

Information or Manipulation: Media Literacy as a Critical Competence (A Qualitative Content Analysis of the *Medijska pismenost* Platform)

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Abstract

In order to adapt to changes in their environment, individuals should develop media literacy, both among audiences and media professionals, while fostering critical awareness. This paper examines the role of media literacy in the development of critical thinking within the contemporary digital media environment. The aim of the research is to analyze how a specialized educational platform, specifically the website *Media Literacy (Medijska pismenost - https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/)*, frames and constructs media literacy, critically interprets media content, and recognizes disinformation, manipulation, and fake news. In a digital environment characterized by content hyperproduction, critical thinking becomes a necessary mechanism of protection against disinformation and media manipulation. Therefore, the central research question of this study is: How does the *Medijska pismenost* platform conceptualize and operationalize media literacy as a pedagogical practice? The research focuses on the analysis of selected sections of the website *Media Literacy*. The methodological framework includes qualitative content analysis applied to selected educational texts dealing with media manipulation, disinformation, fact-checking practices, the role of the audience, and the critical interpretation of media messages.

Keywords: media literacy, critical thinking, media education, fact-checking

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Introduction

Modern society functions under conditions of constant exposure to media, as well as constant information production, where the boundaries between facts, manipulation, and disinformation are disappearing. The media are no longer merely

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intermediaries between events and the audience but active agents in shaping reality. In such an environment, an individual's ability to understand and critically evaluate media content becomes a key competency for the modern citizen. In this context, media literacy cannot be reduced solely to the technical skill of using digital technologies; rather, it involves a complex set of diverse abilities that enable a critical relationship with information and its sources. In this sense, media literacy represents the foundation for the development of any form of critical thinking. Based on these theoretical and social assumptions, this paper analyzes the relationship between media literacy and the development of critical thinking in the contemporary media environment. The paper proceeds from the premise that media literacy represents a key mechanism in building a responsible relationship toward media content; additionally, modern educational platforms play a crucial role in shaping media users in contemporary society. This study does not examine audience effects, but rather analyzes how media literacy is discursively constructed and pedagogically operationalized within a specialized educational platform.

Theoretical Framework: Media Literacy as the Foundation of Critical Thinking in a Digital Environment

Media literacy has been widely conceptualized as a critical educational competence. According to David Buckingham, media literacy involves "the ability to access, understand, analyze and evaluate media messages" (Buckingham, 2003).

Media literacy is widely recognized as an essential competency in contemporary digital societies. It generally refers to the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages across different formats and contexts. Scholars emphasize that media literacy enables individuals to critically interpret information, understand the processes of media production, and recognize potential manipulation within media messages. In an environment characterized by an overwhelming flow of information, these competencies become crucial for navigating complex media landscapes (Potter, 2008).

Critical thinking is closely connected to the concept of media literacy. It represents a form of reflective and self-directed thinking that allows individuals to evaluate information, question assumptions, and form independent judgments. Individuals who develop critical thinking skills are better equipped to interpret media content, recognize bias, and assess the credibility of different information sources. In this sense, media literacy supports the development of analytical competencies that enable audiences to distinguish between factual information and manipulative narratives.

Media literacy is also understood as a set of competencies that allow individuals to critically engage with media environments and participate effectively in democratic societies. As Livingstone argues, media literacy involves the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create messages across different media contexts (Livingstone, 2004).

The contemporary digital media environment is characterized by rapid information circulation, content hyperproduction, and increasingly blurred boundaries between facts, opinions, and manipulative communication. Within such a context, media literacy becomes a fundamental capacity for modern citizens. It is not limited to the technical ability to use media technologies, but also involves the cognitive and interpretative skills necessary for evaluating media messages and understanding their broader social context. As Hobbs (2010) explains, digital and media literacy involves the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using various forms of communication, highlighting its multidimensional character.

This multidimensionality indicates that media-literate individuals are not passive recipients of media messages but active participants in public communication. Media literacy therefore encompasses analytical, participatory, and ethical dimensions that shape how individuals engage with media content. Within democratic societies, these competencies contribute to more informed public participation and strengthen the ability of citizens to critically assess information circulating in the media sphere.

The expansion of digital media has also intensified the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and manipulative communication practices. The speed of online communication, algorithmic distribution of content, and participatory media environments enable misleading information to circulate rapidly across digital platforms. In such circumstances, media literacy becomes an essential mechanism for identifying disinformation strategies and evaluating the credibility of media sources.

Importantly, media literacy should not be understood solely as a technological competence. As Hobbs (2010) emphasizes, the educational benefits of digital technologies depend on the pedagogical frameworks through which they are applied. Without critical interpretative skills, technological tools may contribute to the spread of manipulation rather than to meaningful learning. For this reason, critical thinking is often described as a central component of digital and media literacy.

The connection between media literacy and democratic participation has also been highlighted in the literature. McDougall (2019b), drawing on earlier work by Hoggart, emphasizes that democratic societies require citizens who are not only literate but also critically literate in order to participate effectively in public life. From this perspective, media literacy represents not only an individual skill but also a social competency that enables citizens to engage responsibly in democratic communication processes.

In educational contexts, media literacy is closely related to the development of critical thinking abilities. Milošević (2023) emphasizes that critical thinking functions as an active interpretative mechanism through which individuals evaluate media messages and recognize negative media influences. The development of a critical relationship toward media content contributes to strengthening both critical thinking and media literacy competencies, indicating a mutually reinforcing relationship between these two concepts.

Furthermore, the absence of media literacy education may have broader social consequences. Without systematic educational efforts in this field, audiences may

become more vulnerable to manipulation, populist narratives, and disinformation campaigns. The ability to recognize emotionally charged messages, ideological framing, and populist discourse therefore represents an important dimension of media literacy in contemporary media environments. “Critical media literacy expands traditional media literacy by encouraging individuals not only to analyze media messages but also to examine underlying power structures, ideological assumptions, and economic interests embedded in media production” (Kellner & Share, 2007).

Scholars also link media literacy with civic engagement and democratic participation. Mihailidis (2014) argues that media literacy enables citizens to evaluate information more critically and participate more actively in democratic processes. Through the development of analytical and interpretative skills, individuals become better equipped to navigate complex information environments and engage in informed public discourse.

Overall, media literacy can be understood as a complex and multi-layered concept encompassing cognitive, social, and ethical dimensions. It involves not only understanding media content but also recognizing the interests, power structures, and potential effects behind media messages. In this sense, media literacy plays an important role in strengthening democratic culture and supporting informed public participation. Within contemporary digital environments characterized by information hyperproduction, media literacy represents a key mechanism for distinguishing factual information from manipulation and for developing critical thinking skills.

While existing literature emphasizes the importance of media literacy in combating disinformation, fewer studies examine how educational platforms operationalize these principles in practice.

Media Literacy as a Response to the Phenomenon of Disinformation

In contemporary digital environments, disinformation and fake news represent significant challenges for democratic communication and public understanding. The rapid expansion of digital media platforms has facilitated the widespread circulation of misleading and manipulative information, creating complex challenges for audiences attempting to evaluate the credibility of media sources.

In academic literature, these phenomena are often analyzed through the concept of “information disorder”, which encompasses different forms of problematic information, including misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation. This conceptual framework allows researchers to examine both unintentional inaccuracies and intentionally manipulative communication strategies that shape contemporary media ecosystems (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Within this context, media literacy has increasingly been recognized as a key strategy for addressing the challenges posed by disinformation. Rather than focusing solely on reactive mechanisms such as fact-checking, scholars emphasize the importance of developing critical competencies that enable individuals to evaluate information independently. McDougall (2019a) explains that media literacy should

be understood as a process of building resilience against information disorder by strengthening citizens' ability to analyze and interpret media content within broader social contexts.

The development of these competencies allows audiences to move beyond superficial assessments of credibility and instead engage in deeper critical reflection on the origin, intention, and construction of media messages. In this sense, media literacy functions as a preventive rather than purely corrective mechanism in addressing disinformation.

Research on disinformation further demonstrates that misleading information is often deliberately constructed to resemble legitimate journalistic content. Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2018) note that the phenomenon commonly described as "fake news" includes intentionally fabricated or misleading information designed to imitate credible news reporting. Such strategies complicate audiences' ability to distinguish between reliable information and manipulative narratives.

The digital media environment also shapes patterns of exposure to misinformation. Studies indicate that digital ecosystems, including algorithmic content distribution and social media networks, significantly influence how individuals encounter and interact with false information. In this context, media literacy can function as a protective factor that helps audiences recognize manipulation and critically evaluate information sources (Guess et al., 2020).

Further research highlights the importance of understanding disinformation within broader social and political contexts. Technological solutions alone are insufficient for addressing the structural challenges posed by manipulative information flows. As Lenoir and Anderson (2023) argue, effective responses to disinformation require a comprehensive understanding of the social, historical, and institutional factors that shape the production and circulation of misleading information.

Educational approaches therefore play a crucial role in strengthening resilience to disinformation. Pedagogical research indicates that media literacy programs can significantly improve individuals' ability to identify misleading information and evaluate media sources more critically (Adjin-Tettey, 2022). Such findings support the argument that media education can contribute to building long-term resistance to manipulative communication practices. "Research on misinformation also highlights the importance of media literacy in helping individuals critically evaluate misleading content and develop resilience to manipulative information online" (Vraga & Bode, 2017).

Within this perspective, media literacy should be integrated into broader educational frameworks rather than treated as a short-term intervention. McDougall (2019b) emphasizes that systematic media education within formal schooling can more effectively prepare young citizens to navigate complex information environments as opposed to reactive tools such as fact-checking mechanisms alone.

Ultimately, theoretical approaches to media literacy highlight its role as a comprehensive framework for understanding and responding to contemporary information challenges. By developing critical thinking skills and analytical competencies, media literacy enables individuals not only to identify inaccurate

information but also to understand the broader processes shaping media communication. As such, it represents an essential component of democratic participation in digital societies.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to examine how media literacy is conceptually presented and operationalized within educational digital platforms. Specifically, the research utilizes qualitative content analysis. QCA is particularly suitable for this study as the focus remains on the interpretation of educational media texts rather than the quantitative measurement of audience responses. This method allows for an in-depth examination of how media literacy concepts, critical thinking strategies, and representations of disinformation are articulated and framed within the analyzed platform.

The analysis focuses on the Media Literacy educational platform (*medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba*), developed by the *Raskrinkavanje* team as a resource to strengthen audience abilities to evaluate media content, recognize manipulation, and understand journalistic standards.

The research sample consisted of 11 purposively selected educational articles published on the *Medijska pismenost* platform. In order to enhance transparency and replicability, a complete list of analyzed texts, including URLs and dates of access, is provided in Appendix A. The selection of texts was guided by the following criteria:

1. Thematic relevance: The text explicitly addresses media literacy, disinformation, or fact-checking.
2. Educational purpose: The content is designed as instructional material for skill development.
3. Conceptual relevance: The text provides frameworks for the interpretation of media messages.

Based on these criteria, the analysis focuses on representative texts from the following key sections:

- “What Kind of Media Should We Have?”
- “How to Recognize Credible Media”
- “Basic Elements of Media Reporting”
- “Fake News”
- “Media Ethics”
- “Who Owns the Media and Why Is It Important?”

The analysis was conducted using deductive thematic coding. The analysis focused on several thematic categories, including representations of media literacy, references to misinformation, educational framing strategies, and approaches to critical thinking. An analytical framework was developed a priori, based on existing media literacy theory and the study’s research questions. The texts were systematically examined and categorized according to the following predefined dimensions:

1. Conceptualization of Media Literacy: How the platform defines the term and its necessity.
2. Strategies for Critical Thinking: Instructional methods used (e.g., verification techniques, deconstruction).
3. Representation of Disinformation: Explanations of mechanisms, actors, and economic/political motives.
4. Role of the Audience: Positioning of users as either passive recipients or active, critical interpreters.
5. Ethics and Transparency: Presentation of professional standards and ownership as markers of credibility.

During the coding process, textual segments were analyzed in relation to these categories to identify dominant narratives and interpret how the platform constructs media literacy as a necessary civic competence. This procedure enabled the identification of recurring interpretative patterns and dominant narratives through which the platform frames media literacy and critical thinking.

To ensure transparency and methodological rigor, a structured codebook was developed prior to the analysis. The coding framework was primarily deductive, based on established media literacy theory and aligned with the study's research questions. Each category was operationalized through clear definitions and applied systematically across the corpus. Table 1 presents the analytical categories, their purpose, coding logic, and unit of analysis.

Table 1
Analytical Codebook and Coding Units

Category	Operational Definition	Coding Logic	Unit of Analysis	Rationale
Conceptualization of media literacy	Statements defining media literacy and explaining its importance, purpose, or social role	Deductive	Paragraph	Derived from core media literacy definitions in the literature (e.g., Buckingham, Potter, Hobbs)
Critical thinking strategies	Pedagogical tools and step-by-step guidance encouraging verification, questioning, and analytical reading (e.g., 5W model, source checking)	Deductive	Segment	Focused on how critical thinking is operationalized in educational discourse
Representation of disinformation	Descriptions of fake news, manipulation, misinformation/disinformation, including causes, actors, motives, and consequences	Deductive	Segment	Based on "information disorder" approaches and disinformation scholarship
Role of the audience	Framing of the audience as passive, vulnerable, responsible, active, or participatory; references to user responsibility and civic engagement	Deductive	Paragraph	Connects to media literacy as civic competence and participatory literacy

Category	Operational Definition	Coding Logic	Unit of Analysis	Rationale
Ethics and transparency	Mentions of professional standards, journalistic codes, ownership transparency, accountability, and credibility indicators	Deductive	Segment	Based on normative media ethics and trust-building frameworks
Emergent interpretative patterns	Recurrent rhetorical framings or metaphors (e.g., “pirate media”, “real vs. fake media”) that were not predefined but appeared repeatedly	Inductive	Segment	Included to capture discursive patterns not anticipated in the initial theoretical framework

The coding process combined deductive application of predefined categories with limited inductive refinement, allowing recurring discursive patterns to be identified within the material. This approach ensured theoretical grounding while also preserving sensitivity to context-specific framings present in the platform’s content.

Since the analysis followed a single-coder research design, intercoder reliability was not calculated. However, consistency was ensured through iterative refinement of the coding categories and repeated close reading of the corpus, with coded segments continuously compared across texts to reduce interpretative inconsistency.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does the Media Literacy platform conceptualize the notion of media literacy?
2. What educational strategies are used to develop critical thinking among users?
3. How are disinformation and media manipulation represented within the platform’s content?

Based on the research questions, the study formulates the following analytical hypotheses, which are treated as interpretative expectations and remain open to partial confirmation or disconfirmation through qualitative content analysis.

H1: The study examines whether the Medijska pismenost platform frames media literacy primarily as a “critical filter” through which audiences are expected to evaluate the credibility and reliability of media content.

H2: The analysis explores whether the platform operationalizes critical thinking through instructional strategies of message deconstruction, particularly by emphasizing verification practices (source, context, and intention) and journalistic analytical frameworks such as the 5W model.

H3: The study investigates whether disinformation is framed as a systemic phenomenon connected to broader structural factors, including economic incentives, emotional manipulation, and the logic of attention-driven digital media environments.

Analysis of *Medijska pismenost* Website

Help in learning or in “finding” the truth can also be sought on the internet itself. Today, there are many websites dedicated to educating people in media literacy. For example, the website Media Literacy (<https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/>), provides educational materials aimed at strengthening users’ ability to critically evaluate media content. This website has been successfully run for years by Tijana Cvjetićanin, Emir Zulejhić, Darko Brkan, and Biljana Livančić Milić. This is the same team that edits and manages the Raskrinkavanje platform. Together with the rest of the team, they sign every text published on the site.

Additionally, it is important to note that the Media Literacy website is not an independent project, but functions as part of the Raskrinkavanje platform, which is run by the non-governmental organization *Zašto ne*, based in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina). The platform is not a traditional media outlet, but rather a civil society project with an educational function. It does not belong to either state-owned or commercial media. It is stated: “The Raskrinkavanje platform has so far been funded with the support of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the Embassy of the United States of America in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Center for the Promotion of Civil Society (CPCD), the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), the Open Society Foundation (OSF), the Balkan Trust for Democracy (BTD), and the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN). Since 2020, Raskrinkavanje has also participated in Facebook’s independent fact-checking program, which is another source of funding for the platform”. Funding is predominantly based on international donations, often from Western foundations rather than the state, which allows for relative independence from local political structures, but at the same time raises the question of the influence of donor priorities (donor agendas). All data on donations and funding are publicly available.

Raskrinkavanje is dedicated to verifying the accuracy of media information (so-called fact-checking), with a special focus on online media. However, fact-checking, although important, cannot be the only tool in the fight against falsehoods and disinformation. The best approach is to develop users’ ability to recognize them independently, along with creating “good habits” for navigating the media landscape – in other words, strengthening media literacy. This, as stated, was also the motivation for launching this website.

Given that it is based on experience in fact-checking, the Media Literacy website primarily focuses on informational media content (reporting) and does not aim to cover all aspects of media literacy. Its main mission is to transform the concrete knowledge and experience gained through exposing various media manipulations into content that will help readers develop a critical attitude toward media information. For example, if the credibility of a particular media outlet is in question – whether it has previously published fake news, disinformation, or unverified information – it is possible to search the Raskrinkavanje database.

Construction of “Real” and “Fake” Media, Normative Evaluation of Media Practices and Professional Codes

“What kind of media should we have?” The answer to this question serves as both a guide and a solution. Clearly defined parameters and adherence to positive practices reduce the possibility of manipulation. The section of the website titled “What kind of media should we have?” raises sub-questions that are answered through an analysis of a world in which all media compete for the audience’s attention. In the contemporary media ecosystem, as the authors call it, concepts such as ownership, quality, editorial practices, credibility, and the ethical responsibility of content become key to further interpretation. The analyzed texts explore how different factors – such as the use of original resources, verified sources, and respect for professional standards – shape the quality and reliability of information. Questions about who owns the information, how it is presented, and to whom it is directed form the basis for the critical evaluation of media and digital services.

The analyzed segment of the website shows a clear division of media into “real” and “fake”, “responsible” and “manipulative”, “professional” and “pirate”. This opposition creates an ideal type of media and desirable audience behavior. The texts do not view media as neutral channels of information transmission, but rather place them within a framework of political and economic influence and responsibility. Particular emphasis is placed on concepts such as the imprint (impressum), transparent ownership, and editorial accountability. In this way, a media outlet is not defined solely by its content, but also by its institutional structure and the context in which it operates.

In the analyzed text, “fake media” are not presented merely as unprofessional actors, but as those who abuse freedom of speech without assuming responsibility. The argument is based on a moral dichotomy: legitimate media enjoy freedom with responsibility, while fake media use freedom without responsibility. Thus, the issue of professionalism is expanded into a broader question of ethics and social responsibility.

Particularly significant is the metaphor of “pirates in the media market”, which portrays anonymous portals as unfair competition. This introduces an economic dimension to the analysis, namely profit generation through advertising. Fake media are therefore depicted not only as spreaders of disinformation, but also as disruptors of market balance by exploiting the work of others. Disinformation is defined as “a form of media manipulation based on facts, but misrepresented – which means it contains a ‘mix’ of facts and inaccurate information or half-truths” (Raskrinkavanje.ba, *Dezinformacija*⁴). Truth and objectivity are understood as fundamental elements of media reporting. In this way, the audience is encouraged to understand the broader structure of the media system, not merely individual pieces of content.

Ethics is introduced as a regulatory framework and professional standard, presented as the foundation of legitimacy. Self-regulation through journalistic codes

⁴ <https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/oblici-manipulacija-i-kome-se-obratiti-ako-ih-uocite/koji-sve-oblici-medijskih-manipulacija-postoje/dezinformacija/>

emphasizes accurate, precise, and relevant reporting in the public interest. It is considered through several dimensions:

Transparency – clear identification of sources and context;

Objectivity and neutrality – as the basis of credibility;

Responsibility for consequences – authors must anticipate the social impact of their content.

The audience is clearly called to responsibility: consuming unethical content means supporting it. The idea of market responsibility is introduced – every click becomes a political and ethical act.

Avoiding websites that publish inaccurate information is presented as the most effective way to combat unethical practices.

The Role of the Audience, Verification, and the Political-Economic Context

One of the platform's main goals is to translate general principles into concrete, verifiable steps, thereby fostering the development of critical thinking among the audience. For example, users are encouraged to check for the existence of a legal notice, examine ownership transparency, distinguish between international and national domains, and use tools such as DomainTools, Who.is, and Facebook content analysis via CrowdTangle. In this way, the authors provide practical steps for verifying the authenticity of information.

Source authentication refers to verification processes in which information coming from reliable or verified sources (experts, academic publications, relevant statistical data) is considered credible. Therefore, media credibility is not assumed – it must be verified. At the same time, part of the responsibility is transferred to the audience, which is seen as an active participant. The text emphasizes that the audience is not a passive victim of manipulation, but actively participates in the creation and analysis of content. Interaction with content – through comments, sharing, and critique – represents an informal form of verification. As stated, “an audience that chooses to read and watch such content sends a message that unethical, sensationalist, and misleading journalism pays off” (Raskrinkavanje.ba, *Šta je medijska etika?*⁵).

The segment dedicated to the “5W” model represents an important analytical element. Media content is evaluated through selection, and the insistence on the questions “what, where, when, who, and why” functions as a filter for assessing credibility. Media literacy is thus operationalized through classical journalistic standards.

The application of the “5W” model indicates a systematic approach:

Who – identifying the author, institution, or organization;

What – determining whether the content is reporting, interpretation, or analysis;

When – assessing timeliness and relevance;

Where – defining the geographical context;

Why – examining the purpose of publication.

⁵ <https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-biti/kako-prepoznati-kredibilnost-vijest/sta-je-medijska-etika/>

The text is broken down into the elements of a news report, and key unanswered questions are identified. This strategy has strong educational potential, as it provides users with a framework for evaluating information and encourages critical thinking.

The political-economic dimension of ownership and control of information is a particularly valuable part of the analysis, as it relates directly to transparency in media ownership. As stated, media owners can influence editorial policy and thereby place political or economic interests above professional reporting. In this way, ownership itself directly affects public opinion and shapes it in accordance with political or economic agendas, potentially undermining the public interest.

Media literacy is thus expanded from content analysis to the analysis of power structures. A distinction is made between personal and institutional ownership of content. The quality of information depends not only on the author, but also on the producer of the content and the dominant standards within the media environment. The dimension of ownership plays a key role in controlling information.

Results

The analyzed segment of the platform demonstrates several key characteristics:

1. Media literacy is defined as a set of concrete tools for verifying credibility.
2. The audience is portrayed as an active subject capable of critical analysis.
3. Professional media are defined through transparency, accountability, and institutional frameworks.
4. Fake media are presented as a problem linked to economic interests and political manipulation.
5. Ethics and ownership are treated as equally important as content.

This suggests that the platform does not merely promote the identification of falsehoods but develops a broader model of critical competence that includes understanding media economics, professional standards, and political context.

Two key conclusions emerge from the analysis:

1. The interaction of professional standards and transparency increases trust—authorial accountability and clear source attribution reduce opportunities for manipulation. Anonymity is identified as an early warning sign.
2. The audience as a regulator—participation by end-users enables additional content verification, though it may also introduce bias or manipulation, requiring critical monitoring and moderation.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the digital age, critical thinking is no longer merely an intellectual virtue but a fundamental mechanism for survival in an environment characterized by informational chaos. The analysis of the Media Literacy platform indicates that the

fight against disinformation cannot be won solely through fact-checking, but requires the education of individuals. The platform's educational value lies in clarifying the processes behind the production of media content.

When audiences understand that news is not a “natural phenomenon” but a constructed product shaped by specific intentions, their sensitivity to manipulation increases. Responsibility is thus distributed: media must adhere to professional codes, while audiences must consciously influence content consumption.

Based on the qualitative content analysis, the findings suggest the following:

H1 (supported): The platform largely frames media literacy as a “critical filter” based on constant verification practices. The emphasis on credibility assessment indicates that users are encouraged to approach media content with caution and evaluate information before accepting it as valid.

H2 (supported): The analysis indicates that critical thinking is primarily operationalized through strategies of message deconstruction. Through tools such as the 5W model and step-by-step verification guidelines, the platform promotes an analytical approach to news consumption and encourages users to identify missing information, unclear sources, and manipulative framing.

H3 (supported): The findings show that disinformation is frequently presented as a systemic issue rather than an isolated problem. It is framed as a phenomenon shaped by economic motivations, sensationalism, and emotional exploitation, which are linked to the attention-based logic of the digital media market.

Future research could proceed in several directions:

- **Comparative analysis** – Comparing regional platforms (e.g., Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro) to identify best practices in educational models.
- **Quantitative evaluation of effects** – Conducting empirical research to measure improvements in users' skills after engaging with educational platforms.
- **The role of artificial intelligence** – Examining how media literacy platforms can educate audiences about recognizing deepfake content and AI-generated disinformation.

The findings indicate that media literacy plays an important role in shaping more informed and critically oriented attitudes toward media content. In contemporary digital environments where information and manipulation are increasingly intertwined, critical awareness becomes a key protective competence for navigating media content.

Media literacy should be understood not as a fixed achievement, but as a continuous learning process shaped by changing media practices and technologies. The development of critical awareness contributes to strengthening the quality of public communication by supporting more responsible media consumption and reducing vulnerability to sensationalist and misleading content. Educational platforms of this type represent a valuable resource for strengthening media literacy

competencies; however, the practical application of these skills ultimately depends on individual users and their broader media environment.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it focuses on a single educational platform, which limits the generalizability of the findings and does not capture the diversity of media literacy initiatives across different contexts. Future research could address this by adopting a comparative approach.

Second, the study relies exclusively on qualitative content analysis and therefore examines the discursive and pedagogical construction of media literacy rather than its actual effects on audiences. It does not provide insight into how users interpret or apply the presented concepts in practice. Audience-based methods, such as interviews or surveys, could complement this approach.

Third, the analysis was conducted by a single coder, which limits the assessment of intercoder reliability. Although consistency was ensured through systematic coding and iterative refinement, a degree of subjectivity remains inherent in qualitative analysis.

Finally, the rapidly evolving nature of digital media environments means that platform content and disinformation practices may change over time, potentially affecting the longer-term relevance of the findings.

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Appendix

Corpus of Analyzed Texts

N=11	Title	URL	Topic / Focus
1	Media literacy portal	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/	General media literacy overview
2	What should the media be like?	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-bit	Characteristics of good media
3	How to recognize credible media	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-bit/kako-prepoznati-vjerodostojne-medije	Identifying trustworthy media
4	Difference between real and fake media	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-bit/kako-prepoznati-vjerodostojne-medije/koja-je-razlika-izmedu-pravih-i-laznih-medija	Comparing authentic vs. fake media
5	Who owns the media and why it matters	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-bit/kako-prepoznati-vjerodostojne-medije/u-cijem-suvlasnistvu-mediji-i-zasto-je-to-vazno	Media ownership and influence
6	How to recognize credible news	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-bit/kako-prepoznati-kredibilnu-vijest	Identifying credible news articles
7	Basic elements of a media report	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-bit/kako-prepoznati-kredibilnu-vijest/koji-su-osnovni-elementi-medijskog-izvjestaja	Components of a media report
8	Basic types of media texts	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-bit/kako-prepoznati-kredibilnu-vijest/koji-su-osnovni-tipovi-medijskih-tekstova	Types of media content

N=11	Title	URL	Topic / Focus
9	What is media ethics?	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/kakvi-mediji-trebaju-biti/kako-prepoznati-kredibilnu-vijest/sta-je-medijska-etika	Principles of ethical journalism
10	Fake news	https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/oblici-manipulacija-i-kome-se-obratiti-ako-ih-uocite/koji-sve-oblici-medijskih-manipulacija-postoje/lazna-vijest/	Forms of media manipulation
11	Analyses of articles categorized as dissemination of false news	https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analize-sa-clancima-kategorisanim-kao-prenosenje-laznih-vijesti	Case studies of fake news

Informacija ili manipulacija: Medijska pismenost kao kritička kompetencija (kvalitativna analiza sadržaja platforme *Medijska pismenost*)

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Sažetak

Promenama u svom okruženju čovek bi trebalo da se prilagodi – medijskim opismenjavanjem i publike i medija uz razvijanje kritičke svesti. Ovaj rad ispituje ulogu medijske pismenosti u razvoju kritičkog mišljenja u savremenom digitalnom medijskom okruženju. Cilj istraživanja je da analizira način na koji specijalizovane obrazovne platforme, konkretno veb-sajt *Medijska pismenost* (*Medijska pismenost*), konceptualizuju medijsku pismenost, kritički pristupaju interpretaciji medijskih sadržaja, identifikuju dezinformacije, manipulacije i lažne vesti. U digitalnom okruženju, koje karakteriše hiperprodukcija sadržaja, kritičko mišljenje postaje nužan mehanizam zaštite od dezinformacija i manipulacije medijskim sadržajem. Zbog toga se postavlja ključno pitanje ovog istraživanja, a to je: „Na koji način platforma *Medijska pismenost* konceptualizuje i operacionalizuje medijsku pismenost kao pedagošku praksu?“ Istraživački fokus rada je analiza segmenata sajta *Medijska pismenost* (<https://medijskapismenost.raskrinkavanje.ba/>). Metodološki okvir obuhvata kvalitativnu analizu sadržaja, primenjenu na odabrane edukativne tekstove koji se bave medijskim manipulacijama, dezinformacijama, fact-checking praksama, ulogom publike i kritičkom interpretacijom medijskih poruka.

Ključne reči: Medijska pismenost, Kritičko mišljenje, Medijska edukacija, Fact-checking

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