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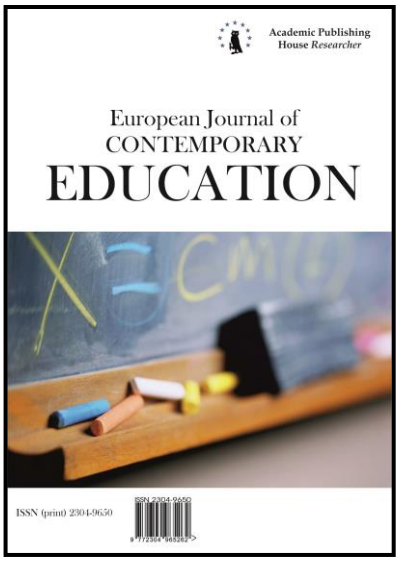


# Media Education and Media Criticism in the Educational Process in Russia

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**Abstract**

Media criticism and media education have a lot in common. For example, both media education and media criticism attach great importance to the development of analytical thinking of the audience. Indeed, one of the most important tasks of media education is precisely to teach the audience not only to analyze media texts of any types, but also to understand the mechanisms of media texts' creation and functioning in society. Actually, the same is emphasized by media criticism, addressing experts, and a wider audience as well. Therefore the synthesis of media criticism and media education is vital. Hence it is very important to debate on the role and functions of the media in society and analysis of media texts of different types and genres in classrooms of schools and universities.

**Keywords:** media criticism, media literacy, media competence, media education, pupils, students, media text, Russia.

## 1. Introduction

Recently the stance of the supporters of "practical media education", viewing it as a set of skills to use modern media technology exclusively for practical purposes (Razlogov, 2015: 68-75) finds fewer supporters. Without denying the importance of this aspect of training, modern "Russian Encyclopedia" defines media education as "a process of a personality's development with the help of and on the material of mass media aimed to develop a communication culture with the media, creativity, communication skills, critical thinking, perception, interpretation, analysis and evaluation of media texts, to teach different forms of self-expression by means of media technology, media literacy acquisition. ... The positive outcome of media education should be media competence of a personality – the set of his/her motives, knowledge, skills, abilities (indicators: motivational, contact, information, perceptual, interpretative, practical (hands-on), creative)

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contributing to the selection, use, critical analysis, evaluation, creation and communicating media texts of different types, forms and genres, the analysis of complex processes of media functioning in society" (Fedorov, 2012: 480).

One of the most important components is training skills of the media texts analysis, whereas media criticism can provide effective help, in our opinion. Media criticism is the area of journalism, creative and cognitive activity, implementing the critical knowledge and assessment of socially important, relevant creative, professional and ethical aspects of the production of information in the media, with a focus on the creative side of media content. It is the communication with the audience, based on the analysis, interpretation and evaluation of media texts, genre and stylistic forms, that has an impact on the audience's perception of the media content, on the representation of the material and the spiritual world (Korochensky, 2003). These issues are associated with the use of information media (of different types, genres and forms), their analysis, definition of linking economic, political, social and / or cultural interests.

Media criticism can be divided into academic (relating to the publication of scientific research related to the comprehension of the media sphere, and designed primarily for professionals in the field of Media Studies), professional (publications intended for a professional audience of those employed in media industry) and mass media criticism (designed for a mass audience) (Korochensky, 2003).

Thus, it is media critics working for mass media, as well as media educators, who seek to increase the media literacy level of the widest possible audience.

Media competence of an individual is multidimensional and requires a broad perspective based on the developed knowledge structure. This is not a frozen category. It is supposedly possible to increase the degree of media competence lifelong, perceiving, interpreting and analyzing the cognitive, emotional, aesthetic and ethical information. The audience who have a higher level of media literacy have a higher level of comprehension, management and evaluation of the media world (Potter, 2011: 12).

However, as professor Art Silverblatt accurately notes (Silverblatt, 2001: 5-6), there are many obstacles in the way of both media education and media criticism. Some of them is "elitist" – people can easily notice the influence of the media on the other, but the same people are not willing to recognize the impact of the media on their own life; the complexity of the media language; emotional media effects, imposing certain behavior patterns, and public trust to the media. All of the above hinders the ability to analyze a media text critically.

As for the situation in Russia, unfortunately, we have to admit the fact that "the problem of preparing the younger generation for life in the era of information explosion, information technology, increasing role of information as an economic category, is not updated in the context of school education, a school graduate is not ready to integrate into the global information space" (Zaznobina, 1998), where manipulative technologies, alas, have a significant place. Inability of a school graduate to resist manipulative media influence is to a large extent an outcome of the low level media competence of Russian school teachers.

There is a contradiction between the insufficient level of research in the field of media education and media criticism synthesis (including in the process of preparing future teachers) and the relevance of the development of media competence and analytical thinking of students of pedagogical profile by not only media activity, i.e. creation, use, and communication of media information, but also its comprehensive analysis, determination of economic, political, social and / or cultural interests that are associated with it.

In particular, one can clearly trace the problematic contradiction between a journalistic media education model (Dzyaloshinsky & Pilgun, 2011; Zhilavskaya, 2009, etc.), aimed at the development of the audience's media activity in the practical creation and distribution of media texts, and the integrated model of media education (Jurin, 2012, etc.), whereas the main emphasis is on media literacy supporting compulsory school subjects. In our opinion, it is necessary to go beyond this utilitarian framework and create a more important for the general public model of the analytical thinking development, built on the synthesis of media education and media criticism.

In addition, in our view, there is a disagreement between the theoretical and practical approaches proponents of "protective theory" of media, calling to protect the audience from harmful media manipulation effects (one way of such protection is for example to only teach the samples of "high art") and the supporters of cultural and social theories of media, considering the

problem of media education in a broad social, cultural and genre and thematic spectrum of media texts (Buckingham, 2003; Sharikov, 2005; Silverblatt, 2001). We believe that this disagreement can be successfully resolved with the help of the synthesis of media and media criticism.

The history of media criticism in Russia goes back more than three centuries. It is clear that in the early years (XVIII century) there was only literary criticism in newspapers and magazines. However, since the end of the XIX century the spectrum of media criticism has expanded due to the analysis of photography and cinematography. In the XX century media criticism included such new types of media as broadcasting, sound recording, television and the Internet. At all stages of its development, media criticism (corporate, academic, mass) has performed analytical, educational, information and communication, regulatory, and commercial functions throughout the genre diversity of media texts.

Together with mass distribution of the Internet the number of critics' community has grown dramatically due to the "amateur" authors, who do not have to turn in their texts to the editors of traditional media in order to reach mass audience. Many of these people having no specialized education, however got jobs in the late 1990s – early 2000s in popular newspapers. Whilst, as Roman Bakanov's content analysis of publications has proved, most of these people criticize TV based on their own experiences and emotions, they don't apply analytical, evidence-based methods. They are aimed to assert themselves, to attract the audience's attention to own texts by negative assessments. Perhaps that is why the vast majority of their writing carries a negative "critical" attitude of almost all television programming. In addition, these texts do not attempt to examine and analyze the identified problems from different angles, to understand the causes and to find out the possible consequences. To do this, a media critic needs to possess a researcher's stance, the ability to not only look for, but also to collect, and summarize the information" (Bakanov, 2009).

But this, of course, does not mean that professional media critics (L. Anninsky, R. Bakanov, Y. Bogomolov, D. Bykov, A. Vartanov, D. Dondurei, V. Kichin, A. Korochensky, I. Petrovskaya, A. Plakhov, K. Razlogov, etc.) have lost their influence. Each of them has its own target audience, favored the mes, besides working for press many of them find time to maintain the Internet "live journals", blogs and other net innovations that enable to get feedback from the audience almost simultaneously upon the publication of the article.

In our opinion, it is professional media criticism that can have a positive influence on mass audience's media competence. I. Petrovskaya dwells upon the problem, too: "Do we have to satisfy the ill taste, or, on the contrary, should we treat it and try to improve the tastes and manners of the audience? Most of TV people believe that we should indulge its desires, because this is the way the audience is, and it is can't be changed by television means. But the point is that television can in fact make people worse than they really are, it can lower the bar to such an extent that people will not be able to distinguish what is good and what is bad" (Petrovskaya, 2003: 43-44).

## 2. Materials and methods

The main sources were the journal publications and books. The study used the basic methods of cognition: systemic and the comparative methods. The use of these methods allows to reproduce assessment approach to the problems. Comparative method defines the difference in views on actual situation.

## 3. Discussion

The relevance of the synthesis of media and media criticism is demonstrated by, adopted in 2008, «European Parliament resolution of 16 December 2008 on media literacy in a digital world», which states that media literacy education should be mandatory. The resolution, inter alia, recommends that compulsory media education modules be incorporated into teacher training for all school levels, so as to enable the subject to be taught intensively; calls on the relevant national authorities to familiarise teachers of all subjects and at every type of school with the use of audiovisual teaching aids and with the problems associated with media education. It also maintains that media education should be an element of formal education to which all children should have access and which should form part and parcel of the curriculum at every stage of schooling (European Parliament resolution, 2008).

In the same line, "Moscow Declaration on Media and Information Literacy", adopted by the

intergovernmental UNESCO Program "Information for All" (IFAP, 2012), recognizes that MIL should be promoted in all national educational, cultural, information, media and other policies; encourages education systems to initiate structural and pedagogical reforms necessary for enhancement of MIL and its integration in the curricula including systems of assessment at all levels of education, inter alia, lifelong and workplace learning and teacher training; encourages an intercultural dialogue and international cooperation while promoting MIL worldwide (The Moscow Declaration..., 2012). A similar declaration was adopted and held at the end of May 2014 during the First European Forum on Media Literacy, held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris (First European Forum..., 2014).

All of the above is very important and significant in the light of the official registration by UMO Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation of a university specialization for pedagogical universities - "Media Education 03.13.30" and its implementation (since September 2002) by our researchers' and practitioners' team (the first graduation of certified teachers who have mastered this program took place in 2007).

The need for further development of media education is supported at the state level: on the17th of November, 2008, the Russian government approved the "Concept of long-term socio-economic development of the Russian Federation until 2020". According to it, federal executive bodies and executive bodies of state power of subjects of the Russian Federation are prescribed to follow the provisions of the concept while developing policy documents, plans and performance of the activities. Executive bodies are guided by these basic directions when developing program documents, plans and indexes of their performance. Thus, "the increased use of information and communication technologies for the development of new forms and methods of education, including distance education and media education" is asserted as one of the priorities of the concept (Concept..., 2008).

In 2005 Kirill Razlogov published a deliberately polemical article which expressed the idea that an individual's media literacy is and should be developed spontaneously (Razlogov, 2005: 68-75). This article set the beginning of the discussion on the pages of the academic journal "Media Education". However, later K. Razlogov explained that although the question of mass media education remains open to him, "special media education is certainly required. It is necessary for educators and teachers ... the work to increase the number of people who are seriously interested in classical and contemporary art is vital, too" (Razlogov, 2006: 92).

In terms of the discussion issues pointed out by Alexander Korochensky are very useful and problematic:

1) Is the idea of developing a rational, critical media culture an illusion masking the inability to realize the proclaimed humanistic concepts of training citizens to conditions of life and work in the information age within the current socioeconomic and cultural context? Is it possible to widely spread the rational-critical communication culture in the social environment, where there are powerful tendencies working to reduce the level of critical media awareness of recipients? Under the above circumstances, is there really a chance for successful implementation of a local social planning, that is, the project of media literate audience?

2) In life and activities of both individuals and communities it is the instincts, the unconscious impulses and emotions that play a very significant role. Effective use of modern media technologies having various impacts on the area of the collective unconscious, suppressing rational reactions of people is a clear proof of that. In this regard, the question is: isn't the ideal of rational-critical communication culture only a phantom, a purely speculative ambition, unattainable due to the inherent characteristics of a human personality and human community?

3) What if the critical autonomy of an individual dealing with mass media is a myth, masking the inability in the socio-political context of the real emancipation and self-emancipation of citizens from media manipulative effects and other adverse effects on the part of the media? (Korochensky, 2005: 41-42).

It seems that A. Korochensky accurately outlined the dangers standing in the way of media education and criticism development. But, in our view, if all of these questions were answered in the affirmative, then one would probably have to give up on media education altogether, since too many obstacles are irresistibly strong and aggressive.

But don't human instincts oppose any education at all? Moreover, do manipulative tendencies in modern society only concern media culture?

Undoubtedly, the absolute media competence of the mankind is as illusory as the total human equality in all spheres of life, including the field of education and culture. However, if one has the will, capacity and skills to develop media competence and analytical thinking of not millions, but only thousands, hundreds or even dozens of people, this is the goal worth working hard on.

Alexander Korochensky (Korochensky, 2003: 163) proposes to extend the concept of media education as a long-term socio-educational activity, aimed not only at schoolchildren and students, but also at an adult audience. Then the ongoing development of the media messages perception culture and evaluation of media according to democratic and humanitarian ideals and values should take on its full meaning.

The critical thinking approach in media education most fully developed by Len Masterman (Masterman, 1985; 1997, etc.), in the last decades has attracted not only supporters but also opponents. Nevertheless, a survey of experts in the field of media from various countries showed that the majority (84 %) believes that the most important goal of media education is to develop the ability of critical thinking / autonomy of an individual, skills to perceive, assess, appreciate, and analyze the media (8).

Herewith L. Masterman believes that successful media education should be attributed to the following factors: a clear understanding of the objectives by the teacher; productive discussion of these goals with the students, based on their comments, priorities and enthusiasm; regular check, and analysis (and if necessary – the revision) of the objectives (Masterman, 1985: 19).

At the same time, the practical implementation of the development of the citizens' rational-critical communication culture on the basis of independent rational and critical thinking faces a number of significant hindrances and difficulties. They cannot be only explained by immature institutions of media education or incomplete conceptualization of the goals, methods and contents of the activities in the field (although both of the above actually take place). Large scale media manipulations of the audience's consciousness and behavior for political and commercial purposes; increasingly irrational images of media reality; intellectual passivity and emotional infantilism of the significant portion of the citizens in the face of negative media influences – all of the above is observed both in Russia and other countries where mass media education is going through a formation stage, and in the countries where it has already become a mandatory component of the educational process at various levels (Korochensky, 2005: 37-38).

In fact, today's media are primarily focused on the cost effectiveness (almost) anywise. So it is quite natural that by and large the media industry is not interested in the audience's developed analytical thinking in relation to the media functions in society and media texts of various types and genres. "Lonely islands" - Russian media agencies which are not commercially centered, for example, TV channel "Culture", will inevitably drown in the flow of the mainstream market.

On the other hand, as it is aptly noted by A. Korochensky, there is another challenge for the development of media competence: "the postmodern skepticism with regard to reason and cognitive abilities of a person (correspondingly, to his/her enlightenment and education); intellectual and moral relativism, giving birth to scornful and ironic attitude to the fundamental human values, democratic and social justice ideals. Against this background, in certain social circles, including the community of media professionals, there are signs of a negative attitude to the idea of widespread rational-critical communication culture – ranging from the denial of its feasibility under current conditions (see, eg, Razlogov, 2005: 68-75) to open hostility, aggressive rejection of the spirit of enlightenment and civilization inherent in this intellectual initiative" (Korochensky, 2005: 39-40). This trend has recently been recognized in the Western hemisphere, too (see, eg. McMachon, 2003).

## 4. Results

The important role of mass media in modern Russian society is unfortunately accompanied with a poor development of media criticism. This particular area of journalism is aimed at analyzing the current creative, professional, ethical, legal, economic and technological aspects of information production in the media and thereby increasing the level of media competence and analytical thinking of wide audiences of all ages. In Russia, there are some talented working critics, however, not all of them are capable of significant conceptual synthesis.

In principle, it is clear why the development of media criticism and media education has not

received formal support in the Soviet times. Authorities were keen to make sure that the mass audience (both adults and teens) thought as little as possible about the goals and objectives of a particular (especially of "national importance") media text. The prevalence of "media incompetent" audience always provided ample scope for manipulation in press, on radio and TV.

Today, the position of media criticism and media education in Russia has drastically changed. Media criticism is a way to communicate with the audience. Based on the analysis, interpretation and evaluation of the whole complex of media content, its genre and style has an impact on the perception of the public, on the picture of the material and spiritual world, formed in the minds of recipients. Media criticism not only examines and evaluates the work of the authors, but also a "moving" complex of multiple relationships of print and electronic media with the audience and the society as a whole. This allows one to define the subject of media criticism as the multifaceted social operation of the media" (Korochensky, 2003: 32).

Based on this definition Alexander Korochensky clearly distinguishes basic functions of media criticism (information and communication, cognitive, correctional, social, organizational, educational, commercial) and formulates the main tasks of media criticism: awareness of how information is produced; study and change of the public perception of media content and world outlook; influence upon the attitude of the public to the media, shaping of a certain social culture of the use and appreciation of the mass media, the development of the inner world of the audience; promotion of creative and professional culture of media texts' creators; promotion of the social environment for functioning of mass media, etc. (Korochensky, 2003: 32). The latter, in our opinion, is of particular importance due to the fact that the Russian audience trusts media less and less. If the mid 1990s media messages were highly trustworthy for 70 % of Russians (Vartanova, 2001: 23), then by 2012, credibility of the most popular medium, television, decreased to 57 % (RIA, 2013).

The reason for this loyalty decline may be attributed not only to the abundance of low-quality television shows, but also, to some extent, to the influence of media criticism, that, owing to the Internet, is becoming more accessible to people, who become increasingly aware of manipulative features of media texts.

Building on the analysis of various resources, A. Korochensky distinguishes the most common manipulative elements of modern media: schematic, simplified nature; the identity of the logical and illogical; false representations; the absence of clear-cut criteria for distinguishing between surface and deep relationships; references to tradition, authority, precedent, normative, the divine will; syncretism of the aesthetic and imaginative, ethical and regulatory and proper cognitive elements of the myth; reproduction of a highly complex picture of the world through the mythical binary oppositions ("good-evil", "friend-foe"); claim to absolutely true non-historical explanation of the reality phenomena and the absolute correctness of practical action, arising out of this grounds; judgmental nature of media texts; etc. (Korochensky, 2003: 83-84).

So, today media criticism has immense potential to foster the efforts of educational institutions in the development of audience's media culture. Herewith media criticism and media education have a lot in common, since one of the most important tasks of media education is to teach the audience to analyze media texts of various genres and types, and also to comprehend the mechanisms of their creation and functioning in society.

Thus, among the key aspects of media education, British media educators (Bazalgette, 1995 et al.) emphasize the agency (referring to a comprehensive study of who produces a text; production process; what is a media institution; its economics and ideology; intentions and results), the media language (the ways the media produce meanings; codes and conventions; narrative structures), the representation (the awareness of how media texts represent actual places, people, events, ideas), and the audience (on the one hand, key audiences are identified, the ways they're addressed; and on the other hand, the study how audiences look for, choose, perceive and respond to media texts). As a matter of fact, the same key aspects of media are subject to media criticism, appealing to both the professional and the mass audience. This is why a solid connection between media criticism and media education is so important.

Bearing in mind, that in the English-language literature, the term "media criticism" is used both to mark the scientific analysis of mass media activities in academic writings, and to present "a quick scan" of pressing issues of the media concerns (Masterman, 1997; McQuail, 2010 et al.), we are going to focus on the latter form of media criticism.

We concur with Alexander Korochensky that there is a need for a thorough psychological, cultural and sociological analysis of media texts in entertainment popular culture in order to identify flawed ideas, cultural and behavioral stereotypes embedded in their social content. In fact, TV shows like "Dom-2" (House-2, the longest running reality show in Russia), promote and reinforce in the public minds the ideas about the fundamental hopelessness of the transformation of supposedly base human nature, about human actions motivated by elementary instincts, about the moral permissiveness and social legitimacy of the use of immoral methods (slander, harassment, backroom collusion) to suppress and eliminate people appearing to be an obstacle on the road to success (Korochensky, 2003: 83-84).

A. Korochensky (Korochensky, 2003: 164) proposes to extend the concept of media education as a long-term socio-educational activity, aimed not only at schoolchildren and students, but also at an adult audience. Then we might dwell upon about the continuous development of the culture of a comprehensive perception of media messages and independent evaluation of mass media with due regard for the democratic and humanistic ideals and values.

Meanwhile, we believe that media education and media criticism possess great capacities in terms of supporting the efforts of media educators and teachers, integrating media literacy in the subject matter, with the development of media competent audience. There is merit in amplifying the participation of academics, researchers and experts in various fields (educators, sociologists, psychologists, cultural scientists, journalists, and others), cultural and educational institutions, public organizations and foundations in order to develop the media literacy / media competence of citizens, to create new institutional structures able to perform a full range of media education objectives in cooperation with the media criticism (Korochensky, 2003: 254).

Over recent years quite a lot has been studied, developed, put into practice in this field. For example, media competence's development process involves the active use of analytical methods and techniques. Among these methods are the following (Eco, 1976: Fedorov, 2007: Fedorov et al., 2012; Fedorov, 2014; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2015; Propp, 1998, etc.): aesthetical analysis; autobiographical analysis; character analysis; content analysis; cultivation analysis; cultural mythology analysis; ethical analysis; hermeneutic analysis of cultural context; iconographic analysis; identification analysis; ideological and philosophical analysis; narrative analysis; semiological analysis; stereotypes analysis; structural analysis.

All of these methods involve key aspects of media such as media agencies, media categories, media language, media technologies, media representations, and media audiences (Bazalgette, 1995).

Certainly, the study of these aspects takes place in a complex, multidisciplinary, integrated manner, immersed in a social and cultural context, suggesting that media education is "the process of forming a media saturated social communication culture" (Sharikov, 2005: 78-79).

## 5. Conclusions

Media criticism and media education share a lot of inherent features. Both media education and media criticism attach great importance to the development of analytical thinking. Indeed, one of the most important objectives of media education is precisely to teach the audience not only to analyze media texts of any genres and types, but also to understand their mechanisms to implement and operate in society. Actually, media criticism investigates the same issues, targeting professional community and the widest possible audience alike. That is the reason why the synthesis of media criticism and media education is so important. The debate on the role and functions of the media in society and analysis of media texts in classrooms has become an imperative of great contemporary importance.

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