The methodology of teaching News Literacy for different audiences in Russia

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The review of introduction and adaptation of a news literacy course (based on key concepts of Stony Brook University program) to the educational and scientific program of National Research University Higher School of Economics in 2013-2017 as well as additional short-term news literacy workshops for students and teachers from other universities and schools from Russian regions will be made in the text.

It was decided in 2013 to introduce a news literacy course to the schedule of media communications faculty at the National Research University Higher School of Economics. Lecturers searched for the optimal form of introduction of the course into the schedule, harmonic cooperation and complementarity of other courses with the news literacy course.

The non-standard view for media-students when looking at news (a view from the perspective of the average consumer, rather than the producer's information content) allowed students to see the complexity of the problems of the modern information field, qualitatively change the perception of the news as a tool of mass communication as a whole and realize its manipulative possibilities.

One of the first decisions was to include the course in the program of research and development seminars (2nd bachelor degree course). The news literacy course became sort of a final chord in the discussion of "basic background of journalism", where journalism theory, the social mission of a journalist, the social functions of journalism, and the values and ethics of the profession were up for debate with the students. (*In the last few years, ethical issues have become one of the topics within the framework of the discussion of news literacy problems*).

Later, the Department of the National Research University Higher School of Economics was transformed into the Faculty of Communication, Media, and Design, and the course on news literacy was included in the Media Department's program. Presently the course is titled "Media Literacy," and it is also included in the program of the 2nd bachelor degree course.

Teachers have identified the primary objectives of learning the "News Literacy" discipline as follows: mastering the basic skills of qualitative interpretation of media messages and studying the methods of deconstruction of news materials presented by modern media. Among the primary tasks of the course, the following can be noted: acquaintance with the specific characteristics of news materials which distinguish them from materials of other types of modern journalism, advertising, PR, propaganda, and other elements of the information space; mastering of news source assessment methods; mastering of technologies used for analysis of news materials of various mass media; and studying the skills of academic work and research in the field of analysis of media materials. As a result of studying the discipline, a student must: know the basic requirements for media texts (accuracy, reliability, existence of references to information sources, differentiation of facts and estimations, pluralism of opinions and points of view, and balance of interests) and understand the importance of meeting such requirements; know the characteristic aspects of journalistic material, its conceptual and structural distinctness;

know the peculiarities of news texts and be at ease with the specifics of texts of other areas of journalistic activities; be able to use the basics of humanitarian knowledge in the course of preparation and analysis of journalistic materials; and know the techniques for analyzing the media texts, including their own journalistic materials, to improve them (see about it: *"Research and Practice Seminar. News Literacy" course program, Shomova, 2013*).

This discipline relates to the relevant professional system and constitutes a seminar which is aimed not only at the development of critical appraisal skills in the perception of media messages, but also the acquisition of primary knowledge about the specifics of research work in the context of professional activities. The main topics of the course as are follows: "News in the social medium: a historical retrospective"; "News in the social medium: the common factors of production, distribution and consumption" (including the common factors of news media consumption: what kind of news the audience prefers, social stereotypes in the perception of news in the media, social and demographic factors of why the audience seeks for media news); "News literacy as a modern trend of the media knowledge development"; "News in the modern communication space"; "News and its "neighbors" in media space (the problem of identification of a news message)"; "Journalism of news and journalism of opinions"; "Balanced and honest news: professional myth or objective reality?"; "The problem of veracity and reliability of news messages"; "Methods for assessing information sources"; "Methods of analysis, decoding and deconstruction of news reports in modern media"; and "Research and pedagogical approaches to the study of problems of news literacy."

The following techniques are used in the course of teaching: training sessions, games, discussions, analysis and consideration of case studies. Students choose examples of case studies in Russian and foreign mass media on each topic proposed by teachers.

The "Broken Telephone" game is one of the students' favorite exercises when they study the "Methods of information source assessment." During this activity, students realize why it is necessary to use primary sources; they begin to understand how information is lost during the transmission thereof and how its content is changed in different interpretations. The group is divided into small subgroups. A teacher reads a story to the first subgroup (in detail, indicating names and the positions of the people involved, geographical names, etc.) in such a way that the others cannot hear it. Then the first group retells the story to the second group, the second retells it to the third one and so on, as in the children's game "Broken Telephone". Finally, the last group tells the story, trying to inform the audience of what really happened, answering the classical questions, "Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?" The result is that the last group's story is completely different from the original one. Students realize that it is necessary to look for primary sources and that when they use secondary sources, not only are the details lost but often so is the meaning. Making matters worse, gross factual errors and frivolous interpretations also accumulate as the story is shared. To broaden the students' perspectives and increase their insight into the history of journalism, we chose the famous story from 1938 for the "Broken Telephone" game. A teacher reads a fragment of the adaptation of *The War of the Worlds,* a novel by H.G. Wells. Prepared for radio broadcast by director Orson Welles, it frightened a lot of people who believed that everything was real (see about it: Orson Welles, War of The Worlds, Radio Broadcast 1938; Radio's War of the Worlds Broadcast (1938) // http://jeff560.tripod.com/wotw.html).

In the course of the discussion of the "Methods of analysis, decoding and deconstruction of news reports of modern media (as exemplified by television news)," the impact of editing and sound recording in a news message on viewers' emotional perception of this message is conceived. Students begin to understand why it is not advisable to play music in the news, why documentation is important, why sound changes perception and can be interpreted in different

ways. After completion of the training, students can explain why it is important to be active newsreaders, not a "sponge" that absorbs all information around without any analysis and evaluation. They pay attention to editing (type of editing, sequences, transitions, etc.), analyze the sounds, "natural" or "added during editing", that are used in the news message. Students are assigned for homework to 1) shoot a two-shot video and choose a relevant audio material (music, etc.) for it, with different moods. Thus, students realize how powerful the sound is in manipulating our emotions; 2) shoot several two-shot videos in which a new meaning derives when two shots are put together. To broaden the students' perspectives and deepen their knowledge of the history of media, a teacher also tells them about famous cinematographers of the XX century and the ways cinema was used for propaganda. They also inform them of the Kuleshov effect, a mental phenomenon by which viewers derive more meaning from the interaction of two sequential shots than from a single shot in isolation. This editing technique was described by the founder of the Russian school of cinema Lev Kuleshov in his book *Art of Cinema* published in 1929 (see about it: Sokolov, 2000).

Deconstruction of news reports is one of the most popular methods of training, when seminar students together with the teacher look through various news reports and analyze their reliability. Teachers work with texts, photos, video and audio materials. The final task of the course is as follows: students have to shoot and edit their own video. They need to select one piece of news from the TV news broadcasts which, as far as they know (they analyze and check the veracity of the message in advance), contains a lie or half-truth. Students have to show the selected news to people (two groups: adolescents and pensioners) and record their comments/reaction to the news. In addition, they have to get answers to the following questions: "When viewing this news, do you get the feeling that you are being deceived (given knowingly false/unverified information)? Or that they try to thrust a particular opinion on you?", and "Where would you clarify or verify the information?"

During the several years of this course's existence, a number of students have chosen the topic of the process for their term theses. The most popular research topic is the interpretation of one event in information programs of various mass media. Thus, in 2017 students were writing about the crisis in Syria, the conflict in Ukraine, and also turned to the analysis of the archives of the end of the 1990s and early 2000s.

In 2013-2016, more than four hundred undergraduate students enrolled in the Course. The curriculum includes lectures and seminars and consists of two modules (62 academic hours).

The research data which the teachers of the media department work on and which is based on the results of interviews of students "before" and "after" the course on news literacy, together with other conclusions, indicates that after the course students became more negatively disposed to all information. They often turn away from all sources instead of checking / critical comprehension. And now one of the main questions is the following: how to achieve a balance? It is also very important to mention that students "acquire immunity". They start realizing how serious the News Literacy issue is and how great their responsibility is if they wish to become journalists. (See: Kolchina A., Shomova S., Kachkayeva A. 2016).

The specificity of News Literacy teaching for different audiences is discernible. In addition, the introduction of the News Literacy course into the two-year university-wide media history and theory course "Media and Mass Communications" became a one-of-a-kind experiment. News literacy lectures titled: "News Literacy: news as an object of manipulation" are given in the beginning of the course and take 1/4 of all studying process. The course is developed as follows: year 1: "News literacy" and "History of media in the 20th Century"; year 2: work on independent media projects and course of lectures read by media industry practitioners. A part of

the course dedicated to the news literacy consists of 20 hours of lectures and 56 hours of seminars. (See: https://www.hse.ru/data/2016/06/24/1117357345/program-1517389924-NUGKaGC39G.pdf).

In 2015-2016, over 250 students from non-journalism faculties preferred this course to others suggested. Following the results of the admission in 2017, it is already known that more than 1,400 students showed interest in the course. Compared to interest in other courses offered at the university, such results provide evidence of great interest in the topic.

The issue of news literacy kindled additional interest in the Russian professional environment when in 2013 the Ministry of Communications issued a decree "On criteria of media literacy and technique of estimation of media literacy among citizens" (http://minsvyaz.ru/ru/activity/directions/540/). Also, the topic of social networks and news literacy is the point of real interest. According to the study on the Russian media landscape (Levada-Center / Yuri Levada Analytical Center, 2016), Russian people began to have less confidence in traditional mass media as a whole, while the credibility of the internet grows. At the same time, the number of supporters of internet censorship also dwindled. 39% of Russians trust the information obtained from the internet, and 39% of Russians believe that the internet can drive traditional mass media out in the future.

In particular, such interest in the topic can be explained by the audience's curiosity about the analysis of information in social networks in the context of the modern information space. Interest in the topic is also heightened by news about the various blockages which regularly appeared during the last year, inter alia, about the fact that Russia can block the popular messenger Telegram in the near future. The Federal Supervision Agency for Information Technologies and Communications, the authority responsible for these blockages, has been speaking about it since 23 June. Pavel Durov, the mastermind behind Telegram, has already responded that he was not going to comply with the requirements of the Agency and disclose the correspondence encryption keys. (See about it: https://meduza.io/feature/2017/06/26/kak-v-rossii-budut-blokirovat-telegram-tri-stsenariya).

This year, a special interest in the scientific community was sparked by discussions within the framework of the international scientific and practical conference on media literacy, which teachers in the media department have been conducting since 2014. The Third International Scientific and Practical Conference "Media Literacy, Media Ecology, Media Education: Digital Media for the Future" was held this year. (See about it: https://cmd.hse.ru/en/mediaconf/2017/).

The following issues are topical: 1)"Illusion of objectivity," "naive realism" and the era of "post-truth": why is critical thinking important in the modern world? (How does the politics of "post-truth" support media opposition? How does the new media environment change the relationship between mass-media and society? What is the difference between propaganda and "fake news"? What is the psychology of "fake-news" and how do cognitive distortions influence the processes of information perception? Does fighting with fakes help to increase media literacy or provoke a total distrust to all media? What is rational fact-checking and reasonable media consumption? Why is the production of modern media important to consider in a moral and ethical context?) 2) "Augmented Reality or Simulation: How do VR and 360-video technologies affect documenting and journalism?" (Immersive journalism is a new term that is used to designate activities at the junction of the journalist's profession and technology [primarily VR and 360-video]. Such hybridization inevitably raises many questions: When is it appropriate to talk about journalism, and when about the attraction? When can you talk about "reality", and when about "simulation"? Where is "found", and where is "done": how is the objective reality correlated with the direction of the material?)

The task of the international conference is to extend and promote media information literacy (MIL) and the critical autonomy of citizens with regard to the media. The media ecology and media literacy field lies at the crossroads of many academic disciplines and is interdisciplinary in nature. Over the past few years scientists and researchers from Finland, Canada, Spain, Italy, Poland, USA, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Ukraine, Armenia, Moldova, and experts of international and national Associations of Media Ecology and Media Literacy were invited to participate in the conference.

Besides, researchers and teachers from Russian regions traditionally take part in the annual conference. However, having analyzed the results of international conferences dedicated to media literacy and media education, one can say that even today many Russian scientists and educators do not see much of a difference between media education and the use of information technology, distance learning and media technology in the educational process. In many schools media education is understood as the creation of school media.

A special scientific section of the annual conference is dedicated to "news literacy." In 2018, it is planned to publish a collection of abstracts of the conferences.

In 2015, with the support of the "Liberal Mission" Foundation, teachers of the Media Department launched the project named "About news in a literate way!" This project, which has been regularly held since 2015, is dedicated to news literacy. Its main goal is to teach students of non-media specialties and teachers the basics of media literacy (with emphasis on news), the use of critical thinking for conscious and comfortable use of information from sources of all kinds, to protect themselves from possible manipulation in the course of making decisions based on information from the mass media. Starting from 2015, five four-day workshops were held: 4 for students from the regions (in St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg) and 1 for teachers from regional universities and schools (in Moscow). The main tasks of the school are as follows: to familiarize the audience with the place of "News Literacy" in the system of modern media education, to demonstrate the main technologies of development of the news literacy, tactics and strategies for its dissemination in the society to the participants of the school, and to offer versatile scenarios of the establishment of teaching programs in the field of media education and the methodology for teaching the course on news literacy. The school program is developed in such a way that it makes a review of the course topics concerning news literacy and covers the following issues: "What is the "power of information" and who needs "freedom of speech"? (the seminar takes place in the form of a talk show); "Fact-checking: how to verify the reliability of information?"; "Movie and media literacy. How is cinema used in propaganda?"; "The new generation of media: from popular scientific multimedia formats to interactive and virtual museums"; and "The power of images and emotions: the analysis of audiovisual texts and entertainment content". At present more than 20 cities have taken part in the project. To become admitted to the school, one must qualify for it. (See about it: http://newsliteracy.tilda.ws).

The development outlook and plans for 2017-2018 are as follows: establishment of an online course, holding a week of media literacy in November 2017, holding workshops for students of non-media specialties and university professors, launching news literacy programs in schools, establishment of communication between students who study the course, and creation of common projects.

The news literacy issue becomes more and more relevant. 2014 – 2016 was the time of a local military and global media struggle, political referendums and landmark elections, which was accompanied by a growing crisis of professional journalism, distortion of media space (propaganda, fake information, pranking, digital aggression, trolling, etc.), "informational

uncertainty" increasing against this background and "informational overloading", dismal state of intolerance to media in the whole world, manipulating and fundamental changes in media consumption of people in many countries of the world who tend to fail to discern news and advertising, facts and falsehood, and who do not think it necessary to verify their sources. (See: https://cmd.hse.ru/en/mediaconf/2017/).