of effective engagement strategies. Additional research should be encouraged to refine these definitions.

5. **AI-driven tools for combating disinformation and detecting harmful content require specialized training for media literacy advocates (teachers, trainers, etc.)**. As Ukrainian newsrooms increasingly rely on AI, it is essential to establish guidelines for its ethical use. Implementing a mandatory content labeling system for AI-generated materials should become a standard quality practice.
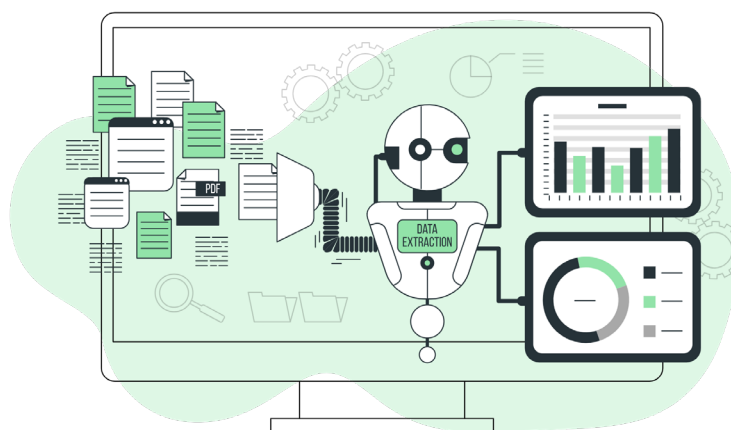
A. International Collaboration in Strengthening Media Literacy Across Different Countries: Ukraine's Contribution

A large number of studies and real cases confirm that Russia operates not only in the Ukrainian but also in the global information sphere, influencing populations in different countries to advance its aggressive goals. Such cases include the recent elections in Romania, the results of which were annulled due to Russian interference[6], as well as other incidents documented by the special services of various countries. Moreover, similar tactics are employed by other authoritarian regimes, terrorist groups, and other actors who exploit the media, social networks, and other communication channels for unscrupulous purposes. The emergence of new technologies and the advancement of AI provide such actors with additional tools for destructive activities. Equally concerning are political shifts in different countries that result in the rise of populists and radicals to power.

Humanity faces a global challenge: how to preserve truth and credibility in an increasingly unstable world. Therefore, cooperation and the exchange of experience among experts and stakeholders from different countries can play a crucial role in strengthening societies' information resilience.

Key Challenges:

1. The field of media literacy is under constant pressure from transformations occurring in media systems worldwide (e.g., the end of the streaming TV era[7]) due to the rise of social networks, media technologies, and artificial intelligence. The European Media Literacy Policy Study, conducted by Ecorys on behalf of Google in 2024, defines media literacy as "a dynamic concept that continues to evolve in response to technological, social, cultural, and political developments[8]." As a result, each country follows its own path in this field, leading to differences in how media literacy is understood and in the key knowledge, skills, and competencies considered essential for modern individuals. These discrepancies hinder the development

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6   The "TikTok King" in Romania and a possible scheme to support far-right presidential candidates

7   The Economist, NV New Voice (2024). Pay more, watch less. The golden era of streaming TV is coming to an end. - p. 127.

8   European media literacy policy study

of constructive solutions to global information challenges and the enhancement of information resilience at both individual and societal levels.

2. Political turbulence and polarization in various regions reduce trust among key actors in the information space, negatively affecting the development of international partnerships and collaborations, including in the field of media literacy.

3. Independent, high-quality media worldwide are increasingly under pressure due to either political or economic factors. On the one hand, this negatively affects the quality of produced content, and on the other hand, it diminishes public understanding of fundamental democratic values such as "freedom of speech" and "pluralism."

4. Ethical standards are not universally adhered to by informal content creators, including bloggers, influencers, and administrators of anonymous Telegram channels and other communication platforms. This lack of accountability increases the risk of rights violations for information consumers, exacerbates conflicts, and has other harmful effects.

Recommendations:

1. The basic terminology in the field of media literacy needs to be reconsidered. The term "media literacy" itself, on the one hand, no longer fully addresses the challenges posed by wars both in Ukraine and other parts of the world and on the other, it is met with resistance by certain audiences. Experts and scholars should prioritize the development of an updated terminological framework, as well as a revision of the core competencies required for individuals to maintain information stability amid the large-scale spread of disinformation and other harmful content. In particular, emotional and psychological resilience, along with digital skills, should be considered essential competencies.

2. International cooperation in media and information literacy should be strengthened and elevated to a new level. International organizations operating in multiple countries have a unique opportunity to launch both joint and regional initiatives that can raise public awareness about media literacy. A notable example is **Global Media and Information Literacy Week, initiated by UNESCO.**

3. While the exchange of experiences between different initiatives in various countries is crucial for advancing media literacy, media literacy programs cannot be entirely universal. To maximize their effectiveness, these programs should be adapted to the cultural and social contexts of the countries where they are implemented.

4. Media literacy programs should place special emphasis on media freedom literacy. Citizens must understand the importance of independent and free media for the functioning of democratic societies. The OSCE has identified four additional key competencies in this area:

- Understanding the value of information pluralism

- Critical evaluation of content

- Recognizing and appreciating the democratic role of media and other information providers

- The ability to recognize and appreciate content that meets journalistic standards.

5. Given the shifting patterns of information consumption, media literacy programs must account for diverse media channels, including not only traditional news outlets but also cinema, art, and archives, which play an increasingly important role in shaping public perception.

6. In today's media landscape, all content creators including journalists, influencers, and politicians must adhere to ethical standards and bear responsibility for spreading disinformation and other harmful content. Key players in the field of media literacy should take proactive steps to develop and promote clear ethical guidelines to strengthen accountability.

7. Over the years of war (starting in 2014), Ukraine has accumulated unique experience in the field of media literacy. For many countries, it serves as an example to follow. The best practices and most effective initiatives from Ukraine's governmental and civil society sectors can be adapted into regional projects particularly for post-Soviet states such as Moldova.

B. Quantitative Measurements of Media Literacy: How to Research the Audience and Measure Project Results

The world of media, digital technologies, and artificial intelligence is constantly evolving, impacting people's lives globally. Research in the field of media and media literacy serves as a crucial tool for understanding this dynamic environment, enabling a proactive response to modern challenges and the development of strategies that contribute to the formation of an information-resilient society. This is critically important for safeguarding democracy, protecting human rights, and ensuring the sustainable development of society.

Ukraine must rely on research to build strategies for the development and protection of its information space (and, consequently, media literacy), particularly in the context of the ongoing war waged by Russia.

Key Challenges:

1. An insufficient number of studies and a lack of systematic research in the field of media literacy.

2. The absence of tools or methodologies for measuring project results not in terms of formal assessments (such as the number of training participants or views of educational content), but rather in terms of more complex measurements that reflect changes in audience media behavior and growth in information resilience.

3. A shortage of highly qualified specialists in the field of media research and the practice of conducting research through organizations that lack the necessary competencies, leading to distorted results and inaccurate interpretations.

4. Insufficient funding for systematic and comprehensive research.

5. The short duration of media literacy projects, which prevents both an assessment of the target audience's needs and an evaluation of project outcomes within the project timeframe.

Recommendations:

1. While indices and nationwide surveys are useful for strategic planning, research should also focus on specific target audiences that particular projects aim to reach.

2. The interpretation of general survey results should take into account that such research may overlook local characteristics or the specific traits of individual target groups.

3. Research conducted in Ukraine does not confirm a correlation between the level of education and the level of media literacy. This should encourage key stakeholders in the field of media literacy to address a diverse range of target audiences instead of focusing solely on vulnerable or marginalized groups. Moreover, higher education should not be considered a barrier to engagement with a particular group.

4. Most studies assessing media literacy levels rely on respondents' self-assessment. However, awareness of an issue does not necessarily translate into behavioral change or the conscious application of knowledge in practice. Therefore, it is essential to integrate cognitive components into media literacy measurement, including:

- "Pre-test" and "post-test" evaluations in educational or training projects

- Experiments with both qualitative and quantitative research methods

- Research focused on content analysis

5. Rural residents are underrepresented in all media literacy studies conducted in Ukraine. This target group requires additional attention from key stakeholders in the field.

6. Research methodologies developed by Western scholars should be adapted to the Ukrainian context. This applies particularly to the pan-European Media Literacy Index, as latent factors that cannot be directly measured may negatively influence overall research results.

7. Funding for systematic and large-scale research can be secured by forming coalitions of international partners. Meanwhile, small-scale research focusing on specific target audiences can be integrated into media literacy projects implemented by individual organizations.

C. Strategies for Working with Vulnerable Audiences in the Field of Media Literacy in Wartime Conditions

With the onset of the full-scale invasion, key stakeholders in the field of media literacy, including international organizations, the government, and civil society began to recognize the emergence of new vulnerable audiences. These include internally displaced persons, military personnel and their families, older people, minors, and others. However, each organization has defined these vulnerable audiences based on its own experience and particular understanding of vulnerability. The absence of a unified approach to defining vulnerable audiences and establishing clear vulnerability criteria has led to project duplication, difficulties in setting clear objectives, and challenges in measuring results.

The key conclusions and recommendations based on the discussion are as follows.

Challenges:

1. The lack of a unified approach to defining "vulnerable audiences" and the criteria for vulnerability creates uncertainty in developing long-term strategies for engaging with different target groups.

2. The general vulnerability of Ukrainian society in wartime conditions—including information overload, communication challenges, excessive polarization and politicization, and economic instability—significantly impacts the structure and planning of media literacy projects.

3. Limited access of vulnerable audiences to new technologies, and in some cases, even to the Internet.

4. Social isolation of certain vulnerable groups, restricting their access to new knowledge and skills.

5. A low level of motivation among vulnerable groups to engage in learning.

Recommendations:

1. There is a need to conceptualize both the term «vulnerable audiences» and the criteria for vulnerability. During the conference discussion, experts identified the following criteria for vulnerability:

a) Limited access to open information due to geographical barriers or lack of technological literacy.

b) A high level of distrust toward institutions and all sources of information.

c) An individual's inability to resist potentially harmful and hostile influences.

d) A heightened sensitivity to these influences compared to the broader group they belong to.

However, this list is neither exhaustive nor final and requires further refinement, which could be a key task for research organizations in the near future.

2. Ensuring vulnerable audiences have access to technical resources and the Internet through libraries, support centers, and similar facilities.

3. Organizing events aimed at fostering social interaction among vulnerable groups.

4. Adapting training formats and information delivery methods to the specific needs of each group.

5. Developing new strategies for working in wartime conditions that actively engage and motivate audiences to explore media literacy.

6. Incorporating marketing strategies into media literacy efforts for vulnerable audiences. This approach involves identifying the target audience, selecting or creating an effective communication channel, and organizing regular, recurring events.

D. Digitalization and the Development of AI as Challenges for the Field of Media Literacy

Artificial intelligence has been developing rapidly in recent years, creating new challenges in areas such as ethics, copyright, the use of private data, and combating disinformation. It is shifting the balance of content production: some researchers believe that AI-generated content will soon surpass content created by humans. This presents significant challenges for the field of media literacy, which must quickly adapt to these changes.

Risks:

1. The development of AI has enabled the rapid scaling of disinformation. Fake or other harmful content can now be created and disseminated at an extremely fast pace and on a large scale.

2. The level of trust in any information—even truthful content—is declining due to the overwhelming volume of AI-generated material.

3. As AI continuously learns and improves, it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between human-created and AI-generated content. This applies to text, video, and audio. Recently, high-quality deepfakes have emerged that can deceive even experts.

4. Copyright issues remain unresolved: representatives of creative industries are suing companies involved in generative AI.

5. Privacy is under threat due to AI's ability to process and use confidential information.

6. There is growing concern about the misuse of AI for «stealing» voices and visual images of real people to create deepfakes or other deceptive content.

7. There are no established ethical policies for the use of AI.

Recommendations:

1. Training programs on AI usage should be expanded to include tools for verifying AI-generated information.

2. Media literacy programs should be revised to incorporate skills for the effective and ethical use of AI.

3. Key actors in the sector should actively utilize AI tools to identify and counter disinformation.

4. Projects should be developed and supported to train university lecturers and school teachers in the effective use of AI tools. This will help diversify the learning process and increase student engagement.

5. Special attention should be given to educational programs for journalists. Journalists should be responsible AI users, employing generative AI models not as writers but as assistants—for example, to analyze documents, transcribe interviews, or perform other tasks.

6. Newsrooms should establish guidelines for AI usage in journalistic work. The practice of labeling AI-assisted content should become mandatory.

Conclusions

The International Conference "Media Literacy in the Context of War and Global Transformations" served as a platform for experts from different countries to exchange experiences and insights.

The conference participants emphasized the importance of:

a) international cooperation;

b) cross-sectoral collaboration;

c) integrating media literacy into both secondary and higher education curricula, with adaptations to new technological challenges;

d) developing innovative approaches to combating disinformation and other harmful content;

e) maintaining ethical standards in content creation and distribution across various platforms, including the use of AI;

f) promoting responsible content creation and consumption among diverse audiences, including vulnerable groups.

The key takeaways from the four discussions held during the international conference on media literacy are presented in the following publications (in Ukrainian):

The key takeaways from the four discussions held during the international conference on media literacy are presented in the following publications (in Ukrainian):

1. How International Organizations Respond to Challenges in the Field of Media Literacy

2. How to Research Audiences in the Field of Media Literacy

3. How to Work with Vulnerable Audiences in the Field of Media Literacy in Wartime Conditions

4. Machines Will Not Take Over