



PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEDIA LITERACY AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract. *The paper examines the psychological factors underlying the development of media literacy among university students in the contemporary digital information environment. Particular attention is paid to information perception, semantic interpretation, cognitive processing, critical evaluation, cognitive flexibility and reflective control as psychological mechanisms that determine students' interaction with media content. Media literacy is considered not only as a set of technical skills required for using digital platforms but also as an integrated psychological ability to understand, evaluate, compare and consciously use information obtained from different media sources.*

Keywords: *media literacy; university students; digital information; cognitive processing; information perception; critical thinking; psychosemantics; cognitive flexibility; reflection.*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technologies has significantly transformed the information environment in which university students study, communicate and make everyday decisions. Social networking platforms, online news resources, video-sharing services, messengers, blogs and other digital channels provide immediate access to a large amount of information. At the same time, the expansion of information opportunities has created a psychological challenge: access to information does not necessarily mean that an individual is able to understand and evaluate it adequately. Students increasingly need to distinguish reliable information from misleading content, identify the original source of a message, compare alternative interpretations, and make decisions based on evidence rather than on the immediate attractiveness or popularity of media content.

In this context, media literacy should be viewed as a multidimensional psychological phenomenon rather than exclusively as a technical competence. A student may be



highly active online while demonstrating limited ability to evaluate the credibility of information or distinguish factual statements from interpretations. The purpose of this paper is to examine the psychological dimension of media literacy — how information is selected, perceived, interpreted, evaluated and incorporated into an individual's system of knowledge and beliefs.

MAIN PART

The way information is presented can influence the initial stage of media perception. Sensational headlines, emotionally charged images, short videos and categorical statements can attract attention before the credibility of the message has been evaluated. A psychologically important component of media literacy is therefore the ability to separate the intensity of the first impression from the actual informational value of the content (Hobbs, 2011).

Understanding media information constitutes a more complex psychological process. Information is not simply transferred from a digital platform into the human mind in an unchanged form. The recipient interprets it through previous knowledge, personal experience, values, expectations and an existing system of meanings. Jabbor (2019), examining psychosemantic analysis of texts as an approach to psychological research, emphasises the importance of analysing the subjective meanings through which individuals interpret textual material. This theoretical position can be extended to contemporary media communication: a media message contains certain objectively expressed information, but the psychological meaning attributed to that message depends partly on the recipient. Media literacy therefore requires students to recognise the possible distinction between what a message actually communicates and what they personally infer from it.

Cognitive processing is another factor determining the quality of students' interaction with media information. Individuals differ in the strategies they use to organise information, establish relationships between facts, compare alternatives and reach conclusions. Jabbor (2020) draws attention to the role of individual cognitive characteristics in understanding human information-processing processes. From the perspective of media literacy, these characteristics can influence whether a student evaluates information superficially or engages in a more systematic examination of its content and evidence.



Deep cognitive processing requires more than reading or viewing information. It involves identifying the central argument, distinguishing evidence from assumptions, comparing the new information with existing knowledge, and determining whether the conclusion logically follows from the available facts (Potter, 2019). Critical thinking plays a central role in this transition: its psychological function is to establish reasonable criteria for accepting, questioning or rejecting a claim.

The relationship between media literacy and critical thinking has received attention in contemporary research. Galindo-Domínguez et al. (2025) indicate that critical thinking, metacognitive processes, self-regulation and the ability to evaluate information sources are closely connected with the way students interact with social media and digital information. These findings support the view that media literacy is not a separate technical skill but is integrated into broader cognitive and self-regulatory processes.

Reflection constitutes another important psychological mechanism. A reflective student evaluates not only the media message but also his or her own response to it. This involves questions such as why a particular message immediately seemed convincing, whether an emotional reaction affected the judgement, whether sufficient evidence was considered, and whether personal beliefs influenced the interpretation (Buckingham, 2019).

Emotional self-regulation is indirectly related to media literacy. Students need to recognise when their emotional state is influencing the evaluation of information and, when necessary, postpone a judgement until the content can be analysed more carefully. The ability to create this short interval between emotional reaction and media action is particularly important in social networks, where information can be redistributed almost instantly.

CONCLUSION

Media literacy among university students is a complex psychological quality that extends beyond the ability to use digital technologies. It includes the capacity to select relevant information, understand its meaning, recognise the influence of subjective interpretation, evaluate sources and evidence, compare alternative perspectives, and regulate one's own responses to media content. These processes demonstrate that the development of media literacy is closely connected with the broader cognitive and reflective characteristics of personality.



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