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Some Issues of Improving Media and Information Literacy Level Amongst the Population in Uzbekistan: A Comprehensive Analysis of Central Asian Context

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Abstract

This research investigates the challenges associated with inadequate media and information literacy (MIL) knowledge among the population of Uzbekistan, offering a comprehensive analysis within the unique Central Asian context. Employing a case study approach, the study examines real-life instances where insufficient MIL skills have led to issues such as misinformation, digital manipulation, and limited access to reliable information. By delving into these practical scenarios, the research aims to highlight the pressing need for enhanced media literacy. The study not only identifies the problems but also proposes optimal solutions by leveraging various media channels. It explores the potential of TV programs, social media platforms, and other media campaigns as effective tools for disseminating essential MIL knowledge. Through a meticulous examination of successful interventions and their impact, the research provides practical insights into designing and implementing tailored media literacy initiatives. Furthermore, the research acknowledges the evolving nature of media landscapes and considers the influence of cultural and socio-economic factors on the effectiveness of interventions. By adopting a multi-dimensional perspective, the study seeks to offer nuanced recommendations that align with the specific needs and dynamics of the Uzbekistani population. In conclusion, this research contributes a holistic understanding of the challenges surrounding media and information literacy in Uzbekistan, substantiated by real-life cases. It not only underscores the importance of enhancing MIL skills but also presents actionable strategies, particularly through diverse media channels, to address and overcome these challenges in the Central Asian context.

Keywords: Media and information literacy (MIL), digital literacy, private literacy, Central Asia, Uzbekistan, socio-cultural context, educational interventions, TV programs, social media campaigns.

1. Introduction

In an era dominated by digital information and communication technologies, the imperative for robust media and information literacy (MIL) has never been more critical. In the recent period, role of MIL in the condition of globalisation of media and information technologies are widely discussed by many scholars (Carlsson, 2019; Mihailidis, 2014).

This research delves into the multifaceted challenges surrounding the enhancement of MIL among the population of Uzbekistan, offering a meticulous examination within the distinctive Central Asian context. The study aims to unravel the complexities arising from insufficient MIL knowledge and its tangible consequences on individuals' ability to navigate an increasingly information-rich environment.

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By employing a case study methodology, this research seeks to illuminate real-life instances wherein the lack of media and information literacy has resulted in adverse outcomes, including misinformation, digital manipulation, and constrained access to reliable information. Through a nuanced exploration of these practical scenarios, the study underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions to uplift MIL proficiency.

Moreover, this research not only identifies the problems but endeavours to provide optimal solutions. It strategically explores the potential of leveraging diverse media channels, such as TV programs, social media platforms, and other media campaigns, to disseminate essential MIL knowledge effectively. The goal is to contribute actionable insights that can inform policy decisions and practical strategies to enhance media literacy within the unique socio-cultural landscape of Uzbekistan.

Main Objectives:

1. **Identify Existing Challenges.** Conduct a comprehensive analysis to identify the primary challenges associated with insufficient media and information literacy among the population of Uzbekistan, considering factors such as misinformation, digital manipulation, and limited access to reliable information.

2. **Examine Real-Life Cases.** Utilize a case study approach to examine real-life instances where inadequate media and information literacy has resulted in tangible consequences, providing in-depth insights into the practical implications of the existing issues.

3. **Assess Socio-Cultural Dynamics.** Investigate the influence of socio-cultural factors on media literacy, recognizing the unique context of Central Asia and Uzbekistan, and understanding how cultural nuances impact the effectiveness of educational interventions.

4. **Explore Educational Interventions.** Explore and evaluate existing and potential educational interventions aimed at improving media and information literacy, with a focus on the utilization of TV programs, social media, and other media campaigns.

5. **Propose Optimal Solutions.** Develop actionable recommendations for enhancing media and information literacy by proposing optimal solutions, specifically considering the effectiveness of interventions through diverse media channels.

Research Questions:

1. What are the prevalent challenges associated with insufficient media and information literacy among the population of Uzbekistan?

2. How do real-life cases exemplify the consequences of inadequate media and information literacy in Uzbekistan?

3. To what extent do socio-cultural factors impact the effectiveness of media literacy interventions in the Central Asian context?

4. How can TV programs, social media, and other TV media campaigns be strategically utilized to enhance media and information literacy in Uzbekistan?

2. Materials and methods

This research employed a comprehensive analysis approach to investigate the issues related to media and information literacy (MIL) among the population of Uzbekistan. Real-life cases were examined, and optimal solutions were proposed to address these challenges. The study utilized a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data from various sources, including TV programs, social media platforms, and other media campaigns.

Data Collection methods are as follows:

1. **Case Studies.** Real-life cases were collected from different regions of Uzbekistan to provide a diverse representation of media and information literacy challenges faced by the population. These cases were selected through a purposive sampling technique, ensuring the inclusion of individuals from various demographic groups and geographical locations.

2. **Surveys.** A structured survey instrument was developed to gather quantitative data on the current level of media and information literacy among the population. The survey included questions related to information-seeking behaviour, media consumption habits, critical thinking skills, and awareness of misinformation. A representative sample of the population was selected using a random sampling technique. Face-to-face interviews were conducted, and the survey data were analyzed using appropriate statistical methods.

3. **Social Media Analysis.** Content analysis was conducted on a selection of social media platforms to examine their effectiveness in promoting media and information literacy. A systematic sampling

technique was used to identify relevant programs and social media accounts for analysis. The content was evaluated based on criteria such as accuracy, balance, credibility, and educational value.

Data Analysis:

1. Qualitative Analysis: The case studies were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. Common themes and patterns were identified, helping to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by the population and the effectiveness of various interventions.

2. Content Analysis: The TV programs and social media content were analyzed using qualitative content analysis techniques. The content was categorized based on predefined criteria, and themes related to media and information literacy were identified.

Results and Discussion. The findings obtained through the above-mentioned data collection and analysis methods will be presented, discussed, and compared with existing literature and international best practices. The results will highlight the current status of media and information literacy in Uzbekistan and identify the key challenges faced by the population. Moreover, optimal solutions to improve media and information literacy will be proposed, focusing on the effective utilization of TV programs, social media platforms, and other media campaigns.

Ethical Considerations. Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board to ensure the protection of participants' rights and well-being during the data collection process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study.

Limitations. This research may have some limitations, including potential biases in data collection, the representativeness of the sample, and the generalizability of the findings. However, efforts were made to minimize these limitations by adopting rigorous sampling techniques and utilizing a mixed-methods approach.

The materials and methods employed in this study aimed to comprehensively analyze the issues surrounding media and information literacy in Uzbekistan. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods allowed for a thorough exploration of the challenges faced by the population. The optimal solutions proposed in this research, utilizing TV programs, social media, and other media campaigns, aim to address these issues and improve the media and information literacy among the Uzbekistani population.

3. Discussion

A number of observations and studies carried out up to this period show that the level of media and information literacy in the Central Asian region is relatively low. For example, on the 18th of March in 2022 the experts from four countries of the region discussed the polarisation of communities, low level of media literacy, the lack of critical thinking, and other issues during the expert meeting “How to Improve the Media Literacy of the Population of the Central Asian Countries?” held by the CABAR.asia analytical platform.

The following recommendations are given by experts as a solution to these problems:

“The experts proposed several measures to improve the situation with the level of media literacy, including:

- The governments of countries should work more thoroughly and fundamentally to improve media literacy and critical thinking of the population of their countries;
- To support initiatives and educate different segments of the population;
- To strengthen work to ensure own information security;
- Use a wide range of tools to increase empathy;
- Create zero tolerance for violence using all available tools and opportunities;
- To support local independent media so that they do not depend on grants and projects from foreign states” (CABAR, 2022).

One of the scientists who conducted a number of studies on the level of media education in the region and its development I. Chelysheva in her article entitled "Media Literacy Education in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan" analysed the development and current state of media literacy education in a number of Central Asian countries (Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan). The author considers the priority technologies of modern mass media education; systematization of the material under study was carried out, the main theoretical concepts of mass media education and key trends in further development were identified (Chelysheva, 2019: 3).

Insufficient media and information literacy in Uzbekistan can lead to various challenges and problems for its population. Here are some common issues faced as a result:

1. Misinformation and fake news: Without proper media literacy skills, individuals may struggle to differentiate between credible information and fake news. This can lead to the spread of misinformation, affecting public perception, decision-making, and trust in the media.

2. Limited critical thinking: Insufficient media literacy can hinder critical thinking skills, making it harder for people to analyze and evaluate media content effectively. This can contribute to the uncritical acceptance of information and opinions without proper examination.

3. Lack of awareness of media bias: Media bias can influence public opinion and shape narratives. However, without media literacy, individuals may fail to recognize bias in news reporting, leading to a skewed perception of events and issues.

4. Vulnerability to manipulation: Insufficient information literacy can make people more susceptible to manipulation and propaganda. It becomes easier for outside influences to shape public opinion, especially through disinformation campaigns and social media manipulation.

5. Reduced digital security: Inadequate media and information literacy can leave individuals vulnerable to cyber threats, scams, and online manipulation. Without proper awareness of online risks, people may become victims of identity theft, financial fraud, or privacy breaches.

6. Challenges in civic engagement: Lack of media literacy skills may hinder citizens' ability to actively participate in public debates and engage in informed discussions. It can limit their capacity to understand and critically analyze various perspectives, inhibiting meaningful dialogue and collective decision-making.

Addressing these issues requires efforts to improve media and information literacy in Uzbekistan. Promoting critical thinking, fact-checking, and digital literacy can help individuals develop the necessary skills to navigate the complex media landscape and make well-informed decisions.

The differentiation of concepts such as "misinformation" and "false information" (fake) was discussed thoroughly by the authors of the book entitled "Media Manipulations and Media Literacy Education" (Fedorov et al., 2022: 7-9). In this term, H. Derakhshan and C. Wardle substantiate the following typology:

- "Dis-information. Information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country;

- Mis-information. Information that is false, but not created with the intention of causing harm;

- Mal-information. Information that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, organization, or country" (Wardle, Derakhshan, 2017: 5).

The concepts of media bias and manipulation are the terms that cause many problems and discussions in the world media industry today: "...manipulation in social networks is a big business: since 2010, political parties and governments have spent more than half a billion dollars on research, development and implementation of psychological operations and manipulation of public opinion in social networks. In some countries, this includes efforts to combat extremism, but in most cases – to spread unwanted news and misinformation during elections, military crises and complex humanitarian disasters" (Bradshaw, Howard, 2018: 3).

One of the important ways to rationally solve the above issues is to develop certain knowledge and skills in these areas. Such skills cannot be implemented only with various projects and grants. It is possible to develop the media education of the population through systematic and clear life examples through the channels of media and social networks that the country's population uses the most. Because "...mass media education of the audience can effectively contribute to the development of analytical thinking and media competence of the individual" (Fedorov et al., 2022: 12)

Studies show that the people of Central Asia, in particular, Uzbekistan, today receive the main information from TV channels and social networks (Internews, 2021: 13-14; Sostoyanie..., 2021: 5). In addition, problems related to the lack of knowledge in the field of MIL arise from the population's use of social networks and mobile communication tools, non-compliance with security rules for bank account numbers and personal data protection.

Today, the following tools and directions are important in improving the media and information literacy of the population in the country:

1. *TV shows, soap operas, serials and other media products are as a main medium in enhancing population's MIL level.* Television shows, soap operas, and other media products have the potential to play a significant role in enhancing the media and information literacy (MIL) level in Uzbekistan. These platforms can serve as powerful tools to educate and engage the population, particularly in rural areas where access to formal education may be limited.

One way in which TV shows and soap operas can contribute to MIL is by raising awareness about different social, cultural, and political issues. By portraying diverse characters and storylines, these media products can foster discussions and critical thinking among viewers. They can tackle important topics such as democracy, human rights, gender equality, environmental sustainability, and health education.

TV shows and soap operas also have the advantage of being easily accessible and enjoyed by a wide range of audiences. According to some American scholars, seriality is thus important in transforming mediums into mass mediums (Harrington, Bielby, 2022: 1). Soap operas enjoy great popularity around the world. In fact, large audiences are fascinated by the packaged but never-ending narratives (Hofmann, 2021: 502).

They have the potential to reach mass audiences, including those who may not have access to the internet or other educational resources. By incorporating accurate and reliable information into their narratives, these media products can promote dialogue and increase public understanding of important issues.

Furthermore, incorporating specific MIL elements within TV shows and soap operas can be an effective strategy. For instance, characters can demonstrate critical thinking skills by fact-checking information, questioning sources, and evaluating the credibility of news. Over time, viewers can learn from these examples and apply similar approaches in their personal lives.

Additionally, televised shows can provide practical information on media literacy, emphasizing the importance of verifying information, detecting misinformation and disinformation, and developing digital literacy skills. This can be done through incorporating educational segments or providing resources during commercial breaks.

Collaboration between broadcasters, educational institutions, and governmental organizations is key for the success of such initiatives. Working together, they can develop educational content, workshops, or symposiums that support media literacy initiatives and reinforce the lessons learned from TV shows and soap operas.

In conclusion, television shows, soap operas, and media products can serve as effective tools in enhancing the population's media and information literacy level in Uzbekistan. By depicting diverse perspectives, addressing significant issues, and incorporating educational elements, these platforms can foster critical thinking, broaden knowledge, and promote a more informed society.

2. The Role of social media in shaping MIL. Social media plays a significant role in shaping media information literacy in Uzbekistan. With the rapid growth of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram, individuals in Uzbekistan have access to a wide range of information sources and have become active participants in the digital landscape.

As we know, social networks were not originally conceived as a political or manipulation tool: they were supposed to become a free and democratic space for communication between friends and relatives, with participants could share their impressions of books, films, music, travel, food recipes, post photos and videos etc. However, as soon as social networks (with their wide possibilities of users' segmentation by interests) gained a multimillion audience, they immediately entered the sphere of business and politics interests. Today, social networks are increasingly being used as a swift and relatively inexpensive way to promote information, including false one. As a result, social networks are becoming sources of various kinds of political and advertising fakes (Fedorov et al., 2022: 6).

One of the keyways social media shapes media and information literacy is by providing a platform for individuals to engage with news, opinions, and different perspectives. Through social media, people can access local and global news outlets, follow journalists and public figures, and engage in discussions on various topics. This exposure to diverse viewpoints helps individuals develop critical thinking skills and encourages them to question the information they consume.

Furthermore, social media facilitates the sharing and dissemination of information. Individuals can quickly and easily share news articles, videos, and other media content with their social networks. This feature allows for the rapid spread of information, which can be both beneficial and challenging when it comes to media information literacy. On the one hand, it enables the promotion of accurate and reliable news, empowering users to share verified information. On the other hand, it can also lead to the spread of misinformation and fake news, making it critical for individuals to develop the ability to discern credible sources.

Social media platforms also offer opportunities for citizen journalism and user-generated content (Kaufhold et al., 2010; Cervi, 2019).

Uzbekistan has seen an increase in citizen reporting, where ordinary people play the role of journalists by capturing and sharing news events through their social media accounts. While this can contribute to a more democratic and diverse media landscape, it also requires media information literacy to verify the accuracy and credibility of such content.

Moreover, social media serves as a platform for public dialogue and expression of opinions. Social media platforms provide a new way of representing and measuring public opinions (Dong, Lian, 2021).

Uzbekistan has witnessed a rise in online discussions, where individuals express their views on political, social, and cultural issues. Such discussions encourage media information literacy as people engage in debates, fact-check information, and seek reliable sources to support their arguments.

To promote media information literacy in Uzbekistan's social media landscape, it is important to focus on education and awareness. Introducing media literacy programs in schools and universities can help individuals develop critical thinking skills, teach them how to identify reliable sources, and navigate the digital media landscape responsibly. Additionally, initiatives by government agencies, NGOs, and media organizations can provide workshops, seminars, and online resources to promote media information literacy among citizens.

In conclusion, social media plays a significant role in shaping media information literacy in Uzbekistan. It offers opportunities for accessing diverse information sources, sharing and disseminating news and opinions, engaging in public dialogue, and contributing to citizen journalism. To ensure individuals can navigate this digital landscape effectively, efforts should be made to promote media literacy through education, awareness, and collaboration between various stakeholders.

3. Enhancing online and digital banking literacy through Media and Information Literacy projects. Due to the exponential growth of the internet, smartphones, and communication technologies during the last two decades, the digital banking sector has enormously advanced in terms of user-friendly, efficient, and fast financial transactions (Indriasari, 2022).

Finding out that hard-earned money has been taken from the bank account without the knowledge or consent could be anyone's greatest nightmare. Due to the rising frequency of bank account fraud, this is regrettably a fact of life for many (Craw Security, 2023).

In many literatures, it is presented in diagrams and figures that MIL field includes the knowledge levels that can be acquired in a number of fields such as Computer and IT, Cinema, Mass Media and Mass communication, Library studies. For example, in the guide "UNESCO MIL for teachers: Unifying Notions of Media and Information Literacy" there is a figure under the title "The Ecology of MIL: Notions of MIL", according to which the field of MIL includes information literacy, media literacy, including news literacy, advertising literacy, television literacy, cinema literacy, games literacy, internet literacy, computer literacy, digital literacy, FOE and FOI literacy (Wilson et al., 2011: 19).

This issue and figure were further developed in the manual "Media and information literacy: policy and strategy guidelines", the above concepts were changed in colour depending on the degree of closeness, and the term of "social network literacy" was also added (Grizzle et al., 2013: 54).

By creatively using these drawings and developing the ideas in them, we reflect our approach and views on Ecology of MIL in the form of the following figure (Figure 1).

In this diagram, the types of "literacy" listed above are divided into specific groups with attention to content and essence. Concepts, depending on the level of field affinity, were initially combined into information literacy and media literacy, and through them were combined into the general field of MIL. We have included the concepts of online and digital banking literacy, which are very important in today's digital era and pose a serious threat to many people, as part of information literacy. Although these concepts seem related to economy and finance at first glance, we cannot deny that people's knowledge in the field of information literacy plays a decisive role in the attacks on bank cards and accounts of individuals by various hackers and the withdrawal of funds from them.

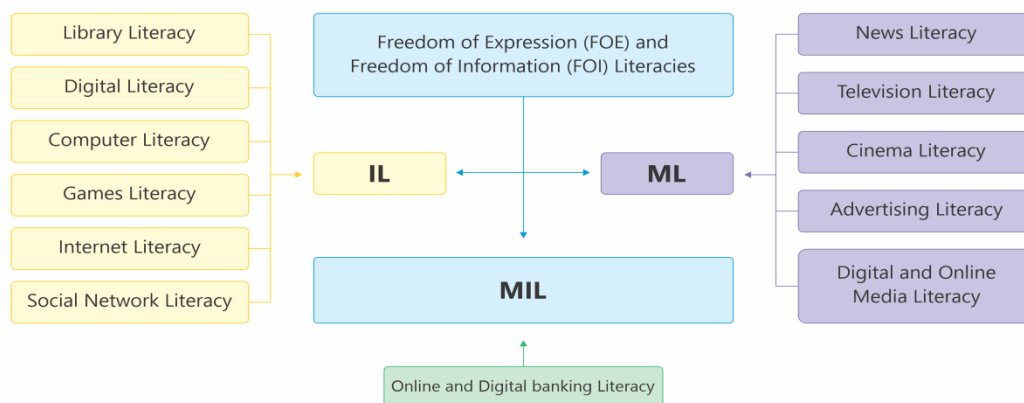


Fig. 1. The Ecology (Notions) of MIL (Source: own creation)

In general, in today’s digital age and the globalization of information technologies, the role of MIL is becoming more and more important, including the knowledge that is important for people’s daily life.

Enhancing online and digital banking, as well as online financial literacy, through Media and Information Literacy (MIL) initiatives in Uzbekistan can play a significant role in promoting financial inclusion and empowering individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge for managing their personal finances effectively. Here are some potential steps that can be taken to achieve this goal (Table 1):

Table 1. Potential steps that can be taken to achieve improvement in levels of Media and Information Literacy (MIL)

No	Potential steps	Definitions
1.	Educational Campaigns	Launch comprehensive educational campaigns to raise awareness about online and digital banking services among the general public. These campaigns could utilize various mediums, such as television, radio, social media, and other online platforms, to reach a wider audience.
2.	Collaboration with Financial Institutions	Collaborate with banks and financial institutions to provide targeted training programs and workshops on online banking services. This can include educating users on creating and managing online accounts, understanding transaction processes, and ensuring digital security.
3.	Mobile Banking Apps	Develop user-friendly mobile banking applications that cater to the needs of individuals across different age groups and demographics. These apps should offer intuitive interfaces, secure transaction features, and provide easy access to financial information and services.
4.	Online Financial Literacy Courses	Partner with educational institutions, financial experts, and industry professionals to develop online financial literacy courses. These courses can cover a wide range of topics, including budgeting, saving, investing, credit management, and financial planning.
5.	Social Media Campaigns	Leverage social media platforms to create engaging content that promotes online banking services and financial literacy. This can include informative posts, videos, infographics, and live sessions with experts where users can ask questions and receive guidance on personal finance matters.

No	Potential steps	Definitions
6.	Public-Private Partnerships	Foster collaborations between government entities, private organizations, and NGOs to jointly implement MIL initiatives. This can help mobilize resources, expertise, and funding required for creating impactful online banking and financial literacy programs.
7.	Online Community Engagement	Create online communities and forums where individuals can come together to discuss personal finance topics, share experiences, and seek advice. Moderators and financial experts can actively participate in these communities to provide guidance and support.
8.	Capacity Building for Financial Professionals	Conduct training programs for financial professionals, including bank employees and financial advisors, to enhance their digital banking knowledge and skills. This will enable them to assist customers effectively and offer appropriate guidance on utilizing online banking services.
9.	Continuous Evaluation and Improvement	Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of MIL initiatives through feedback mechanisms, surveys, and data analysis. This will help identify strengths and weaknesses, allowing for continuous improvement and adaptation to the changing needs of the population.

By implementing these MIL initiatives, Uzbekistan can empower its citizens with the necessary skills and awareness to take advantage of online and digital banking services, fostering financial inclusion and promoting economic growth.

4. Results

In order to substantiate the problems analyzed in the "Discussion" part and their solutions with the events that occur in people's lives in recent years, many journalistic materials related to the topic were analyzed and studied among the messages transmitted on various media and social network channels. Some of them are presented as cases for analysis in this article.

The first case is not only about dating chats, which have become popular since the advent of the Internet, and the dangerous consequences of not following "privacy literacy" ([Hagendorff, 2018](#)) in their use:

Case 1.

Convinced that it is possible to earn income through "love from a distance", the man goes hunting again through "Odnoklassniki". Of course, he searches for women who have been hit by life's shocks, who are divorced or who are looking for happiness, who are thirsty for love, and who intend to marry if they meet a person like in the brochure. 34-year-old Kh. S., who is divorced with one child, has secondary special education, lives in Almalyk becomes his next prey... The guy "in love" introduces himself as a businessman engaged in trade in China. In this way, "romantic" relationships begin through the social network. More declarations of love, non-stop text messages...

Two weeks later, the "lover" who "left for China" convinces the woman with promises that he will send a matchmaker to the woman's family upon his arrival in a month, and with oaths taken in his mother's name. Having her naked photos, he moved to the goal: "I received 100 US dollars from a guy you know to do this work. After receiving the pictures, he will give another 200 USD. Okay, if you give me \$100, I'll give him his money back and delete your pictures. But my service fee is 200,000 soums." Of course, there is nothing more valuable to a woman than her honour and dignity. Kh. brought the requested money – US dollars to the specified address, that is, to the metro station "Almazor" in Tashkent city, and wrapped it in a plastic bag and threw it under a tree, based on the text message written by a man who was watching from afar, and left it under a tree. She was thankful that she was spared the shame ([Sobirov, Matyoqub qizi, 2019](#)).

Such cases are explained by Canadian experts with the term "sextortion".

"Sextortion is a sophisticated cybercrime in which perpetrators often contact a victim through an online forum, including social media like Instagram and Snapchat. Targeting teen boys and young men, the perpetrators often pose as teen girls or young women who claim to be interested in a sexual relationship with their potential victim. They then request intimate photos and videos of the boys or young men. Once they have received these images or videos, they then threaten to share the videos or photos with the teen boy or young man's family, friends, school community and/or employer, attempting to shame their target into handing over money" (vicpd.ca, 2023).

The next case is about people who are trying to deceive people by gaining their trust in the field of online trade and services, which are widely popular on today's Internet and social networks:

Case 2.

In today's information age, buying all the products necessary for our daily needs through various trading platforms and social networks has become a common practice. Especially, it is very convenient for people to find hotels or rental houses in other cities through the Internet.

Unfortunately, today there are enough fraudsters who use these facilities for malicious purposes.

On January 17 of this year at 14:00, citizen J.I., born in 1999 in Nishan district of Kashkadarya region. When looking for a relatively cheap apartment with comfortable living conditions for rent in Tashkent, he sees that exactly one apartment is available on the site "olx.uz" and several groups on the Telegram social network, and immediately contacts the owner of this ad. The owner of the ad says that this apartment will be vacated in a couple of days, until then he need to transfer 500,000 Uzbek soums to the bank's plastic card as an advance, otherwise the owner may give this apartment to someone else. In order not to miss out on a good rental house, citizen J.I. transfers the requested amount to the owner's plastic card.

After that J.I. can no longer contact this unknown person and, realizing that he was deceived, turns to the internal affairs authorities (Aniq.uz, 2022).

With the development of media and information technologies, the cases of attempts to steal data from a distance are also increasing. The news article titled "Be careful! A dangerous virus is spreading on Telegram" by J.Kadamov, a journalist of "Qalampir.uz", discusses about the hacking technology related to stealing phone passwords and other personal data by hackers.

Case 3.

In the last two or three days, various viruses have been distributed on the Telegram social network in Uzbekistan, and citizens are suffering from this. The Cybersecurity Center of the Ministry of Internal Affairs called on Telegram users to be aware.

"Please vote for me" messages are coming to almost everyone's Telegram account. The main purpose of spreading these messages is to capture your account, confidential correspondence, video or photo data.

Similar situations can be observed in applications related to bank plastic cards.

"If you received such a message and clicked the "vote" button, you will be asked to enter your phone number and confirm the SMS sent to your phone number. "By confirming this SMS, you are allowing third-party devices to access your account," the MIA warns.

In order not to fall into the trap of fraudsters, it is recommended to follow the following:

- setting up two-way authentication;
- in any case, do not provide the numbers received in the SMS-notification to anyone;
- stop the activity of other devices by checking "Active sessions" in the messenger devices section.

"We ask citizens to be extremely careful and not to be deceived by information attacks," the authority informed in the warning (Kadamov, 2023).

The Cyber Security Center of the Rapid Investigation Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan has an official channel on Telegram and YouTube social platforms. On these channels, under the hashtag "#Cybercrime", such messages are regularly

broadcasted, and through them, the population becomes aware of various new forms of cybercrime and is called to be alert. In particular, the message distributed on December 30, 2023 contains the following information.

Case 4.

U.O. (female) and B.Kh. (female), living in Samarkand region, contacted the internal affairs body and reported that an online loan was issued in their name for unknown reasons...

According to findings, A.Sh., (female) called those two women and introduced herself as "Bank operator", obtained their personal data by sending "SMS" message (fake link), registered on their behalf via mobile application, and transferred 27 million soum online loan – a total of 54 million soums – and at the same time transferred this amount to her own bank account.

In recent years, various life situations similar to the cited cases have appeared frequently in the media channels of Central Asia. However, in this regard, it should also be noted that the persons who are threatened in this direction do not always turn to the internal affairs bodies or the mass media. People in the region avoid public discussion, certain level of national, religious and social values and other factors prevent them from doing so. But the main issue here is not to cover all such problems in the media, but to increase the literacy of the people in the field of MIL based on the existing situation and examples.

From the above cases and their analysis, it is clear that insufficient media and information literacy knowledge can indeed have a significant impact on various aspects of society, including social life, family dynamics, and the economy. This applies not only to Uzbekistan but also to many other countries around the world:

1. Social Life. Lack of media and information literacy can lead to the spread of misinformation and the prominence of fake news, which can negatively affect social interactions and relationships. People may form biased opinions, misunderstandings, or even engage in conflicts fuelled by misinformation. This can strain community cohesion, trust, and cooperation among individuals.

2. Family Problems. Insufficient media and information literacy can contribute to family problems by perpetuating and reinforcing harmful stereotypes, biases, and misconceptions. If family members lack the critical thinking skills to evaluate information effectively, it can lead to misunderstandings, tensions, or even conflicts within families. Furthermore, exposure to unreliable or false information can lead to family members making uninformed decisions, such as falling for scams or engaging in harmful practices.

3. Financial Harm. Inadequate media and information literacy can also have economic ramifications. Financial scams, fraudulent schemes, and investment misinformation can lead to individuals making unsound financial decisions, resulting in financial harm. It can be particularly detrimental for vulnerable populations who may lack the necessary awareness and knowledge to protect themselves from exploitation.

To address these challenges, it is important to focus on improving media and information literacy education in Uzbekistan. This includes promoting critical thinking skills, teaching individuals how to evaluate sources of information, valuing reliable and evidence-based information, and encouraging open dialogue and discussion. By equipping people with the necessary skills and knowledge, they can navigate the media landscape more effectively, make informed decisions, and contribute to a healthier and more prosperous society.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this comprehensive analysis has unveiled critical insights into the challenges and opportunities surrounding media and information literacy (MIL) within the population of Uzbekistan, set against the backdrop of the unique Central Asian context. The research has meticulously examined real-life cases, illustrating the tangible repercussions of insufficient MIL knowledge, including misinformation, hacking and digital manipulation. Through this exploration, the study emphasizes the urgency of addressing these issues to fortify individuals against the pitfalls of the information age.

Recognizing the impact of socio-cultural dynamics on the effectiveness of interventions, the research advocates for a nuanced approach tailored to the specific context of Uzbekistan.

It highlights the need for educational programs that resonate with the cultural fabric of the region, promoting an understanding of media and information literacy as a fundamental skill for navigating the complexities of the digital era.

The proposed solutions, leveraging TV programs, social media, and other media campaigns, present actionable pathways for improvement. These mediums offer not only avenues for disseminating essential MIL knowledge but also serve as platforms for fostering a culture of critical thinking and responsible information consumption.

As we navigate an increasingly interconnected world, the imperative to enhance media and information literacy becomes paramount. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse by providing practical recommendations and insights that can inform policymakers, educators, and media practitioners alike. By collectively embracing these recommendations, we pave the way for a more informed, resilient, and digitally literate population in Uzbekistan, ready to face the challenges and opportunities of the evolving information landscape.

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