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# Why Media Literacy Is Gaining Disconfiguration in Central Asia: A Comparative Analysis

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**Abstract**

Different rates of development of digital media and new technologies in Central Asian countries entail a distortion of understanding of the importance of media literacy. The geographical proximity of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan does not become the basis for an identical preference for information sources, and the understanding of media literacy is very different. The article presents the results of a 2019 study conducted with the support of Internews on the use of media and the attitude of the local population to understanding media literacy. The study covers 3000 people from 14 to 65 years old. The results of the study show that a number of factors affect media literacy: access to new technologies, gadgets and the Internet, the economic situation of citizens, and the lack of systematic training in media literacy. The older the audience, the less awareness of such concepts as "plagiarism", "propaganda", "compromising evidence", "network addiction", "information war", "fake news". Not all citizens of these countries are willing to spend time clarifying or checking questionable information. Accordingly, from this we see that not all citizens understand the importance of media literacy in their lives and in general.

# Keywords: media, source of information, media literacy, Central Asia

**Introduction**

Media literacy is the most important skill of a modern person, which allows to navigate the media space. The ability to work with information and literacy in the field of perception, understanding, interpretation of media texts, that is, critical thinking, have become important for a person of the modern era.

The study reveals the structure of the media environment in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the preferences and expectations of the audience, as well as the self-assessment of the media information literacy of the audience. Based on the goals, the research tasks were formulated: identifying the structure of the media environment, audience expectations and preferences; Determination of popular sources of information (TV, radio, print media, Internet media, social networks) and the level of trust in them; Revealing preferences in various types of media and preferences for various means of access to media content (TV, radio, computer, mobile phone, smartphone, tablet); Determination of the state of media and digital literacy of the audience. When writing the article, the works of domestic and foreign authors about media literacy were used as a theoretical basis. (Albuquerque, 2015; Connie Nugent, Gilbert Berdine,2018; Freedman, Shafer,2011; Hasse, C.,2017; Horton, 2008; Stix, Jolls,2020)

**Research methodology**

The study covered citizens of these Central Asian countries from 14 to 65 years of age from the total number of citizens in each country: Kazakhstan - 66.5%, Tajikistan - 62.4%, Uzbekistan - 70%. 3000 people took part in the questionnaire survey: 1000 respondents from each specified country. By gender: 49% of men and 51% of women from ***Kazakhstan,*** 50.7% of men and 49.3% of women from ***Tajikistan***, 50.3% of men and 49.7% of women from ***Uzbekistan***.

Fieldwork was carried out in the period 20.07.2019 - 31.08.2019. The survey was conducted in the form of a personal interview with the respondent (face-to-face). The number of questions in the questionnaire was 50 questions + 11 socio-demographic parameters. The questionnaires were prepared in Kazakh / Tajik / Uzbek and Russian. A pre-test of the questionnaire was conducted in each country (20 interviews). When processing the survey results, the SPSS program was used.

**Findings**

The shares of sources of information about life in the country in the three countries are quite different. The share of TV in all three compared countries is the largest compared to other sources. If we compare the shares occupied by TV, in Kazakhstan this share is the smallest (59.6%) in comparison with Uzbekistan (77.1%) and Tajikistan (74.9%).

Kazakhstanis more often learn about the life of the country through the Internet: from Internet sites (52.8%) and from social networks (45.5%). The share of the Internet as a source of information about life in the country in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan is significantly less: in Tajikistan, information from Internet sites is received by just over a third of respondents (34.9%), in Uzbekistan - a quarter of respondents (25.5%). The share of respondents who consider social networks as a source of information in these two countries is also much lower than in Kazakhstan - in Tajikistan they are 12.6%, in Uzbekistan - 16%.

It is noteworthy that in Tajikistan there are much more respondents receiving information from print media (16.2%) and radio (22.3%) than in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, there is a noticeable decline in the role of print media and radio as a source of information about life in the country.

In Tajikistan (45.1%) and Kazakhstan (41.8%), the social circle (relatives, friends, acquaintances or work colleagues) is considered a source of information by a larger percentage of respondents than in Uzbekistan (17.9%).

***Table №1.***

***FROM WHAT SOURCES DO YOU GET INFORMATION ABOUT LIFE IN THE COUNTRY MOST OFTEN? (%)***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Answer options*** | ***Kazakhstan*** | ***Tajikistan*** | ***Uzbekistan*** |
| From television broadcasts | 59,6 | 74,9 | 77,1 |
| From Internet sites | 52,8 | 34,9 | 25,5 |
| From social networks | 45,5 | 12,6 | 16,0 |
| From other people, relatives, friends, acquaintances, or work colleagues | 41,8 | 45,1 | 17,9 |
| From newspapers, magazines | 10,3 | 16,2 | 9,9 |
| From radio broadcasts | 5,6 | 22,3 | 6,0 |
| Not interested | 0,3 | - | 0,2 |
| From books | - | - | 0,1 |
| at a loss to answer | 0,6 | 2,0 | 0,8 |

*\* The amount is not equal to 100%, because respondents could check several answer options.*

In terms of age, in Kazakhstan, the preference for information sources is differentiated by age. The older the respondent, the more often they named TV as a source of information, the younger - Internet sites and social networks. In the age category "14-18" the majority, and in the age categories "19-29", "30-45" more than half of the respondents turn to Internet sites as a source of information about life in the country. The share of social networks as a source of information about life in the country is also significant among respondents from the age categories “14-18” (61%), “19-29” (54%), “30-45” (49%).

Television as a source of information was named by less than half of the respondents in the age categories "14-18" and "19-29". Only one fifth of respondents aged 60-65 turn to Internet sites and social networks as a source of information.

From this we can conclude that Kazakhstani youth prefers Internet sites and social networks as a source of information, while the older generation prefers television.

In Tajikistan, the share of TV is high in all age categories. It is a source of information that most Tajiks turn to more often than other sources. Internet sites as a source of information are more often used by respondents from the age category "19-29" (44%), the share of social networks is low in all age categories and does not reach 15%.

In Uzbekistan, the majority of respondents in all age categories more often named TV as the main source of information. The share of TV is relatively low only among respondents in the age category "19-29" (66%), it is the respondents from this age category that more often turn to the Internet as a source of information about life in the country (39%). The share of respondents from the age categories "14-18" and "30-45", who called the Internet a source of information about life in the country, barely reaches a quarter of the respondents. Social networks as a source of information about life in the country were more often named by respondents from the age category “30-45”, however, for example, when compared with Kazakhstan, Uzbeks consider social networks as a source of information much less often (18%).

Thus, we see that in Kazakhstan, in comparison with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, in the age categories "14-18", "19-29" Internet sites and social networks as sources of information are much ahead of TV. And in the age category “30-45”, Internet sites and social networks are actively competing with TV and their share is not significantly inferior to TV. A significant part of the respondents from the 45-60 age category (45%) also use Internet sites as a source of information about life in the country. While in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan the share of TV is the largest and it leads in all age categories, both in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, respondents from the age category "19-29" most often turn to Internet sites as sources of information. In both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the popularity of social networks as a source of information about life in the country is low in all age categories.

In all three countries (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) in terms of frequency of use, TV is in leading positions. In Kazakhstan, half of the respondents (52.6%) watch TV every day, slightly more than a quarter of the polled Kazakhstanis (27.5%) watch it once or several times a week. A significant part of the respondents from Tajikistan (58.9%) also watch TV every day, one fifth of the surveyed Tajiks watch TV from one to several times a week. In terms of the frequency of use of TV products, Uzbekistan is the leader in the region - 78.8% of Uzbek respondents watch it every day.

Polls also show a decrease in the share of radio audiences in these three surveyed countries. Most of the respondents “never” listen to the radio at home. In all three countries, radio is more often listened to outside the walls of the house - in the car, in transport.

As for the frequency of Internet access, the respondents from Kazakhstan use the Internet much more often than the respondents from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan: in Kazakhstan, 69.9% of respondents go online through any device every day, in Uzbekistan - 42.3%, in Tajikistan - 30.4%. It should be noted that the share of respondents who never use the Internet in Uzbekistan (42.3%) and Tajikistan (33.2%) is quite significant.

The use of mobile communications in all three countries has become commonplace, most of the respondents in Kazakhstan (88.7%), Tajikistan (74%) and Uzbekistan (82.6%) talk on a mobile phone and smartphone every day.

The frequency of using a computer, laptop, tablet in the three countries is different. In Kazakhstan, the share of respondents using these devices every day is almost 2 times higher than the share of such respondents in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. If in Kazakhstan the share of respondents who do not use these devices “never” is one fifth of the respondents (20.7%), in Tajikistan they make up a third of the total number of respondents (32.7%), and in Uzbekistan - 64.5% .

***Activity of respondents in Internet***

Based on the answers to the question “ which of the following have you done on the Internet in the last month? ”, it can be seen that in Kazakhstan the activity of respondents on the Internet is much higher than in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. This applies to both entertainment, obtaining and searching for information, communicating in social networks, and such actions as paying for various services, buying goods and services, using Internet banking, electronic wallets, and receiving government services. In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the activity of a significant part of the respondents is more often associated with communication in social networks, finding and receiving information, entertainment; in these two countries, actions related to paying for utilities, managing a bank account, purchasing goods, services, tickets, paying for goods and services through e-wallet, receiving government services, is very low. In Uzbekistan, 42.2% of respondents over the last month (at the time of the survey), according to them, “did nothing,” the share of respondents who gave the same answer in Tajikistan was 32.5%.

***Internet availability***

42.2% of respondents in Uzbekistan, according to them, do not have the Internet - neither stationary nor mobile, in Tajikistan this answer was given by a third of the respondents (33.2%). The survey results show that Internet penetration in Kazakhstan is higher than in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan: 55.7% have mobile Internet, 29% have both stationary and mobile Internet. In Tajikistan, the most common mobile Internet, 62.5% of the respondents has it.

***Trust in sources of information***

Television is the leader in all three countries as a source of trustworthy information (Uzbekistan - 63.9%, Tajikistan - 55.1%, Kazakhstan - 45.9%). Information sites on the Internet in these three countries are much less trusted (Tajikistan - 20.9%, Kazakhstan - 17%, Uzbekistan - 13.2%). The percentage of respondents who trust other sources of information is very low in all three countries. The answer “there are no sources of information that I trust” was more often given in Kazakhstan (15.5%).

***Availability of devices, gadgets, etc.***

A television in all three countries is a device that is found in almost every household. A significant part of the respondents from Tajikistan have satellite dishes - 64.2% of the respondents own them. In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, there are almost 2 times less such respondents. Also, in all three countries, the prevalence of mobile phones and smartphones is very high; according to them, respondents from Kazakhstan are more likely to own smartphones (52.6%). Half of the respondents from Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, and a third of the respondents from Uzbekistan have computers and laptops. About a third of respondents from Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have tablets, only 16% of Uzbeks answered that they own a tablet. In terms of owning a personal, family library, respondents from Uzbekistan are noticeably ahead of Kazakhstanis and Tajiks. The radio receiver as a separate home device is not widely used in Kazakhstan (9.7%) in comparison with Tajikistan (34.5%) and Uzbekistan (19.8%). Uzbeks more often answered that they have video players and stationary devices for listening to audio recordings at home than respondents from Tajikistan and Kazakhstan.

We can say that in Kazakhstan, such devices as a radio receiver (as a separate device, not in a phone or car), a video player (cassette video recorder, DVD player or Blu-Ray player, digital video player), game console, set-top box, stationary device for listening audio recordings (radio tape recorder, tape recorder, music center), video camera (as a separate device, not in a phone, tablet or camera), an e-book reader (as a separate device) less than 10% of respondents own. Also, in Kazakhstan, only 9.3% of respondents have a home media library (audio and video recordings in any storage format: cassettes, discs, recordings on a computer's hard disk, etc.).

In Tajikistan, only 5.7% of respondents have a media library (audio and video recordings in any storage format: cassettes, disks, recordings on a computer's hard disk, etc.). Less than 10% of respondents from this country own devices such as a game console, the set-top box, the same applies to the share of respondents who own stationary devices for listening to audio recordings (radio tape recorder, tape recorder, music center), as well as devices for reading e-books (as a separate device).

In Uzbekistan, devices such as a game console, set-top box, a stationary device for listening to audio recordings (radio tape recorder, tape recorder, music center), an e-book reader (as a separate device), a video camera (as a separate device, not in a phone, tablet or camera) have less 10% of respondents (for each category).

In all three countries, the least common gadget is an e-book reader (as a standalone device), less than 5% of respondents own it.

***Internet skills***

Most of the respondents who answered that they know how to formulate search queries are in Kazakhstan (41%). A little more than a quarter of Tajiks and about a fifth of Uzbeks expressed confidence in this skill. More than half of the Tajiks surveyed are sure that they are able to collect information from various sources; among Uzbeks and Kazakhstanis, such respondents are noticeably fewer. A fifth of the respondents from Tajikistan can determine whether the information found on the Internet is correct and trustworthy, in their opinion. Also, a fifth of respondents from Uzbekistan believe that they are able to recognize indications that a certain TV program is suitable for children and adolescents. In other cases, the percentage of respondents who confirmed possession of the necessary skills was less than 20%. An important skill - to reveal hidden information about additional payments for the use of a service, is possessed by the smallest percentage of respondents in all three countries.

***Media literacy***

With regard to the issue of media and information literacy, respondents from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were asked whether they know about such concepts as "computer virus", "plagiarism", "propaganda", "compromising evidence", "network addiction", "Information war", "fake news".

With regard to age characteristics in individual countries, as the age category of Kazakhstani respondents increases, the percentage of those who know about viruses decreases. If 83.1% of respondents aged 14-18 know about computer viruses, among the respondents “61-65 years old,” they make up 47.8%. It should be noted that among those who answered that they knew about such concepts as "plagiarism", "propaganda", "compromising evidence", "network addiction", "information war", "fake news", the least respondents from the age category "61-65 years old". The greatest awareness of these concepts was expressed by respondents from younger age categories. Awareness of such concepts as "information war" and "fake news" in all age categories is relatively low.

The overwhelming majority of interviewed Uzbeks in all age groups do not know about such concepts as plagiarism, compromising evidence, the majority do not know about such concepts as information war, network addiction, fake news, a significant part do not know about the concept of propaganda. The greatest lack of awareness on all points is observed in the age group "61-65".

Most of the respondents from Tajikistan know what a computer virus is. The majority of Tajik respondents are not aware of plagiarism, fake news, as well as such concepts as network addiction and information war, compromising evidence. Awareness about them is low in all age groups, the lowest awareness is observed in the age group "61-65", comparatively higher rates among respondents from the age group - "19-29".

From this it can be concluded that most of the older generation in these three countries do not know the definition of these media terms. However, not all young people are aware of this.

***Information poisoning or garbage?***

In the age of development of information technologies and the Internet, the concept of "information poisoning" appeared, which is expressed in the disorientation of a person when a huge flow of information falls on him, inability to digest information. Slightly less than a third of respondents in Kazakhstan (30.7%) and Tajikistan (29.7%) answered that “it is often difficult for them to navigate this flow” of information. This answer was given only by 11.4% of respondents from Uzbekistan.

In Kazakhstan (44.4%) and Tajikistan (36.3%), the respondents who answered that they can easily navigate in the flow of information accounted for less than half of the respondents. In Uzbekistan, just over half of the respondents gave it.

A quarter of respondents from Uzbekistan (25.9%) do not see a problem in the large flow of information. In Kazakhstan (14.1%) and Tajikistan (16.1%) there are fewer such respondents.

A significant part of the respondents in all three countries are not observant in relation to the coverage of political events by various media. Such respondents in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan make up the majority, in Uzbekistan (58%) a significant share. A critical attitude to the coverage of political events by various media was most often demonstrated in Uzbekistan (39.5%). Only 24.5% of Kazakhstanis and 17.8% of Tajiks showed observation in relation to the coverage of political events by various media.

***Table №2***

**HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED AN OCCASION, WHEN THE SAME POLITICAL EVENT DIFFERENTLY COVERED IN THE VARIETY OF MEDIA SOURCES? (%)**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Answer options*** | ***Kazakhstan*** | ***Tajikistan*** | ***Uzbekistan*** |
| Yes  | 24,5 | 17,8 | 39,5 |
| Not | 70,1 | 69,0 | 58,0 |
| at a loss to answer | 5,4 | 13,2 | 2,5 |
| ***Total*** | ***100,0*** | ***100,0*** | ***100,0*** |

When watching TV, listening to the radio, reading newspapers and magazines, 39.1% of the polled Kazakhstanis have a feeling that they are being deceived - they are given deliberately false, unverified information or are trying to impose a certain point of view on them. The percentage of such respondents in Tajikistan (18.1%), Uzbekistan (11.3%) is much lower. In Kazakhstan, there is also a high percentage of those who found it difficult to answer this question - 27.2%.

When confronted with incomplete or questionable information, about a third of respondents from Tajikistan and Kazakhstan answered that they would use an Internet search, and 28.1% of respondents from Uzbekistan would do the same. We see that Internet searches to clarify and verify incomplete or questionable information are primarily used in all three countries. Secondly, in all countries, respondents check information through friends, relatives and acquaintances.

In Kazakhstan, when checking information, less than 10% of respondents resort to searching for information on television channels (8.6%), in newspapers or magazines (4.7%), and listening to news on the radio (3.5%).

In Tajikistan, in comparison with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, when checking news information, respondents more often look for confirmation on TV channels (17%), in print media (11%), radio (7.4%).

In Uzbekistan, 13.6% of respondents double-check information through searches on TV channels.

In Kazakhstan (44.1%) and Uzbekistan (41.4%), a significant part of the respondents will not waste time on clarifying and checking information that has raised doubts. There are fewer such respondents in Tajikistan - 25.4%.

From this we can conclude that in all 3 countries people will check dubious information for themselves, that is, they will be engaged in fact-checking. However, in all 3 countries, a certain proportion of the population does not want to spend time checking, thereby underestimating the importance of the fact checking, which is an integral part of media literacy.

**Conclusions.**

From the results of the study, it can be seen that despite the fact that Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are geographically close and are neighboring states, the preferences of information sources and media literacy of citizens of these countries are very different.

As we saw from the study, a number of factors and the availability of media tools affect the media literacy of the population. For example, the Internet. The respondents from Kazakhstan use the Internet much more often than the respondents from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. It is worth noting that the share of respondents who never use the Internet in Uzbekistan (42.3%) and Tajikistan (33.2%) is quite significant. Therefore, people who do not have access to the Internet cannot obtain information from foreign sources and are limited only to domestic media. And they have no way to compare the information received with foreign sources. Likewise, due to the lack of the Internet, people cannot make online purchases or use certain Internet services.

As it became known from the study, in all three countries people have televisions, satellite dishes, mobile phones and smartphones at home. That is, it suggests that people watch the news about the life of the country and are interested in. And we cannot call them completely media illiterate.

But the frequency of using a computer, laptop, tablet in the three countries is different. In Kazakhstan, the share of respondents using these devices every day is almost 2 times higher than the share of such respondents in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. If in Kazakhstan the share of respondents who do not use these devices “never” is one fifth of the respondents (20.7%), in Tajikistan they make up a third of the total number of respondents (32.7%), and in Uzbekistan - 64.5%. As we can see, there is a large proportion of those who do not use a computer, a laptop, a tablet in Uzbekistan. The authors suppose that this is not because they do not know how to use this technique, but rather because of the economic situation of citizens, since not everyone can afford to buy these techniques.

In all three countries, among those who answered that they know about such concepts as "plagiarism", "propaganda", "compromising evidence", "network addiction", "information war", "fake news", the least respondents from the age category "61-65 years old". The greatest awareness of these concepts was expressed by respondents from younger age categories. From this we can conclude that the younger generation, in comparison with the older generation, is more proficient in modern media terms.

Nevertheless, media literacy remains one of the most important aspects, since not all citizens of these three countries are willing to spend time clarifying or checking questionable information. Accordingly, from this we see that not all citizens understand the importance of media literacy in their lives and in general.

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