

## MEDIA INFORMATIONAL LITERACY: A NEW CONCEPT

### МЕДИАИНФОРМАЦИОННАЯ ГРАМОТНОСТЬ: НОВЫЙ КОНЦЕПТ

*Irina V. Zhilavskaya, PhD,  
Chair of Journalism and Media Education,  
Sholokhov Moscow State Humanitarian University,  
Moscow, Russia  
zhiv3@yandex.ru*

*Ирина Владимировна Жилавская, кандидат филологических наук  
заведующая кафедрой журналистики и медиаобразования,  
Московский государственный гуманитарный университет  
имени М.А. Шолохова,  
Москва, Россия  
zhiv3@yandex.ru*

*This article illuminates questions of interconnection between the basic concepts in the theory of media informational literacy, the elimination of logical contradictions, and the creation of a modern conception of media informational literacy and media education.*

**Key words:** *media; information literacy; media education; noospheric media education; informal education; media informational literacy; MI-literacy; media informational potential of the individual; media informational outlook.*

*В статье раскрываются проблемы взаимосвязи основных понятий в теории медиа- и информационной грамотности, устранения логических противоречий и создания современной концепции медиа-информационной грамотности и медиаобразования.*

**Ключевые слова:** *медиа; информация; грамотность; ноосферное медиаобразование; неформальное образование; медиаинформационная грамотность; МИ-грамотность; медиа-информационный потенциал личности; медиа-информационное мировоззрение.*

## Using the noospheric approach

The All-Russian Scholarly and Practical Conference “Media Informational Literacy in the Information Society”, held in April 2013 in Moscow, confirmed that researchers and practitioners of media education and information training are trying to find a contemporary approach to the understanding of convergence processes of Media and Information Literacy. It remains very difficult to address and overcome existing contradictions. Experts are still in thrall to their ideas in this field of research and operate within the framework of established scholarly trends.

For two days the conference agenda was devoted to the question of media informational literacy (MIL) – the “combination of knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for an individual to understand when and what information is needed; where and how to obtain that information; how to evaluate it critically and organize it once it is found; and how to use it in an ethical way”. The authors of the conference program documents emphasize that this concept “extends beyond communication and information technologies to encompass learning critical thinking, and interpretative skills across and beyond professional and educational boundaries”.

While acknowledging the importance of the conference in the promotion of the idea of media literacy, however, we would like to engage some ideas that were not elucidated in the course of the discussion. Without them, it is difficult to picture a single internally consistent new literacy concept for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

When we discuss any concept, we must consider it a system of interconnected viewpoints interacting as a team. At the same time, it also represents a system of problem-solving methods. Today it’s still too early to speak about any media literacy concept because there’s still no consensus in defining key notions such as “media”, “information”, and “literacy”. No underlying definition of media literacy formation would be acceptable to all scholars. In this regard, it is very difficult to outline specific characteristics which might measure indicators and methods

of achieving a high non-traditional literacy level. Moreover, there is no popularly accepted spelling of the concept (together, separately or with a hyphen?).

Without theoretical and methodical coherence at the origin of concept formulation, there are moments when searching for answers to difficult questions, and formulating recommendations and suggestions, experts are talking about effectively dissimilar phenomena. In fact, a majority of researchers and experts have not managed to grasp the actual meaning of the media information concept as an idea, an open image of a future conception that allows us to perceive the depth of meanings and intentions. This situation brings to mind the Higgs boson search, which posits an ungraspable element capable of moving from the abstract and immaterial world of atoms to the material world.

Aware of the complexity of the problem, we will try to present our views on some approaches, principles and interpretations of notions in the system of media-informational literacy and media education, which, as we think, have their own internal logic.

First, let us denote that we regard the conceptual, methodological, criteria and instrumental framework of MI-literacy and media education in terms of the noospheric ethical-ecological approach (E. K. Tsiolkovsky, V. I. Vernadsky, N. K. Moiseev, E. Leroy, P. Teilhard de Chardin, L. S. Gordina, B. E. Bolshakov, M. U. Limonad). It involves conceptualization based on the principles of harmony with the world, genetic unity of the world, the subject-subject view on education and formation of noospheric thinking.

Noospheric thinking is a new term, and its content regards the disclosed logic of the logic of hypothetical construct. The most significant components of the semantic concept of “noosphere thinking” are the following:

- High level of criticality;
- Focus on creation of products that improve the state of the biosphere;
- Projectivity;

- Focus on cooperative solution of scientific and industrial problems;
- Focus on solution of nonstandard problems;
- Focus on knowledge and understanding of the processes occurring in nature and human society.

Since thinking is the activity of consciousness, at least the basic characteristics of noospheric consciousness should be defined. An understanding of the necessity for co-evolution of man and nature is an essential condition for the formation of noospheric consciousness. Thus, focus on cooperative interaction with nature and other people becomes the main characteristic of a noospheric man. Their main distinguishing feature is the highest responsibility to their ancestors and descendants, all mankind in its endless historical existence. They see their own purpose in implementing ideas, denying everything that destroys life and approving all that contributes to its maintenance and development. A maximal engagement with intellectual and spiritual life, and an active, effective responsibility for everything that is happening on the planet comprise the cultural position of a noospheric human. A global perspective is essential, i.e. vision and understanding of everything that happens on the planet and to mankind, awareness of the dynamics of the world, its diversity and interdependences.

The idea of media-informational literacy is logically included in the concept of a noospheric education, which is the convergence of natural science and unscientific educational concepts and practices of the end of the twentieth century. A noospheric education is characterized by consistency and unity in the view of nature, world and human. This unity of thinking allows for the development of a high degree of morality, of consciousness, and for the uncovering of a person's potential aimed at realization of their destiny in the world. This pedagogical system is based upon the knowledge of principles of peace, society, person's psyche, as well as educational principles that justify the relaxation-active mode in studies, incorporating a learner's experience into the process of education and perception of the world.

The ideology and fundamentals of noospheric education as they relate to the methodology of science can be regarded as a basis for the modern media education concept. Noospheric media education is a pedagogical system of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; one of its key features is the focus on revealing the Higher Self of the teacher and the learner (the fullness of their potential, inner essence, which is the driving force behind all of their actions) through their creative interaction, using all the channels of reality perception.

The new and important factor for development of media-informational literacy media-informational literacy and media-education concept is recognition that media-education should be to a large extent informal (from the Latin *informalis*). The prefix “in-“ has the meaning and impact of the movement directed inside the subject. This semantic particle corresponds to a linguistic content meaning “within something”, “inside something”. For example, the root of the word “innovation” comes from the Latin “*nova*” (in Russian, “new”). The prefix “*in*” means “introduction, inward”. The concept of “innovation”, therefore, can be interpreted as “the introduction of changes inside the product, within the process”. This interpretation differs from the concept of “nonformal”, with the prefix “*non*”, meaning “optional, easy, unofficial, spontaneous”. In regard to the concept of long-term socio-economic development of the Russian Federation for the period up to the year 2020, the problem of personality socialization and education has three educational strategies – formal, nonformal and informal, based respectively upon the three educational types:

- Formal education (elementary, secondary, secondary special, higher, further education);
- Nonformal education (development of the advance course system);
- Informal education (various kinds of economic and noneconomic motivations to nurture individual inclinations for personal development and self-education).

It should be noted that the term “informal education” is formalized in the “Memorandum on Lifelong Learning” (2000).

As yet little-studied, informal education is the undirected exploration of socio-cultural experience beyond the strict bounds of the organized pedagogical process. It occurs in the process of any communicative action within family groupings, and in various organizations and communities, including educational communities, libraries, museums, and via different kinds of media, Informal education is flexible; it depends on a learner's needs and can be realized in any place and at any time. In this context an informal education manifests itself in internal human motivation to perceive the world, in self-organization and determination. "I am the source of information and its consumer at the same time. I develop myself and determine my development pathway by myself".

### **It is necessary to distinguish between “media” and “mass media”**

In Russian the word “media” is a shortened version of the English “*media communication*” meaning communication with means, i.e. not a direct, face-to-face communication. “Media” derives from the Latin “*medium*”. In various European languages “*medium*” means: a tool, a mediator, an easily suggestible person, and in a physical sense – environment. In our interpretation of media space, the concept “media” includes a limitless range of communication tools which serve to transfer different kinds of information. These include works of art in the form of books, pictures, movies and advertisement in all its aspects, TV or radio programs, public performances, official documents, post cards, ciphered messages, SMS, or complicated convergent multi-media texts of the web-based mass media. In short, media are channels of content delivery. However, the great majority of experts in media-informational literacy and media educators use the word “media” to mean “means of mass communication” – mass media. We traditionally regard “media” as mass media, which restricts researchers to the limited field of journalistic practice. With such a narrow definition, the following notions drop out

of sight: book, letter, speech, music, painting, sculpture, etc. Besides, there are direct media, unlike the mass media, involving point-to-point communications with the consumer. Such means of message delivery as post, telephone, telegraph, fax and others relate directly to the idea of media.

Media texts created in these and any other kinds of media appear to be beyond the sphere of the media-informational literacy, which is focused mostly on television, Internet, print media and sometimes on advertisement and movies. This fundamental disagreement wrongfully restricts the scope of media-informational literacy and media education distribution, and prevents us from building a holistic conception based on the idea of the Universal Media. This makes it rather difficult to integrate processes from the broader area.

In practice, this leads to situations such as the following: the Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers developed by UNESCO experts and published in 2012 under the editorship of Alton Grizzle and Caroline Wilson understood media as “physical objects used to communicate, or mass communication through physical objects such as radio, television, computers, film, etc”. It also refers to any physical object used to communicate media messages. Media are a source of credible information in which contents are provided through an editorial process determined by journalistic values and therefore editorial accountability can be attributed to an organization or a legal person (Media and Information Literacy: Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers, 2012).

### **Information is not a thing**

In developing the MIL concept, the notion “information” should also be defined. The word “information” derives from the Latin word “*informare*”, which means “to shape”. Thus, from the etymological point of view information is the act of rendering an indefinite mass structured.

J. P. Barlow in his work, “Selling Wine Without Bottles: The Economy of Mind on the Global Net”, says that “Information is a verb, not a noun. Freed of its containers, information is obviously not a thing. In fact, it is something that happens in the field of interaction between minds or objects or other pieces of information... Information is an action which occupies time rather than a state of being which occupies physical space, as is the case with hard goods. It is the pitch, not the baseball, the dance, not the dancer... Information is experienced, not possessed. Even when it has been encapsulated in some static form like a book or a hard disk, information is still something that happens to you as you mentally decompress it from its storage code” (Barlow, 1994).

Within the framework of a traditional paradigm of information literacy, in order to “develop person’s informational literacy it’s essential that some informational environment should be created around a person, to get adapted to such environment a person should have some special knowledge, experience and skills” (Denisova, 2006), while the information itself appears to be something lying in the box or posted on some site page, or in TV program, counting moments until it will be accessed. However, possession of information doesn’t mean knowledge, and moreover, it’s not a motivator for active living.

Modern interpretation of information corresponds to the idea of all pervading media, mediation and communications. Information can exist only in motion, it flows, and like water it penetrates all the pores of the social body. It cannot be blocked; it’s impractical to fight with it using dams, because against a background of stagnation, it loses its informational qualities and is no longer as valuable as it could be. It is clear that secret archive documents can become information only if they are declassified, because otherwise there’s no information. From this perspective, those competencies which developed in the circumstances where linear information culture dominated do not meet the challenges of a modern hyper-technological web society.

## **From divergence to convergence**

The fundamental principle to form the MI-literacy concept is the principle of unity of the communication act, where media as a communication means are inextricably linked to information. In postindustrial society, as civilization moved from the paper medium of conveying information to electric means, due to the unprecedented change in production of information and appearance of new channels of delivery, two ways of theoretical and practical understanding of communication formed, built upon the basic essence of communication – media and information.

Each of the ways in the process of divergence has developed conceptual apparatus, schools of thought, theories and methods. Moreover, the difference between experts in the field of media and that of information is not of a conceptual nature. It separates scholars and practitioners on the branch principle: libraries and everything connected with the preservation of information is within the scope of information literacy; mass media and everything integrated into the mass media environment are somehow associated with media literacy. However, the processes of information flow through media channels are identical in all communication structures, whether it is a city library or a local television network.

We are currently experiencing a convergent phase in the development of a communicative culture. It is expressed in a fusion of different media, of formats and genres, of ways to deliver information, and in the need for new professional competences. Therefore, the fusion of two kinds of literacy – media and information (currently very topical) – represents an objective evolution of scientific knowledge and global technologies.

As an illustration of this principle, it is enough to remember the historical process of the creation and transformation of a book as one of the key media types. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when book manufacturing technology was developing, Johann Gutenberg and other inventors, in the search for an optimal solution, brought together paper technology, wood block printing, complex chemical and mechanical processes,

engravers' and stone carvers' craft, coinage elements and even features of wine making.

As a result, the book appeared as a special kind of communicative means in industrial society, a symbol of printing culture. However, a further turn in civilization's development eventually resulted in divergence; the notion of "book" splintered into subspecies: electronic book, audio book, video book. Nowadays we know entirely new forms: the "tactile book", the "digital book". Soon we will have aerial books, the letters of which will be able to appear, but then disintegrate wherever and whenever the reader wants.

The study of the history of the development of "living systems" as an ongoing, consistent pattern of sequences of divergence and convergence leads us to extrapolate principles that can be fruitfully applied to information systems and to expect that, as a result of rethinking what a media information concept is, a new divergence process will appear soon, resulting in formation of principally new competences in media informational literacy.

We understand that MI-literacy represents only a minimal threshold of personal development for the individual. Nevertheless, it plays an overwhelmingly important role in processes of strategy formulation and tactics for the economic and social development of society. Besides, such literacy should be regarded not only from the perspective of people's educational level, but also in a wider context, including such life spheres as civil society, politics and technologies, professional identity, level of prosperity and many others. Such a wide range of contexts involves rethinking the part of media informational literacy in the system of social institutions, and in the structure of an individual's intellectual resources.

### **Media information potential of the individual**

As they grow in noospheric development, a person and a society rise from acquisition of media-informational literacy up to the level of a media and information culture as a method to preserve and build values of the society, its cultural experience and norms. And finally they reach the

highest level – the media and information mindset, which, in our opinion, is based upon ideas of progress in civilization. Among which there are:

- The idea of freedom;
- The idea of variety;
- The idea of variability;
- The idea of polylogue;
- The idea of partnership;
- The idea of cooperation;
- The idea of interdependence;
- The idea of individuality recognition;
- The idea of development;
- The idea of critical solidarity and self reflection.

These noospheric values guarantee not only the survival of humankind, but also global welfare and prosperity. In this sense, it becomes obvious that media-informational literacy as the new literacy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not a metaphor, not a turn of phrase, but a vital need determined by global processes in the development of civilization.

In the process of media education, the intellectual resources of a person is updated as he progresses through the levels of media informational literacy, media and information culture and reaches the level of a media and information mindset.

The speed of an individual's and a society's media and information development are not always the same; that is why both the person and the society may feel some discomfort. The person who moves far ahead of the social medium in understanding global information processes is doomed to be misunderstood and lonely; and society is not able to realize its potential if a large part of its citizens go behind the evolution of the information and communication technologies. The most balanced way is when the potentials of both individual and social media and information grow in harmony, mutually enriching on other.

In regard to the potential for an individual grasp of media and information, we mean intellectual communicative resources allowing individuals to fulfill themselves effectively within the information

society. Media education experts by no means aim to fill people with information, but to “derive” it from them. Like a flower seed containing all the information about its form, color and scent, and only negative external conditions can deform it, and so people have all the encoded information for their communicative capabilities, and social environment can transform the delivery channels of this information in its own way and, thus, affect personality formation.

In conclusion, based on our own investigations and taking into account modern approaches to media-informational literacy and media education, we have formulated the definitions of concepts that interest us.

Thus, *media literacy is a system of base media-informational competences that enable people to effectively organize a communicative relationship with society on all the levels of media activity. Media informational literacy is a new literacy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which involves the human ability to consciously interact with information and its distribution channels in the media environment. Media informational literacy is the result of media education.*

Thereafter, *media education is a combination of different educational acts providing personal identification, self-development and self-organization, which manifest themselves in conscious media behavior, media activities and media creativity on the basis of humanist ideals and values.*

## References

Barlow, J. (1994). Selling Wine Without Bottles. The Economy of Mind on the Global Net. *The Economy of Ideas in Wired.2.03*.

Denisova, N. (2006). *Person's Information Culture: Bibliographic Index*. KemGUKI Research Library. Kemerovo: Kemerovo State University of Culture and Arts.

*Media and Information Literacy: Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers*. (2012). Paris: UNESCO.

*Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*. (2000). URL: <http://www.znanie.org/docs/memorandum.html>.