

Review

Developing Digital Skills for Ethical Media Use

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Abstract

Professional success and personal empowerment for our students, in today's increasingly digital environment, depend on having strong digital abilities and knowing how to use media in an ethical manner. Digital skills are the aptitudes needed to use digital tools and technologies efficiently. The abilities required to handle the complexities of technology are changing along with it. These modifications put the fundamentals of media ethics at jeopardy. The problem is more complex than arguments over certain principles, like objectivity. The problem is more complex than particular issues, such how newsrooms can confirm citizen-generated information. Assumptions must be reconsidered in light of the rapid changes. In a reality, where everyone with a modem is a publisher and fast news and analysis are required, what does ethics mean? This article explores the definition of digital skills, their significance in today's society, the ethical considerations surrounding media consumption and production, and practical strategies for fostering these skills to our students, that will be the future teachers and educators. It also brings data protection information and recent statistics relevant to Albania, presenting a comprehensive overview

of the need for developing these digital skills for ethical media use while ensuring that every one is informed about their data protection rights.

Key Words : *Digital Skills, ethical media, media consumption, curriculum, ethical considerations.*

Introduction

The rapid advent of digital technologies has transformed how individuals access, share, and create media content. According to a report by the Pew Research Center (2021), 72% of Americans use social media to access news, while 53% of U.S. adults say they frequently encounter fabricated news stories. This highlights an urgent need for developing powerful digital skills to handle difficult circumstances filled with misinformation and manipulation. In Albania, the digital terrain is equally dynamic, with approximately 76% of the population using the Internet in 2022 (Institute of Statistics, Albania, 2022). However, this connectivity is accompanied by challenges related to misinformation and inadequate data protection measures. As Albanian users engage with media content, they must develop the digital literacy, critical thinking skills,

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and ethical awareness necessary for responsible digital citizenship. As users engage with media content, teachers and students must become proficient in digital literacy, critical thinking, and ethical considerations to participate constructively in society and in labor market.

The Importance of Digital Skills for Ethical Media Use

A study by the European Commission (2019) indicated that only 54% of Europeans have basic digital skills, with significant disparities across age groups and geographical regions. This lack of digital literacy compromises their capacity to navigate the media landscape effectively. This deficiency is exacerbated by rural-urban disparities, as nearly 60% of rural youth lack access to essential digital literacy training, in Albania. Research conducted by the Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS) in 2021 indicated that only 42% of high school students reported having adequate digital skills, highlighting a significant gap in media literacy.

The Role of Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is essential for ethical media use, enabling individuals to assess the reliability and validity of the information they encounter. Research conducted by Stanford University (2016) found that 82% of middle school students could not distinguish between a sponsored post and a news article, illustrating a critical gap in critical thinking skills. Furthermore, the same study revealed that college students exhibited similar patterns of vulnerability to misinformation. Only 34% displayed the ability to recognize the bias in information sources. This demonstrates that educational interventions must focus on fostering critical thinking as a cornerstone of digital literacy. In our country, the need for improved critical thinking skills is evident; only 35% of the population could correctly identify biased information sources in a survey conducted by AIIS in early 2023. This highlights the pressing need for educational interventions focused on developing critical thinking.

Ethical Considerations in Media Use and Data Protection Awareness

Ethical media use involves understanding the implications of sharing and creating content. With approximately 1 in 5 Americans (20%) reporting experiences of online harassment (Pew Research

Center, 2021), issues of digital ethics, such as data privacy and the impact of online behavior, require immediate attention. According to a study by the Data & Society Research Institute (2017), 65% of participants reported feeling that social media platforms are not transparent about their content moderation policies, further complicating ethical interactions with media. In recent years, Albania has taken strides to improve its data protection framework, notably through the adoption of the Law on Personal Data Protection in 2018, which aligns with EU regulations.

According to a survey conducted by the Albanian Institute for Media Studies (2023), 72% of respondents expressed concerns about their personal data being misused online. Additionally, only 52% of respondents claimed to have a basic understanding of their rights under the data protection law. This indicates an urgent need for educational initiatives focusing on data rights and privacy.



Strategies for Developing Digital Skills Educational Interventions

Educational institutions play a crucial role in developing digital skills for ethical media use. The National Association for Media Literacy Education advocates for programming that equips students to "access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in various forms." The National Agency for Information Society in Albania has initiated projects aimed at integrating digital literacy into the school curriculum.

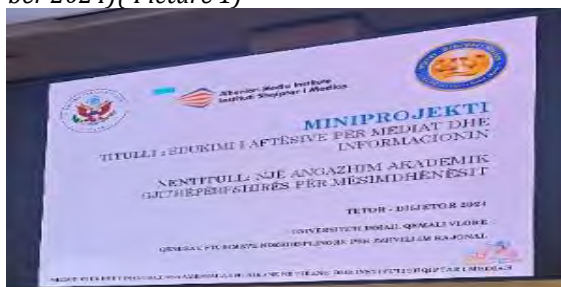
To achieve this, the following strategies should be implemented:

Curriculum Design: Integrating digital literacy and critical thinking into core subjects can provide authentic learning experiences. In countries like Finland, schools have successfully integrated media literacy into their national curriculum, leading to improved student outcomes in critical thinking and digital citizenship (Finnish National

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Agency for Education, 2016). In Albania, according to the latest news from ASCAP, starting from the coming school year, Media education will be included in all the high schools curricula as an interdisciplinary subject. To be added here, even at our Faculty, it is approved by the academic senate of UV and MAS, that Media education should be part the academic curricula, for all teaching MA programs, by adopting models used in Finland, where media literacy is integrated into the national curriculum, leading to improved outcomes in critical thinking and digital citizenship (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2016).

-Workshops and Training for Educators: Offering comprehensive training programs for teachers can enable them to impart digital and media literacy skills effectively. A meta-analysis by the Brookings Institution (2020) indicated a direct correlation between teacher training in digital literacy and student performance in evaluating online information. A 2021 study revealed that teacher training directly impacts student performance in evaluating online information and understanding data privacy. A very effective training project, needs to be mentioned here. It was presented & developed by the U.V, American Embassy and the Albanian Institute of Media. Some departments of the Faculty of Technical Sciences and the Department of Foreign Languages, integrated their ambitions, efforts and skills in finalizing this Project, titled: *"The Training of Media & Information Skills for Teachers"*(October-December 2024)(Picture 1)



Picture 1 "The Training of Media & Information

Skills for Teachers"(October-December 2024)

The students being involved in this project were students of the third year BA program, and MA second year students.



(Picture 2)MA students during the mini project

The final step of this training project was the National Conference on : *"The Training of Media & Information Skills for Teachers"* organized on December 2, 2024 at the University of Vlora. There were six lecturers on the conference, discussing topics on:

- Media Education and Ethics
- Digital Skills and Data protection
- Curriculum Design and media literacy
- The challenges of digital world and AI use in teacher training...etc.

(Picture 3) National Conference on Media Education & Training



- Community Engagement

Community organizations can offer targeted programming to enhance digital skills across age groups:

- Youth Programs: The YMCA's Youth and Government program has successfully educated young people about digital rights and responsibilities, resulting in 75% of participants reporting increased awareness of ethical media practices (YMCA, 2021).

- Adult Education: Initiatives such as public library workshops that focus on identifying credible sources and fact-checking have proven effective, with study populations reporting a 50% increase in awareness of misinformation after attending such workshops (American Library Association, 2019).

- Collaborative Efforts

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Collaboration among stakeholders enhances resources and support for digital skills development:

-*Partnerships with Tech Companies:* Initiatives like Google's "Be Internet Awesome" aim to teach children the fundamentals of digital safety and citizenship, reaching over 10 million children globally since its launch (Google, 2021). Collaborating with tech companies can amplify efforts focused on ethical media use. These could be tailored to the Albanian context to teach children about digital safety.

- *Policy Development:* Promoting policies that integrate digital literacy into national education frameworks is essential. The European Digital Education Action Plan promotes digital literacy as a fundamental skill across member states, with ambitions to improve digital skills for 70% of the population by 2025 (European Commission, 2020).

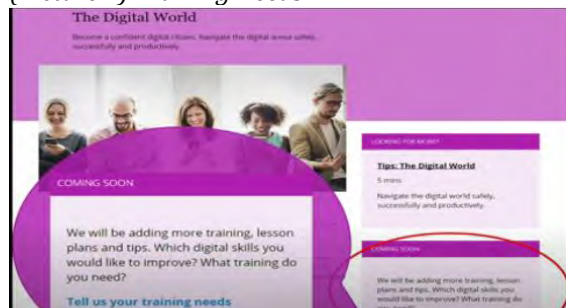
The Role of Teachers and Educators

Educators play a pivotal role in shaping students' understanding of media education and ethics. Key responsibilities include:

- **Continuous Professional Development:** Engaging in training programs that focus on new technologies and their implications for education.
- **Creating a Supportive Environment:** Fostering a classroom culture that encourages questions, exploration, and critical thinking.
- **Modeling Ethical Practices:** Demonstrating responsible media consumption and production to instill similar values in students.
- **Collaborating with Technology Experts :** Collaborating with technology organizations and experts can greatly enhance media education. Benefits include:
 - **Access to Resources:** Providing educators with tools, software, and educational materials that support media literacy.
 - **Workshops and Training:** Hosting events that bring together educators and tech professionals to share insights and best practices.
 - **Real-World Connections:** Creating opportunities for students to engage with industry professionals, gaining practical insights into the interaction of AI and media.
 - **Promoting Ethical AI Use:** Ethical AI use is crucial in media education. Key topics to cover include:

- ✓ **Data Privacy and Security:** Teaching students the importance of protecting personal data and understanding privacy settings.
- ✓ **Critical Media Consumption:** Encouraging students to question the motivations behind media messages and the role of AI in shaping these narratives.
- ✓ **Responsible Content Creation:** Fostering an understanding of copyright, intellectual property, and ethical storytelling practices.
- ✓ **Engaging Parents and Communities-** Engaging parents and communities in media education initiatives is essential for fostering a supportive environment. *Strategies include:*
 - a. *Workshops for Parents:* Hosting sessions that educate parents about media literacy and the challenges of the digital age.
 - b. *Community Initiatives:* Collaborating with local organizations to promote media literacy programs and resources for families.
 - c. *Open Communication:* Encouraging dialogue between schools and families about the importance of media literacy and AI education.

(Picture 4) Training Needs



Albanian Context:

Community organizations in Albania, too can offer targeted programming to enhance digital skills and data protection awareness across various initiatives such as the "Youth Connection" program by the Ministry of Education aims to teach young people about digital rights, responsibilities, and the ethical implications of online behavior. Such programs could facilitate discussions on data privacy, helping enhance awareness among youth.

Public Workshops and Seminars: Local NGOs and libraries could host workshops to educate adults about identifying credible sources and understanding their data protection rights. A community survey showed that participants of such initiatives reported a 40% increase in awareness of

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their data *protection rights and online safety protocols*.

Collaborative Efforts - Collaboration among various stakeholders enhances resources and support for digital skills development and data protection awareness:

Policy Development - By aligning with EU standards, Albania can foster a culture of privacy and security. The Ministry of Justice's continued work on enhancing data protection legislation is a step in that direction, but public awareness must keep pace.

Nearly 60% of rural youth lack access to essential digital literacy training. A report by the Albanian Media Authority (2022) found that 65% of Albanians believe they have encountered disinformation online, raising concerns about the effectiveness of public media education efforts. The need to improve critical thinking skills is evident; only 35% of the population could correctly identify biased sources of information in a survey conducted by AIIS in early 2023. This highlights the urgent need for educational interventions focused on developing critical thinking. In recent years, Albania has taken steps to improve its data protection framework, notably through the adoption of the Law on Personal Data Protection in 2018, which is in line with EU regulations.

(Picture 5) Prompts suggested for the students



Questions about these prompts:

- Who will be able to see the data we enter on the website?
- Do these data support teaching or learning?
- Does it provide support? Is it safe?
- Is the website secure?
- How long is it going to be available?

Conclusion

The digital age endorses a new set of skills and ethical considerations for media use. By fostering digital literacy, critical thinking, and ethical responsibility, we can build a society better equipped to engage with media constructively. Implementing educational interventions, community engagement initiatives, and collaborative

efforts involving various stakeholders is crucial to empowering individuals, particularly in Albania, to navigate the complexities of digital media responsibly. As highlighted by recent statistics and reports, prioritizing these skills will create a more informed and ethically conscious society, ready to face the challenges of the digital world. Media education must address these challenges, teaching students how to critically evaluate sources and understand the influence of algorithms on their information consumption and data protection.

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