



Article

Fostering Media and Information Literacy and Critical Thinking Skills in the Digital Age

Valerii Novitskyi¹, Halyna Taranenko², Volodymyr Kalenych³, Olena Baranova⁴ and Hanna Poberezhets⁴

¹Interregional Academy of Personnel Management, Kyiv, Ukraine, ²Dmytro Motornyi Tavria State Agrotechnological University, Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, ³Vinnitsia Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi State Pedagogical University, Vinnitsia, Ukraine, ⁴Mykolaiv National Agrarian University, Mykolaiv, Ukraine.

Correspondence: nvg@tasagro.com

Abstract

Against the backdrop of advances in information and communication technologies and social media resources, there is a growing need for the active development of critical thinking and media literacy skills. The intensification of manipulation and disinformation in the media space necessitates the search for new means of developing a culture of communication and ethical competencies in society. The purpose of this article is to analyze contemporary strategies for the cultural development of society in the context of ethical and philosophical aspects, media literacy, and critical thinking. The methodology involved the use of synthetic-analytical approaches, as well as methods of induction and deduction. The research focuses on practical developments of adaptation strategies for integrating the Ukrainian media education space into the European environment with the aim of raising the level of critical thinking in society, its literacy in identifying manipulation, and developing the philosophical and ethical foundations of cultural development. The article substantiates the importance of effective media education in the context of developing the competencies necessary for effective social progress towards a culture of communication and strengthening philosophical concepts of cultural and ethical development for social progress.

Keywords: *critical thinking, communication culture, ethical aspect, information society, media literacy, philosophical aspect.*

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Introduction

Given the growing amount of information in the current social development environment, developing skills in critical reflection on information data, the ability to identify manipulative and disinformation messages in the media space, and strengthening communication competencies based on philosophical and ethical principles is particularly important. The situation is exacerbated by rapid technological progress and digital upgrades of media resources and social networks. The latter are currently positioned as a priority means of receiving, analyzing, and disseminating media content.

The development of online forms of communication - blogs, forums, social networks, etc., has led to a transformation in the way information is disseminated. This necessitates a deep critical analysis of the formation of media content as a factor that determines the influence on the consciousness of society today. Unfortunately, the media space is actively used for manipulative actions, spreading fake news, disinformation of certain social groups, and deliberate manipulation of social behavior. This poses a real threat to the organic development of public space (Väliverronen, 2021).

Media literacy is especially important in countries like Ukraine, as social media often determines the course of public thinking. At the same time, educational systems pay very little attention to the development of critical thinking, media literacy skills, and communication ethics. At the same time, in the European educational environment, programs to develop a communication and media literacy culture are actively integrated into the general education process (Sofilkanych, 2022). Given the active European integration development of Ukraine, there is a need to formulate and implement unified educational concepts for the development of critical thinking and media literacy in the context of society's active use of digital communication and social networks. The article focuses on filling in the significant gaps and pays special attention to the ethical and philosophical concepts of the cultural development of society.

The article aims to analyze modern strategies for the cultural development of society in the context of ethical and philosophical aspects, media literacy, and critical thinking.

The main objectives of the study are defined:

1. Extended analysis of the theoretical and methodological basis for the formation of definitions of critical thinking and media literacy in terms of the current impact of digitalization of the information and communication process.
2. To identify the essential principles of developing the educational environment in the context of forming a culture of communication and media literacy, and to compare global trends with the realities of the Ukrainian educational field.
3. To analyze modern strategies for the development of philosophical and ethical foundations of communicative and cultural social progress.

4. To offer practical recommendations for optimizing the content of educational programs.
5. Develop ways to improve the level of communication culture and media competence of the public.

Literature review

Modern sectoral scientific developments and publications are mainly focused on certain areas. These include the positioning of media literacy and critical thinking as key factors in developing the modern educational process; the impact of information and communication transformation and digital development on the process under study; the importance of critical thinking for the media security of the social and media space. In an interdisciplinary context, representatives of the scientific community analyze the impact of culture-building activities and effective communication on society's philosophical and ethical progress.

The issues under study are closely related to the philosophical and ethical understanding of cultural processes. In particular, this is evidenced by the publications of Donelli (2019), Hodkinson (2024), Zapata-Barrero and Mansouri (2022), and Risjord (2022). Contemporary researchers like Akimova et al. (2022a; 2022b) and Cho et al. (2024), studied current philosophical traditions in the light of the digitalization of communication interaction and the global influence of social networks, position the cultural development of society as a complex phenomenon that represents a multifaceted system of subject-object relations. The issue is further developed in Causadias's (2020) and Croucher's (2020) publications, which explore various aspects of modern society's communicative and cultural development in the context of philosophical and ethical approaches.

Brenner and Igamberdiev (2021) investigate the socio-philosophical basis of the process of forming the information culture of the future. At the same time, Byrkovych et al. (2023) focus on analyzing the synergy of cultural aspects, social values, priority ideas, and communication ethics based on philosophical doctrine.

A number of scholars have investigated the possibilities of increasing the level of critical thinking and media literacy through educational technologies. In particular, Dutta (2020), Holliday (2020), Kellner (2020), and Boton (2024) present the results of experimental studies on the implementation of educational projects for the development of critical thinking and media competence, and the identification of fake information.

Houser (2023) and Inglehart (2020) discuss the potential of philosophical concepts and in-depth ethics in the context of innovative development of the media landscape. The researchers pay special attention to the impact of the digital communication environment, social networks, and media space. At the same time, Kovalchuk and Ovsyankina (2020), and Nerubasska et al. (2020) describe how developed critical thinking allows optimizing the effectiveness of decision-making in view of the active dynamics of the information environment.

A number of scholars propose using digital tools to increase media literacy and develop digital skills in society. For example, Kramer (2021) studies the potential of interactive media to improve critical thinking skills, Marukhovska-Kartunova et al. (2024), and Vraga and Tully (2021) analyze the potential of social media as a stimulus to the communication process, countering manipulation and disinformation against the backdrop of global threats. Park et al. (2021) define the functionality of critical thinking and media literacy as a factor in overcoming social conflicts and increasing the stability of the social environment.

Neher (2020) and Kong (2024) argue that cultural evolution should be based on the motivation of societies that transform themselves and the world around them. The authors emphasize the value of a public philosophy that combines ethics, digital society, and communication.

In the context of the value of a personal philosophy of communication competence, Peck (2023) emphasizes that culturally sensitive social development is interconnected with the dynamics of the educational system. The researcher actualizes the concept of social dynamics of participation, community engagement, and cultural development in action.

These contemporary studies represent the need to rethink the impact of critical thinking and media competence on the development of the cultural, ethical, and philosophical foundations of modern society.

Methodology

The main materials of the study were selected publications for 2020-2025, which are indexed in leading scientific databases (Web of Science, Scopus), as well as statistics from official sources. The keywords used for the search were “culture of communication, media literacy, philosophical aspect, ethical aspect, critical thinking, information society”. The main criteria for the exclusion and inclusion of scientific papers and publications in the methodological sample of the study are the level of reliability and validity of information, as well as the spatial and temporal indicators in the context of its representativeness. The sample size of 25 items is representative in terms of scientific and statistical power.

The information landscape of the sources selected for the research sample was based on the aspects of quality, accuracy, relevance, bias, reputation, and credibility. Attention was paid to the methods of assessing the quality, accuracy, relevance, bias, reputation, and reliability of the information resources found. Relevant material on the search topic was selected, with key points and arguments identified. Particular attention is paid to the importance of consistency in data collection and citation.

The study used general scientific methods: analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, systematization, generalization, forecasting, and abstraction. These methods made it possible to determine the main criteria and definitions, identify the most influential factors, and critically assess the associated risks.

Analysis and synthesis were used to comprehensively study scientific approaches to the definitions, essence, and functionality of media literacy and critical thinking. The method of induction allowed us to generalize the trends in the development of media literacy from specific facts and phenomena, while deduction made it possible to test them on specific examples. Abstraction was used to identify the most significant aspects of the problem. Generalization allowed us to develop a conceptual educational model. Forecasting made it possible to predict potential trends in the development of the phenomena and processes studied in the information society. The limitations of the study are due to the complexity of experimental verification of theoretical conclusions.

Results

Critical thinking is a scientific thought process expressed in the ability to reasonably and objectively analyze information or a situation, evaluate, differentiate, and argue its reliability. The main components of the process are analyzing the reliability and credibility of information sources, developing skills in finding interconnections and the consequences of influence, and forming logical conclusions and reasonable assumptions about the variability of the situation or perception of information. In the context of modern requirements for media literacy and the risks of manipulation in online communication, it is necessary to develop the ability to analyze one's assumptions with the identification of their weaknesses and strengths, as well as to make appropriate adjustments, generate new approaches, non-standard solutions and ideas (Abdulrahman et al., 2020; Permana et al., 2024).

Critical thinking in pedagogical practice is positioned as the antithesis of dogmatic thinking, being identified as an independent, logical, and creative thought process. The specific properties of this type of thinking are individuality and social orientation, which ensures the ability to realize and argue a personal position on certain issues, the ability to produce new ideas and non-standard solutions, to subject issues to critical analysis, effectively rethinking actions, and predicting potential consequences (Adeshola & Adepoju, 2024).

At the same time, among the fundamental theoretical areas of media literacy are cognitive (development of analytical skills) and sociocultural (a means of socialization and prevention of manipulation and disinformation).

Critical thinking and media literacy should be developed simultaneously in light of modern information technologies. Modern IT technologies increase the speed and accessibility of information analytics and require the development of critical thinking skills in modern society. The key theoretical and methodological approaches in this context are the acquisition of competencies in technical skills and digital security and the integration of strategically important concepts of critical thinking and media literacy in the educational process.

In order to become active members of the information society, interact with information flows, and protect oneself from actions related to disinformation and

manipulation, it is necessary to have media literacy and critical thinking as components of information culture. The active development of digital media resources and social networks intensifies this process, significantly transforming the thinking processes of society (Ansari & Khan, 2020; Pavlik, 2023). At the same time, this requires increased attention to cybersecurity, personal data protection, and the ability to recognize fakes and disinformation.

Today, there is a significant decline in the level of trust in media resources in the global social environment. The statistics compiled by Edelman represent a general decline in the level of trust in the media due to the tendency to use media resources for manipulative purposes (Figure 1).

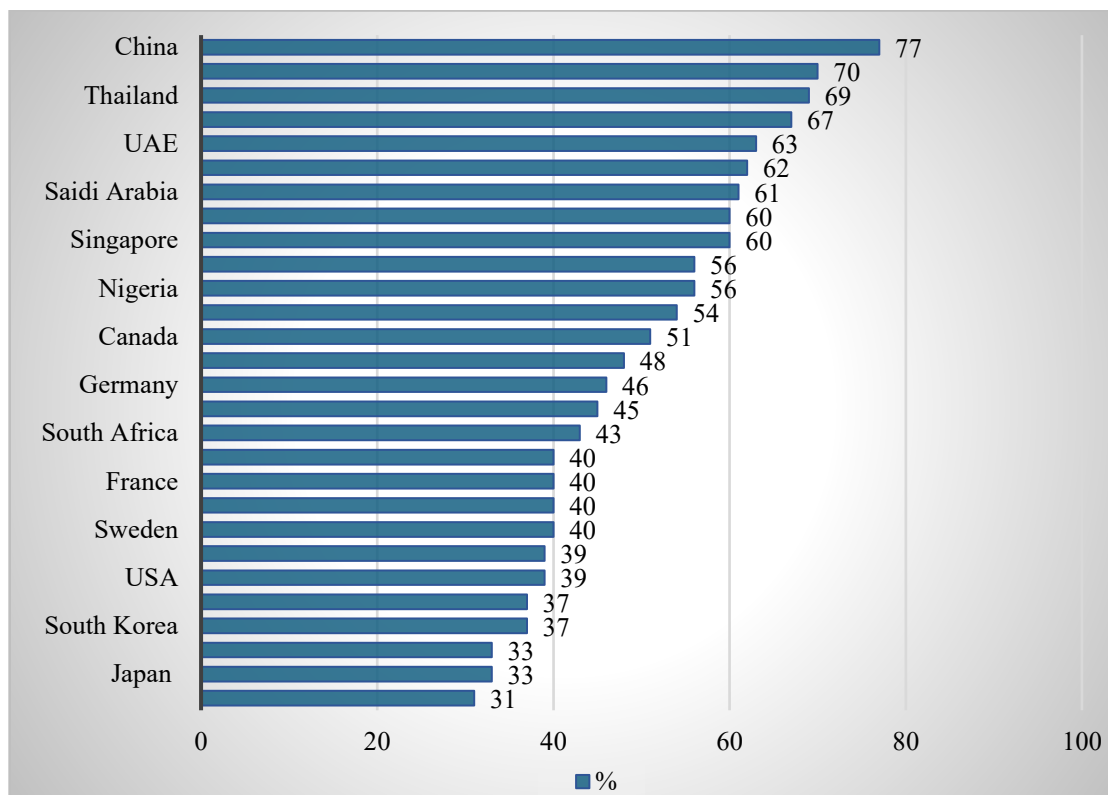


Figure 1. The level of public trust in the media space in individual countries in 2024, %

Source: Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report (2024)

At the same time, the Edelman Trust Barometer (2024) classifies a low (destructive) level of trust at 1-49%, an average of 50-59%, and a high level of 60% and above. Traditionally, a high level of trust in the media is maintained in countries with authoritarian policies and a pro-government position. A low level of trust is characteristic of developed democracies.

Raising the level of media literacy in Ukraine involves systematically conducting educational courses, trainings, coaching, and practices for developing civic initiatives. Using digital platforms and providing open access to free online courses is advisable. It is important to prevent the manipulative and destructive influence of the communication network, including the manipulation of public opinion, the spread of

disinformation, and the increased risk of polarization of society. As an integrated interaction environment, the global network effectively promotes certain concepts among the target audience. The network makes it possible to identify subgroups within the target audience to create more personalized media messages and to record and note the individual specifics of each recipient. The dynamics of the main media technologies are evolving, rapidly gaining popularity and becoming new platforms for manipulation: blogs, RSS feeds, discussion forums, search engine optimization (SEO), and podcasting (Höttecke & Allchin, 2020; Noetel et al., 2021).

Strategic concepts for developing media literacy and critical thinking skills are a system of techniques, methods, and approaches designed to improve the ability to synthesize, analyze, and evaluate large amounts of information. The strategy's main goal for developing critical thinking and media competence is the ability to logically analyze information, understand its essence and context, and formulate reasonable conclusions.

Today, it is advisable to highlight the main psychological and pedagogical concepts of media literacy and critical thinking development in the educational process (Table 1).

Table 1. Educational strategies for the development of media competence and critical thinking in the learning space

Strategy	Features	Sample
The method of open questions	Promotes in-depth analysis of large amounts of information, with the formation of appropriate conclusions	Instead of a specific answer to the task, it is proposed to provide an extended description of the method of finding it.
Interactive learning	Promotes the development of thinking and a conscious desire to filter information, stimulates motivation to master certain knowledge.	Interactive exercises, digital platforms Coggle and MozaBook
Problem-based learning	Brainstorming, development of a practice-oriented problem analysis, brainstorming, selection of variant paths, and leverage method.	Students are informed about a certain problem and are tasked with collecting as much information as possible about its essence to find ways to solve it.
Discussion method	Developing productive debates, comparing different conceptual points of view, finding similarities and differences, and drawing appropriate conclusions. Provides for a dispute with personal logic and analysis of the opponent's arguments in the course of the discussion	Identification by students of the disadvantages and advantages of all options for solving a particular problem, weighing them, and making a single decision
The method of independent analytical study	Selection of the most optimal ideas based on an independent analytical study of their variability	Classify one's own proposals, ideas, and opinions according to certain criteria

classifying ideas		
Learning from mistakes	Drawing constructive and positive lessons from one's own mistakes	The task of identifying the main factors that impede the quality of the task, searching for sources of ideas and inspiration
Method of communication interaction	Develops initiative, motivates mutual learning, promotes the development and defense of one's own position	The practice of exchanging opinions within a classroom on a controversial issue

Source: systematized by the author based on (Dutta, 2020; Holliday, 2020; Kellner, 2020)

Analyzing Table 1, it is worth focusing on individual tools. MozaBook is a valuable tool for the development of critical thinking. It is a targeted educational software that synergizes theoretical and practical interactive tools, combining the functions of presentation programs and working on the content of the curriculum. Within the software, it is possible to use the existing media library.

Coggle is a software that allows the creation of digital mind maps. The practical application of the resource involves localizing logically related material around a certain definition. Creating mind maps is seen as an effective tool for optimizing the development of critical thinking, as it allows for the organization of concepts, ideas, and facts into a logical structure that visually displays the relation between different components of the information field through analysis and synthesis. By facilitating the visualization of information, mind maps stimulate creative thinking, develop analytical skills, and improve communication processes.

The stages of development of critical thinking and media literacy in the educational field include:

1. Formation of a basic understanding of media and digital communication in primary school through multimedia lessons and interactive technologies that teach how to distinguish media content and critically perceive it;
2. studying different types of media products at the secondary level of education: media literacy at this level is closely related to understanding information, its differentiation, and reasoned discourse;
3. preparation for active citizenship in the digital society at the stage of higher education: methods of analysis, generation of own media messages;
4. increase media literacy in the adult education system through targeted educational programs to develop critical thinking, media literacy, and identify information threats;
5. development of media literacy in andragogical education to prevent the risks of media fraud.

The peculiarities of the formation of the modern cultural social environment are most evident in understanding the significance and role of innovative technologies in developing social communication. The tendency of algorithmic thinking and cultural processes can potentially cause a number of negative consequences, in particular, the transformation of the individual, his or her absorption in digital processes, and alienation from his or her own essence (Figure 2).

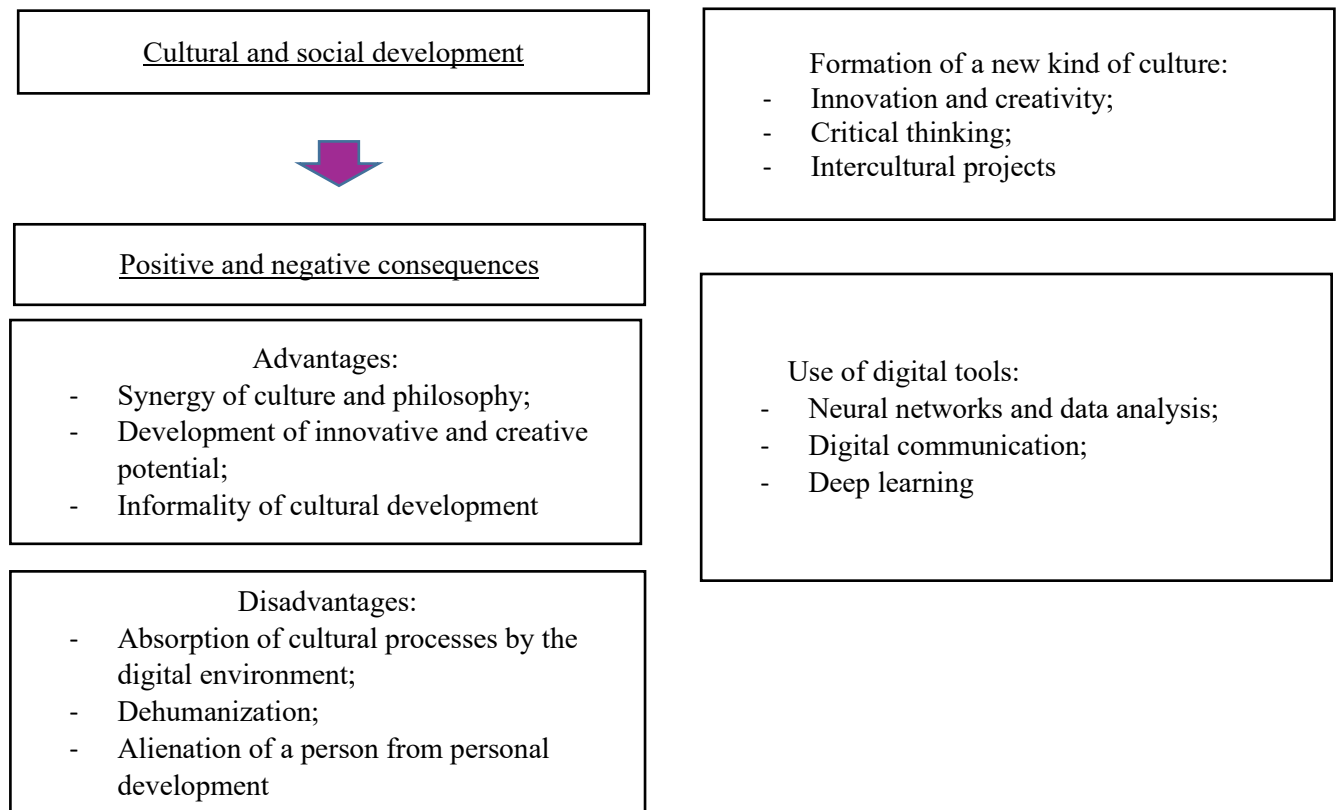


Figure 2. Cultural development of society in the context of globalization

Competence, reliability, and sustainable development should become the main principles of the development of the social communication space (Swart, 2023). The analysis of information arrays should be carried out using the capabilities of artificial intelligence and automated big data analytics systems, which will ensure compliance with certain environmental algorithms in the information environment, limit the use of manipulative technologies, and minimize risks.

Table 2 presents the main information on integrating effective practices to improve media literacy. These include open online courses, gamified learning, and others.

Table 2. Practical development of media literacy courses

Category	Course/Project Name	Description / Case Examples
1. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)	Coursera: “Media Literacy and Critical Thinking”	Online classes were conducted to improve the overall level of media literacy in society, including recognizing manipulation and disinformation. Particular attention is paid to content analysis skills and analysis of information coming from social media.
2. Educational Campaigns through Social Media	IREX: “Learn to Discern”	A targeted campaign for different age groups, which helps to develop skills in critical evaluation of media and social networks. The Facebook platform is used to develop practical skills.
3. Workshops and Seminars for the Public	StopFake: “Workshop on Media Manipulation Detection”	A system of training seminars for journalists and students that involves analyzing cases to distinguish between manipulative news and disinformation.
4. Fact-Checking Initiatives and Platforms	StopFake	A fact-checking service that exposes disinformation and provides news verification.
5. Partnerships with Media to Create Educational Programs	Television Project: “Media Literacy for Everyday Life”	A national educational television program with an audience of two million people. The program is based on real cases of information analysis in the media space.
6. Gamification of Media Literacy Learning	Bad News Game	It is an interactive game where participants collectively create fake news, exploring the processes of manipulation. The game helps to increase media literacy among various social groups.

The studied tools and approaches to the formation of media literacy and improvement of critical thinking skills of society illustrate how closely the aspects of ethics, philosophy, and culture of communication are interconnected. The cultural progress of modern society in the context of human-culture interaction positions the human being as the basis of the modern innovation and information society. At the same time, a person becomes an integral part of existence, which contributes to the effective realization of the creative and innovative potential of the individual in the context of theories of complexity and innovation.

Discussions

The theoretical and methodological foundations of modern concepts of critical thinking skills and media literacy were developed by scientists, educators, and psychologists who analyze educational technologies. At the same time, there are some

differences between their conceptual visions. Also, a number of aspects considered in this study appear in their publications in a different light.

In particular, Greene et al. (2021) highlight the vectoriality of pedagogical approaches to the development of critical thinking skills, using the education system in some developed countries as an example. The researchers note that media literacy has a broad cultural significance, as it stimulates the development of critical analysis skills and a better understanding of others in practice, which contributes to communication and intercultural development. At the same time, Dutta (2020) emphasizes the risky aspects of the impact of social media on the consciousness of different social strata and age groups.

Aspects of philosophy as a basis for cultural development are being developed by contemporary researchers Brenner and Igamberdiev (2021). The peculiarities of the cultural development of contemporary society include the diversification of academic philosophy, which synergizes emotions, civil society, and global development.

In continuation, Risjord (2022) emphasizes the importance of the philosophy of artificial intelligence and argues that the digitalization of society at the current stage of development transforms cultural aspects, and often this transformation has a negative connotation. Regarding the value of ethics and philosophy of civic education, Kramer (2021) emphasizes that the cultural development of society is closely interconnected with the effectiveness and dynamics of the educational system.

Based on the results of the current study, it is necessary to endorse Neher's (2020) conclusions regarding the functionality of media literacy in improving critical thinking skills and communication competence. At the same time, our study reveals several aspects of integrating innovative targeted educational technologies into the traditional educational field, from primary to andragogical education.

The findings of Houser (2023) have a number of advantages, as they confirm the practical effectiveness of educational programs to increase media literacy among students, but at the same time, such findings are quite difficult to use in practice to prevent manipulation and propaganda through media resources.

Park et al. (2021) offer successful examples of integrating full-fledged critical thinking and media literacy projects into all levels of the curriculum. At the same time, experience shows that the proposed approach needs to be further refined and adapted to socio-political conditions, current digital communications trends, and social media's popularity. This is consistent with Zapata-Barrero and Mansouri's publication (2022), which emphasizes the importance of media literacy in preventing the false or targeted spread of disinformation.

Croucher's (2020) position that classical pedagogical theory does not provide an algorithm for automatically ensuring the development of students' critical thinking skills seems to be correct, but it does identify certain pedagogical prerequisites for the effectiveness of the process.

Finally, the current study recognizes the importance of effective media education in the context of developing the competencies necessary for effective social

progress towards a culture of communication, strengthening the philosophical concepts of cultural and ethical development for social progress. Despite the significant contribution of scientists in the field, there are a number of gaps, in particular, in the practical testing of modern interactive and digital potential for the development of critical thinking and media literacy in the real conditions of the educational process. The outlined vector forms the prospect of further research.

Conclusions

The analysis of various modern approaches to the cultural development of society in the context of ethical and philosophical aspects, media literacy and critical thinking, implemented in this study, has made it possible to establish that key strategies are crucial for the development of a conscious and responsible society in a dynamic information and communication global space.

The tools and approaches studied for forming media literacy and developing critical thinking skills in society illustrate how closely the aspects of ethics, philosophy, and culture of communication are interconnected. Given Ukraine's active European integration development, there is a need to formulate and implement unified educational concepts for the development of critical thinking and media literacy in the context of society's active use of digital communication and social media. Raising the level of media literacy in Ukraine involves systematically conducting educational courses, trainings, coaching, and practices for developing public initiatives. Using digital platforms and providing open access to free online courses is advisable.

The strengths of the study are the contribution to the practical development of adaptation strategies for the integration of the Ukrainian media and educational space into the European environment, which will increase the level of critical thinking in society, its literacy in identifying manipulations, and the development of philosophical and ethical foundations of cultural development. The difficulty of verifying empirical data determines the weaknesses of the study.

The study results meet the original objectives and are considered valuable in forming practical strategies for innovative learning. It is promising to study the effects of long-term hybrid learning or its impact on variables such as motivation, autonomy, and interaction.

Further research should be devoted to the practical testing of modern interactive digital potential for developing critical thinking and media literacy in real-life learning environments at different levels of education. Another important area is developing a system of indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of media literacy programs, which allows for assessing the progress of focus skills and improving the quality of educational programs.

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Conflicts of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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