



Fact-Checking as a Basis for Media Literacy of Centenarians in Central Asian Countries (on the Example of Kazakhstan)

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Abstract - As a result of analyzing the experience of normative-legal regulation of the dissemination of inaccurate information in Kazakhstan, it was concluded that the existing legislative acts successfully prevent the emergence of many fake news. The average level of media literacy is associated with the lack of rapid response to acute social events and low prevalence of media education practices. Factchecking practices and methods in the country are aimed at increasing cooperation between media and Internet users and at involving young people in the process of information verification.

Theoretical and/or practical significance. The material reveals the essence and peculiarities of factchecking in Central Asian countries. The obtained data can be applied in the preparation of training manuals and guides on factchecking in a particular region of specialization.

INTRODUCTION

The relevance of this study is related to the need to develop fact-checking practices and methods for their further integration into media education programs. The development and complication of communication links can lead to distortion of the meaning of transmitted information and the emergence of fake news. According to researchers, the concept of “fake” is interpreted ambiguously - it can include such denotations as “hoax” and “joke game” on the one hand, and “fraud”, “manipulation”, “misleading” on the other. Clickbait headline, anonymity of the source, potentially conflicting news content, reference to non-existent authorities and an insistent call for information dissemination are considered indispensable attributes of fake news. These markers are the subject of study for fact-checkers and fake news specialists.

Generation Z, also called digital natives, are adapting the norms and rules of the networked society to share information more effectively. Based on their communication experience, they create their own definitions of such common concepts as “family”, “history”, “ethics”, etc. In this context, it seems particularly important to study the impact of fake news on the

formation of the worldview of centenarians. A study conducted by the authors in 2021 showed that members of Generation Z are often exposed to fake news. The publication of controversial information can both cheer them up and encourage them to check with reputable sources. Noting that misinterpreted news can cause panic in society, respondents identified several sections in which fake news most often appears - foreign and domestic policy, economy, and health care. Despite the rather high level of media literacy compared to representatives of older generations, one should not underestimate the possibilities of using fake news as tools of information influence in the digital environment natural to the younger generation. One of the measures to increase the protection of centinials from negative information influence is the introduction of the practice of factchecking - a system of fact-checking from various sources.

Centenarians are not ready to believe unverified information; moreover, a substantial part of them are eager to verify information important to them from several sources. But the perception of information as reliable depends not so much on the number but on the quality of sources. Without pretending to provide a complete description, the authors consider it necessary to point out a number of methods of disseminating fake news. These include, for example, the publication of inaccurate information in a source that is trusted by readers. After viral dissemination of this information in social networks and mass media, the original material is deleted so that the publication can avoid defamation charges, while numerous references to the falsehood continue to influence the information space. Another common technique is the use of digital diplomacy materials - the judgments of influential politicians. With the abundance of communication channels, it is possible to find a judgment that matches the goals and values of the fake news operator.

Here, in an objective presentation of the verifiable fact of the speaker's published judgment, it is possible to completely change the original message of the judgment by giving a different meaning through translation and/or interpretation. The publication of expert texts from well-known analytical structures is also often used as a

reflection of the official point of view of the authorities, while the expert expressed his opinion within the framework of an ongoing discussion in the scientific community. As we can see, to increase the resistance to destructive influence we need information centers - trusted specialized structures, where the verification of essential actual facts is concentrated and the nature of creation of this fact, authors and interested parties is revealed, as well as measures to prevent destructive forces spreading fake news are developed. Further - fact-checking centers.

In this context, it is important to study fact-checking practices that not only identify fakes in media space but also build critical thinking skills in people who are not affiliated with the professional or academic community. To develop factchecking as a tool for media education in Kazakhstan, it is necessary to analyze the similar experience of foreign countries.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the authors apply the information and communication method (ICM), which has positively proved itself in previous studies of Generation Z [1], [2] and others. Being a development of the structural-functional method, in the conditions of digital environment, the use of ICM allows to reveal the structure of communications in the functioning of network communities, interpersonal and intergroup interaction. Where the created and disseminated information serves to strengthen or break information ties.

I. The purpose of this study

The purpose of this study is to identify the effectiveness of factchecking as a means of increasing media literacy of centenarians in Kazakhstan. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were set:

- to consider the experience of normative-legal regulation of dissemination of inaccurate information in Kazakhstan.
- analyze the level of media literacy in the country.
- to characterize the available practices and methods of fact-checking.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The formation of Kazakhstan's international reputation is inextricably linked to the narratives published in the media and their reliability. The main direction in the country's journalism is considered to be informing the world community about the current political and economic situation and responding to citizens' requests in a timely manner. It is believed that the imposition of alien culture in modern conditions (especially in nation-states, whose multiculturalism is their main factor of development) contributes to the loss of the unique cultural code and self-consciousness of the country's citizens, which will allow

them to succeed without direct military action. Therefore, according to some authors, the mass media of Kazakhstan are alien to neutrality, because they need to form public opinion on national and state issues and educate people's consciousness in the spirit of patriotism. The state also faces the task of finding a balance between the protection of national security and the observance of constitutional rights and freedoms of citizens [3]. Solving the tasks of building trust between the state and young people, Generation Z, in the digital environment serves as a factor of stability and a guarantee of the country's development [4].

The special importance of fake-news became apparent in 2020-2021 - during the COVID 19 pandemic, when the spread of false information became so widespread that the process was labeled with the special term "infodemia" [5], [6].

Recognizing and filtering false information is becoming increasingly important. False information is understood as a method of psychological influence, consisting in the dissemination of information that is a deliberate distortion of information about the object, its motives and actions. Most often it exists in the form of rumors, allegedly confidential data not for general access and a combination of true and false information with an emphasis on the obviously conflicting side of the issue. The emergence of false information is closely linked to the communication regime of a society. The social meaning of the communication regime is to create social order and self-preservation of the existing system, but the influence on information flows by the political regime, legislation, mentality and values of society brings disorderliness into the information flows. This is especially characteristic of the communication regime of Central Asian countries and, in particular, Kazakhstan, which is characterized, on the one hand, by a low level of autopoiesis, the impossibility of rapid conflict-free switching between different modes of communication, and, on the other hand, by public consent and solidarity, and the demand for horizontal network relations with the authorities. That is why in Kazakhstan, after passing through two stages of media education development, the issue of media cooperation both within the country and with foreign partners is especially relevant [7]. The reforms of the second half of the 20th century aimed at developing information technologies in the country, as well as UNESCO's media education programs and the increasing number of contacts between researchers contributed to the creation of the state program "Information Kazakhstan", the school of socially responsible journalism and the institute of media standards.

The transformation of the global information space with the active participation of Kazakhstan has launched the process of convergence of journalism in the country. Its signs include partial diversification of the form of presentation of materials, transition to work in the mode of constant activity and expansion of the functions of a

journalist. The transformation of media consumption began in Kazakhstan with the emergence of permanent Internet access in the mid-2000s. Now the main consumers of media content are members of Generation Z, who are forming their own culture of behavior in the information society and influencing the main trends. At the same time, they receive a large amount of information, from which only the most relevant at the moment is selected. The processes of interactivity and convergence of the media with the target audience play a significant role in this. According to the 2015 study, television remains the main source of news, including political news, for centenarians, with informal network communities taking the second place. It is assumed that now social networks play a leading role in the process of information exchange. Current news from the socio-political sphere is preferred to discuss with their friends, peers and colleagues, which proves the need to implement fact-checking practices in the network space.

The study of contemporary media realities in Kazakhstan shows the active development of the media criticism segment. This is usually attributed to such factors as compliance with global trends in the development of mass media and mass media, protection of state information resources, development of professional media space and inclusion in the curricula of schools and universities of disciplines aimed at the development of critical thinking and autonomization of the individual in relation to the media. It is worth noting that information security in Kazakhstan is also regulated by legislative initiatives. Thus, in 2011 all resources on the domain “.kz” were transferred to the ownership of the country, and in 2017 the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kazakhstan recommended the installation of security certificates in the context of the Cyber Shield Kazakhstan program. Despite the fact that the country was one of the leaders in cybercrime, the news about the introduction of digital security certificates was perceived negatively by the society. In 2019, Kazakh President Kasym-Jomart Tokayev justified the absence of the need for digital security certificates by the fact that it was “proved the security of the information space of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the possibility of using a certificate only in cases of intrusion from the outside.” This fact proves the previously stated hypothesis about the request of Kazakhstan citizens for network dialog with the authorities.

RESULTS

The right of citizens of Kazakhstan to access to reliable information is ensured by republican normative and legal acts. Article 12 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan guarantees the observance of absolute human rights and freedoms, including freedom of speech, creativity and self-expression. These provisions are concretized in Article 20, which states that every citizen

has the right to freely receive and disseminate information by any means not prohibited by law, and propaganda of destructive actions and undermining national security is not allowed and is prosecuted by law [8].

State information policy and legal regulation of the media are described in more detail in Law No. 451-I of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On the Mass Media”. While establishing freedom of speech, receipt and transmission of information, the law prohibits the use of the mass media to disseminate information that does not correspond to reality and deliberately distort facts, arguments and opinions. The basic principles of media activities should be objectivity, reliability, legality and respect for the rights and freedoms of citizens. The seventh chapter, as amended on 28.12.17, establishes liability for violation of the legislation. It is imposed on officials of competent state bodies, owners of publications, as well as authors and disseminators of inaccurate information [9].

Article 274 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan regulates the types of punishment for the dissemination of knowingly false information. Thus, individuals may be punished by a fine of up to one thousand monthly calculation indices, community service of up to 400 hours or restriction or imprisonment for up to 1 year. If the crime was committed by a group of persons or a person who abused his official position, as well as if the media and telecommunications were used to disseminate inaccurate information, the fine increases to three thousand monthly calculation indices, community service - up to 800 hours, and the term of restriction or imprisonment - up to 5 years (up to 7 years in a state of emergency or hostilities) [10]. In connection with the increase in the number of fake publications in the Internet and mass media, the republic is considering the issue of toughening the punishment for knowingly false information. Taking into account the already existing experience in handling such situations, the researchers recommend the development of unified guidelines for verifying information, immediate response and refutation of false materials, the development of a professional standard for reporters and the introduction of fact-checking practices outside the professional journalistic environment.

It is worth noting that the Kazakhstani mass media reported such violations of legal norms of information dissemination as conflictogenic statements, violation of individual privacy, violation of copyright and misinterpretation of facts and opinions. These trends were especially pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of understanding of the scope of the disease at the initial stage caused information starvation, which, in turn, led to the spread of fakes and unconfirmed information. According to a survey of journalists and print and electronic media executives, news about the government's position on the pandemic and updates on the course of the disease received the most attention. The sources of news

were most often the Ministry of Health of Kazakhstan and medical service providers [11].

In order to form a unified public opinion on the issue of media literacy in the first months of the pandemic, an open poll was conducted on the topic “On the issues of introducing ‘media literacy’ in schools and universities”. According to its results, 78% of users believe that the number and speed of fake news spreading has increased with the development of social networks. That is why it is necessary for all users of social networks to distinguish fake news in the information flow. 68% and 67% of respondents voted in favor of introducing media literacy lessons in schools and universities, respectively. According to the majority of users, the effectiveness of the education received will be determined primarily by quality teaching materials, and the introduction of such a discipline will contribute to increasing the level of media literacy among young people [12].

The current state of the media sphere can be described as an era of post-truth and information noise. Media literacy in such conditions not only helps to correctly interpret news reports, but also to identify reliable sources of information. To determine the level of media literacy in Kazakhstan in 2019, a study was conducted with 245 people aged 18-68. Most of them have encountered unreliable information, and its source in half of the cases was the website Nur.kz. At the same time, a significant part of respondents find it difficult to identify fake news and double-check the information only if the news report arouses their interest. This may indicate the unpopularity of fact-checking techniques outside the professional community and the need to create accessible media education programs.

Kazakhstan currently has an average level of media literacy development. This is due to the fact that since the 2010s, only the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University has been training specialists in this area. Adapted Russian experience and the beginning of the publication of media education literature contribute to improving the situation in the professional sphere. There are three main areas of mass media education: training for university teachers and school teachers, training for the civil society as a whole, and training for children and young people in schools and higher education institutions.

Internet users from Kazakhstan are more inclined than respondents from other Central Asian countries to communicate in messengers and instant messaging services. Against this background, the level of media literacy of information exchange participants is high: on average, 45% to 70% of respondents in Kazakhstan are familiar with such concepts as fake news, information warfare, network addiction, computer viruses, plagiarism and kompromat. The average index of media literacy in Kazakhstan is 6.52 points out of 12 possible, with the highest scores in the criterion of efficiency and appropriateness of information use, and the lowest scores

in the criterion of the ability to protect oneself from malicious content. A study conducted in 2021 shows that most members of Generation Z living in Kazakhstan spend between 2 and 5 hours a day online. In a quarter of cases, media consumption time is more than 5 hours. The most relevant news topics for them are foreign and domestic politics, education and science.

Experts from Kazakhstan note that media literacy, while expanding people's rights and freedoms in the sphere of information, cannot exist in isolation from freedom of speech. According to Internews regional media literacy consultant G. Asanbayeva, developed skills of critical thinking and analyzing news reports are the key to public trust in the press and, consequently, in the agenda broadcast by the state. For this purpose, media and information literacy practices should be implemented at all levels of education [13]. One such initiative is the Central Asian media program MediaCAMP. Its main objectives are to improve the legal environment for the media and increase the number of literate consumers of content, including among schoolchildren and young people. This program has been implemented since 2019, and in 2021, within its framework, the first textbook on media literacy for university teachers in Kazakhstan was published in the Kazakh language [14].

Researchers from Kazakhstan distinguish 7 purposes of spreading deliberately false information characteristic of the media in the country: economic manipulation, fraud, spreading viruses and malware, scrambling Internet traffic, provoking unrest, discrediting a public figure and waging an information war based on discrimination. In order to develop media education and improve the professional competence of journalists, the MediaNet international journalism center was established in Kazakhstan in 2004. On its basis there are a media school, fact-checking agencies, a factchecking training academy, a bureau for express monitoring of public opinion, and a number of other projects [15]. The highest priority course of development is monitoring and filtering of fake news.

Fact-checking agencies Factcheck.kz and Stopfake.kz are actively working in this direction. From creating fact-checking methods for media professionals, these agencies have moved on to working with a wider audience and young people in the Central Asian region [16]. Among the main principles observed by the agencies are fairness and impartiality, timely response to the acute social conflict agenda, standardized verification and objectivity [17], [18]. Any user can help websites in checking the reliability of publications, and among the regular authors and editors of the Factcheck.kz project there are several students and graduates of Kazakhstani universities who have taken courses at the Factchecking Training Academy. In addition, to interact with active representatives of young people in Central Asia and to facilitate access to current factchecking techniques, an anti-factchecking game project has been developed, available in the web version

and in the application version [19]. In the future, all these measures should contribute to the involvement of centenarians in the factchecking process and the development of new methodological recommendations considering the specifics of media consumption of younger age groups.

CONCLUSION

Actualization of fact-checking methods taking into account regional specifics will allow this tool to become a basis for increasing the level of media literacy, including among the representatives of Generation Z. The existing legal and regulatory restrictions in the country, on the one hand, contribute to the non-proliferation of false information, and on the other hand, may restrict the actions of factchecking journalists. Despite the fact that Kazakhstan has an average level of media literacy of the population, the development and improvement of factchecking methods will reduce the level of information noise in the media field. In this context, work with young people - representatives of Generation Z - should be emphasized as a separate area. The development of media schools and media academies, the updating of training manuals and regular online monitoring will contribute to the involvement of young people in the process of creating a favorable digital environment, which in the long term will lead to an increase in the overall level of information literacy.

Recognition of the authenticity of a given fact, the truth of a given judgment to a greater extent depends on the trust of recipients of information to its senders. In this respect, nowadays in the Republic of Kazakhstan, after the referendum there is a favorable situation of relative public consent. The period of dynamic stability that Kazakhstan is entering should be widely used to increase media literacy among young people - Generation Z, which in turn will strengthen critical perception and resistance to the impact of fake news.

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