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EDUCACIÓN • EDUCAÇÃO • EDUCATION

Vol. 39 (# 20) Year 2018. Page 1

Media education and democracy

Educación mediática y democracia

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Received: 20/03/2018 • Approved: 18/04/2018

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ABSTRACT:

This paper contains an attempt to evaluate the relation of democracy and media education from the perspective of contemporary political, information and communication situation. Modern examples of election campaigns illustrate the media technologies that are used by the elite in relation to the audience who are illiterate in the field of media. The article brings about the issues of compliance of the declared postulates of media education with real media practice in the first quarter of the XXI century. The concept of "media education policy" is introduced into scientific discourse, and the features of its implementation are considered.

Keywords: media education, democracy, mediacracy, media-democracy, freedom of speech, information access.

RESUMEN:

Este documento contiene un intento de evaluar la relación de la democracia y la educación mediática desde la perspectiva de la situación política, de información y comunicación contemporánea. Los ejemplos modernos de campañas electorales ilustran las tecnologías de los medios que son utilizadas por la elite en relación con la audiencia que es analfabeta en el campo de los medios. El artículo plantea los problemas de cumplimiento de los postulados declarados de la educación mediática con la práctica real de los medios en el primer cuarto del siglo XXI. El concepto de "política de educación en medios" se introduce en el discurso científico y se consideran las características de su implementación.

Palabras clave: educación en medios, democracia, mediacracia, democracia mediática, libertad de expresión, acceso a la información.

1. Introduction

The development of the media as a means of communication channels has a long history. Reflections on the media start with antiquity and continue to the present day. In the Middle Ages the word "medium" was related to such concepts as magician, sorcerer, oracle, priest, wizard, voodoo, shaman. In various European languages the word "medium" has many meanings: an easily suggestible man; means of communication; mediator; the middle class representative; the surrounding reality; as well as – the public life, free speech, something which is in the public domain.

Historically, the word "media" appeared in English in the XVI century to refer to people who served as a link between the two worlds: the material world and the spiritual world. In the XVII century the concept migrated to the language of philosophy, and was treated as a

medium, broadcast, the sphere which forms new meanings.

Since the XVIII century the term "media" started to be applied to newspapers which appeared then, and later - to journals. The zenith of the media was in the era of technological revolution, in the period of the invention of electric communications. Since the middle of the XIX century the concept of media refers to the propagation of messages by technical means of communication (electric media - the telegraph, the radio, the telephone). The whole XX century passes by under the sign of the mass media, the Means of Mass Communication, and the term "media" is narrowed to the category of mass communication.

However, in the XXI century, we return to the idea of universal media that penetrate all the elements of the global information system. Nowadays, this concept is used in urban planning, in the areas of science such as psychology, sociology, culture, education, environment, etc.

We are talking about the involvement of media in everyday life, social processes and institutions which are nowadays impossible to consider without the medial components. "We live in the society filled with technologies that connect people with myriads of different ways of mediated communication, and "saturated" with meanings which every day and every moment are produced/ consumed by modern media" (Kolomiets, 2014, p. 18).

Today, we realize "all that is "given" to us in perception, communication and knowledge – is given by the media" (Alieva et al., 2013). This approach is enshrined in the works of the Russian media researcher V.V. Savchuk, who formulates the modern concept of media reality as "everything is the media, or media ergo sum" (Savchuk, 2013, p. 93-95).

2. Materials and methods

Repeatedly intersected, means of communication create the media environment crafted by man. They, like blood vessels, permeate the entire social body, all the spheres of our life, this is not something distant from the individual or the community, and it is an integral part of the whole. As the Russian researcher, the European Union expert Sergey Zuev remarks, "the information flow permeates the space, it is the quintessence, like the force of gravity. Just as it is impossible to imagine the modern world without the gravity, studied by Newton, it is impossible to imagine the modern world without the lines of force penetrating it and creating the information flows" (How Facebook plans ...).

Moreover, the person becomes a media, skipping through itself the flow of information, transforming them and speaking in turn, the source of new information flows.

To understand the nature of the media we should highlight their dynamic nature. Media - is not a static objectivity, existing only in the material world, but it is the ever-changing content configuration, depending on various factors, it is a tool of multi-functional activities, such as communication. A messenger who delivers good or bad news; a pigeon that brings the expected message; a private diary of auto-communication or a technological gadget for networking - all these are information transportation options, which are relevant only in the case of information flows (Barlow, 1999, p. 65-69).

3. Results and discussion

Gradually, step by step, the humanity was starting to understand the necessity of studying the media and their effective use. For example, in the era of the Arab Caliphate (VII-IX centuries) it was believed that the scriptures bore the wisdom, and their storage - libraries - is the home of wisdom, the house of science (Volodin, 2004, p. 68-73). In the era of the Reformation writings, books began to carry out a special educational function of the distributor of scientific knowledge. Later G.V. Leibniz says that the government can have information on the processes and the moods prevailing in the country, if it systematically receives reviews of new publications with information about the author, his life, his works, with the characteristics of the contents of his works. Leibniz believed that this could help, to some extent, to control the situation in the country. The opening of the National Library of Chile (Santiago, 1813) meant the formation of one of the institutions of the new state, and contributed to the attainment of the independence of Chile (Arkhipov, 2016).

It is evident that the mankind had to revalue "media" concept, its nature and role in the society. However, only by the beginning of XX century, the researchers of social processes realized the need for in-depth study of this phenomenon as a complex of special kind of scientific-philosophical, social and technological phenomena, ensuring the effectiveness of information relations in the society.

The starting point of theoretical research in the field of media is associated with Toronto School of Communication. Harold Adams Innis, the "father of Canadian economic history", a will-be researcher of culture and communication, owns the elaboration in the field of study of the written language as a power resource and the domination of technology. In the 1940s, Innis began exploring the influence of communication media on the typology of the social system and the survival of empires. As a result of the study, he proposed the original historical and philosophical concept, explaining the role of the freedom of communication in the formation, development and disappearance from the historical scene of the largest civilizations. Innis considered the change of media as the dominant of social development.

Sequential change of the information epochs - the emergence of the written language, the invention of printing technology, electric and then digital revolutions - expanded the information capabilities of man. Nowadays, on a global scale, by overall assessment, more than 2.5 quintillion bytes of new data appears every day. We are located within the "information explosion", surrounded by printed, electronic, digital, and other information. "By 1800, the total sum of human knowledge was doubling every 50 years, in 1950 - every 10 years, and by 1970 -every 5 years" (Gendina, 2006, p. 51). It is expected that in the period till 2020, due to the increasing use of smartphones, tablets, social networks and other forms of digital communication, global amount of information will be doubling every two years. Under the influence of such dynamics, some local trends lead to quite unexpected results: for example, mobile phones are nowadays more affordable for Africans than clean drinking water (Mehta, 2008, p. 27).

But the advance of human communication capabilities not only increases the level of public awareness. It leads to the global changes in the society, those ones which are often mutually exclusive.

According to the British film critic and journalist Peter Bradshaw (Bradshaw), there were three important events in the last century:

- we stepped from the world of information lack into the world of information overload;
- -we moved from the world, in which the government and businessmen were in need of media for the dissemination of information, into the world where they can distribute it themselves;
- we moved from the world, in which citizens needed media to get information, into the world where every citizen has access to information and, furthermore, he can produce it on their own (Bradshow).

All these changes have led mankind to learn a new form of literacy – media literacy and, respectively, to begin forming a new kind of education - media education.

According to many Western and Russian researchers in the field of media and media education (C.Bazalgette, J.Bowker, S.Goodman, M.North, J.Pungente, I.Rother, M.Silverblatt, D.Schretter, D.Suess, Ch. Worsnop, E.A. Bondarenko, A.V. Sharikov, I.M. Dzyaloshinsky, A.P. Korochensky etc.), it appears there and when there is a problem of perception of variable content (Bondarenko). The need to understand the messages makes people read the hidden meaning, the presence of which is its system property. Hence there exists the close attention to the media text - its language, content, form and structure.

It should be emphasized that in the system of media-education, not only the media text is important, but also the context in which it operates, the historical roots and traditions of its occurrence, the system of communication between people, groups, communities, technologies and machines, the causes and the logics of meanings generation, etc., also what is more important - social, economic, political and cultural conditions in which media education system and the education system as a whole are taking place.

The concept of media education began to take shape in the late 60s, when there were two relatively independent lines - so-called critical literacy and visual literacy. The first of them put forward the main goal of "the formation of critical thinking" of a person in relation to the means of mass communication and was more common in Europe (the UK, France, etc.). The second line regarded as the main task the development of non-verbal communication skills (perception, understanding, use and creation of media) and prevailed in Canada and the United States.

The concept of "media education" was first formulated at the joint meeting of the Information Sector of UNESCO and the International Film and Television Council in 1973. According to UNESCO approach, "under media education (mediaeducation) should be understood teaching of theory and practical skills to master modern means of mass communication, as part of specific and autonomous field of knowledge in teaching of theory and practical skills".

In the mid-1970s UNESCO announced about media education as a priority area for the next decade. UNESCO documents emphasize that "Media Education (mediaeducation) is interconnected with all types of media (printed and graphics, sound, screens, etc.) and different technologies; it enables people to understand the communication media used in their society and acquire skills of using these media to communicate with other people; it ensures that people learn how to:

- 1) analyze, critically reflect upon and create media texts;
- 2) identify the sources of media texts, their political, social, commercial and / or cultural interests, and their contexts;
- 3) interpret the messages and values offered by the media;
- 4) select appropriate media for creating and communicating their own media texts, also for reaching the target audience;
- 5) gain free access to media for both reception and for the producing. Media education is part of the fundamental rights of every citizen, in any country around the world, to freedom of expression and the right to information and it is a tool to support democracy.

Media education is recommended for implementation in the national curricula of all countries, in the additional system of informal and "lifelong" education" (UNESCO, 1999, p. 73).

By the early 90-ies. media education ideas are implemented in more than 40 countries around the world.

In the second half of the XX century the governments of several leading states started development of guidelines for the media policy. They were urged by ownership concentration and monopolization in the media, which threatened to breach the rights of citizens to receive truthful information, growth of multimedia operations, increase of the influence of press, television and later the Internet on the society.

In this regard, for example, in the USA, media education is considered as journalism education or its components. The term "media literacy" became widespread instead of the didactic concept of "media education". It was first formulated in 1992 in the Report of the Aspen Institute for Humanities Research at a conference on media literacy issues and issues of the US leadership in this area. "Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create media content in various forms".

Nowadays, the American media school actively promotes the concept of news literacy (newsliteracy). The central category of this trend is a piece of journalistic news, which is currently associated with many risks: it is used as a method of shaping of public opinion, and as a way to manipulate the audience, and as a means of information warfare.

"News Literacy is a mandatory skill like reading itself, the same basic hygienic habit, like the habit of brushing your teeth, - said Professor at Higher School of Economics Anna Kachkaeva while she was opening in Russia the 1st International scientific conference on newsliteracy issues. - There is nothing more humanitarian healthy than to critically assess what goes on in the media, correctly decode the meaning of the message, to be able to use and

understand information, and understand that media-behavior is as much a part of our lives as everyday relationships and communication between people" (Lapina-Karasyuk, 2014, p. 16).

In 2008 in Europe, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on media literacy in the digital world. This document is fundamental for the experts in the field of EU media education. Its ideology is largely correlates with the provisions of the Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union, which states that "the European Union is founded on the indivisible and universal values - human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity; it relies on the principles of democracy and the rule of law. It puts the person at the heart of its activities, by establishing the citizenship of the European Union and by creating an area of freedom, security and justice" (Charter of Fundamental...).

The Resolution formulated a number of provisions that have become the base for the development of media education and media literacy in the whole world. In particular, the European Parliament calls on the authoritative institutions responsible for regulating of audiovisual and electronic communications to cooperate at different levels in order to improve media literacy of the population; it confirms the emergency to develop at the federal level the codes of conduct and general administrative initiatives; it especially emphasizes the need to involve all stakeholders in support of a systematic study and continuous analysis of the various aspects of performance of media literacy (Buley et al., 2016).

The European Parliament notes that improvement of media literacy can be promoted both by leading politicians, journalists, radio and television, as well as media companies, and also by small local organizations (such as libraries, educational centers for adults, community cultural centers, institutions of additional general education and special training local amateur media).

These accents and regulations say that media education becomes universal, it goes beyond the purely mass communication and covers a wide range of channels and sources of information. This approach to the problem is fixed in the concept of convergent media and information literacy, and is enshrined in the "Moscow Declaration on Media and Information Literacy", adopted at an international conference in Moscow on 28 June 2012. It states that "the media and information literate person can use a variety of sources and channels of information in the personal, professional and social life. He knows when and what information is required and for what, where and how it can be obtained. He knows who and for what purpose created and distributes this information, he has an idea about the roles and responsibilities of the media functions, memory institutions and other information providers" (Moscow Declaration on...).

In general, in the European Union media education in primary schools is integrated into the lessons of the native language (54%), fine arts lessons (50%), civics lessons (38%) and ICT lessons (38) (Hartai, 2014, p.14). However, experts of EMEDUS (European Media Literacy Education Project) believe that the spread of ICT courses in schools has not led to ensure that they began to carry out the tasks of media education, while training in information and communication technologies is more focused on the technical aspects of the communication process to the detriment of the critical analysis of the media sphere.

Values of media and media-democracy. Meanwhile, it is the critical thinking that is the foundation of the basics of the declared media literacy of citizens. It saves the autonomy and independence of an individual in relation to the mediacracy, which is being formed.

The term "mediacracy" (from the English word massmedia – media and others, Greek κράτος - power, influence), is a phenomenon in which political decisions and discussions, as well as political communication does not occur in the primary political level, but in the media. Using media technologies, designers of the global social process turn a citizen into a viewer of political debate in the media, while his role is more decorative, with no possibility of active intervention. Media-behavior of a viewer, a reader, a listener is defined by media management policy, major advertisers, sponsors and owners of the means of mass communication. Thus, according to the German political scientist Thomas Meyer, "democracy of participatory turns into an imaginary contemplation democracy or media-democracy,

which disables a citizen of self-determination possibility (sovereignty)" (Meyer, 2001, p. 153).

Understanding these processes nowadays, in fact, is the subject of a reinterpretation of media. Media-democracy, which occurred in the conditions of mediatization of society, has changed the political landscape of today. On the one hand, it leads to a greater freedom of expression, on the other hand, it leads to the professional use of the media in the interests of the individual stakeholders - companies, corporations, state. And the answer to the question of why people reject the proposed real freedom of action in favor of the freedom of a single click, is obvious. Most people do not want to be active participants in the political reality, knowing well that the political game according to established rules will not give them anything. Like the elections in Russia: no matter for whom you vote, the result is known in advance, and it actually has no effect on people's lives.

Classic UNESCO postulates of media education as part of the fundamental right of every citizen of any country to freedom of expression and information, telling that media education contributes to the support of democracy, today they are transformed into declarations. The view of a theorist in the field of media J. Gerbner is known and widely replicated. He understands media education as the formation of the coalition "for the expansion of freedom and diversity of communication, for the development of a critical understanding of the media, a new approach to liberal education" (Gerbner, 1995, p. 1-18).

However, as A. Chernov noted in his book "Media and Democracy", the manifestations of the crisis of democracy have now become so numerous and significant that evoke the feeling of illegitimacy of the most, if not all, democratic procedures. This is the result of a new media-political "format", which is conditioned by both the simultaneity and by the interdependence of the processes taking place in politics and in the media. In fact the political process is now going on in the media installations, and it is the basis politainment - representation of political unity as the news, advertising and entertainment. Transfer of "site" of political action from the Parliament to the TV leads to a "transfer" of politicians and politics into the hands of media-designers and marketing managers, who present them to the world as a brand product (Chernykh, 2011, p. 11-18).

In this regard, all the more elusive seem the classic postulates of media education as a right of every citizen to have access to information, freedom of speech and choice of mediabehavior.

A striking example of the use of media technologies in the political process is a campaign for the US presidential elections in 2016. It had a special character. The range of election technologies went far beyond the traditional areas, typical for the campaigns of previous years (Wingfield et al., 2016). To realize their goals, both parties enlisted the support of powerful ICT corporations (Clinton – "Google", D.Tramp- "Facebook") and they both applied unique technologies ("Google" - manipulation technology using the search mechanism – SEME"; "Facebook" - the technology revealing subconscious preferences at the level of particular voters - members of their social network) (Prokhorov, 2002, p. 47-54).

According to the Head of the Center of military-industrial policy of the United States of America and Canada Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences Yevgeny Rogovskii, in fact, using online social networks was to create a convenient and efficient way of hate propaganda inspiring violence and inflating the conflict, which is now used extensively both by terrorists and politicians in order to destabilize the society.

The availability of new information technologies for the general population revealed a clearly destabilizing dependence in the American society - the more polarized the interests of the society, the wider use of new technologies for the worsening situation.

As it was noted in 2004 by an American professor Ilya Somin with respect to American citizens, "An informed electorate is a mandatory prerequisite for democracy. If voters do not know what is happening in politics they can not rationally exercise the right to control government policy. Massive voter ignorance poses a serious threat to American democracy in the 2004 elections and later. This is especially worrisome before the upcoming elections during the war, which puts at stake the important political decisions". The author emphasizes

that inadequate voter knowledge implies two major implications for democracy. Firstly, it does not allow the government to reflect the democratic will of the people in any whatsoever meaningful form, undermining "the real true" defense of democracy as a system that reflects the will of the people. Also, voter ignorance endangers the key role of democratic regime that serves the interests of the majority, because ignorance potentially opens the door to a manipulation of the people by elites, and also to the huge errors committed by politicians because of the need to involve an ignorant electorate to help obtain the post.

In these reflections Professor is supported by Simon Kay, arguing in his blog post 16 March 2015 on the complex relationship between political democracy and ignorance. "The fear caused by radically ignorant in public policy, extend beyond a mere possibility that the Company will make a bad choice when voting. Ignorant voters easier to errors and manipulation by means imposing on rhetoric, but unsubstantiated claims with facts. They may resort to sources of democratic councils, which do not have a detailed understanding. They may be more inclined to accept conspiracy theories, or slide down to the schemes, which take too dichotomous or radically simplified version of reality" (Kaye, 2015).

Citizens who are illiterate in the political sphere are primarily those who are illiterate in the media. They are controlled by mass, and they get into the networks of information threats and increased risks. In particular, during the current election campaign in the United States, some experts pointed out (Zittrain..., 2014) that if the leaders of "Facebook" had wanted to "push" voters, who favor a particular candidate, they could have easily inflated the results of the election in his favor (How Facebook plans...).

The contradictions of Russian media education policies. In the context of the contemporary discourse on the Russian media education there has been outlined a slight drift towards media education policy. This phenomenon is both might be positive and, in case the meaning of media education is distorted, might have negative consequences.

The concept of "politics" (Greek politika) is interpreted in dictionaries as the art of state and society management, either as a set of social ideas and the consequent targeted activities related to the formation of relations between states, peoples, nations and social groups (Dictionary "War and Peace"). There are different types of policies - domestic, foreign, economic, social, cultural, educational.

Media education policy is conditioned with the global trends in the development of the society, such as ultramodern information technologies, covering the whole world, new models of a personality`s media behavior, the global quasi-reality. However, media education policy has obviously some specific national features.

One look at the history of Russian media education development is enough to notice how consistently the attitude to media education institute has been changing, in accordance with the political changes of the Russian state of the XX century. This universal tool of influence on the younger generation has been accurately fitted to the details and mechanisms of the Soviet propaganda machine. The years of repression eliminate many initiatives in the field of media education, and it was off the arena of Russian science and practice for a long time, while the 60ies, on the contrary, bring along the media education "thaw" which starts research in this area, a variety of media education projects being launched (Hegel, 2000, p. 61-63).

The next stage of recomprehension of media-education experience was outlined along with perestroika in the 90s, when an innovation wave gushed into schools and additional education centers. It has played a beneficial role in the development of Russian media-education. It was then that different experimental sites began to emerge, where modern media education models were perfected. It was then that many successful media education projects were launched and improved, these projects are still in operation.

The civil approach to media education becomes relevant during the sharp increase of the political activity of the population and the growth of civic consciousness (Dzyaloshinsky, 2008, p. 34-38). The policy of modernization, proclaimed during the regime change by Russian politicians, was impossible without the media competence of the person who has full information about the events, who is able to assess it, interpret it and express their opinions

accurately.

However, this period was very short-lived. Hence, some of the initiatives of modern officials, based on the protective media theory, through which attempts are made to protect children and adults from the "harmful information", to ban inappropriate content, to prevent access to information, to transfer the real social activity into the virtual – the click reality - all these indicate that Russian media education is going through the period of overcoming difficulties.

Moreover, nowadays there exists the practice of substitution of media education with technologies of information policy, public relations technologies, use of media educational experience to promote the necessary ideas, to form the image of individual managers, companies or state institutions.

Such a complex trajectory of development of Russian media education suggests that we are dealing with highly politicized tool, that in different periods of time very successfully works on different objectives (From the speech...).

Perhaps it is the lack of clearly defined objectives explains the obvious lack of success in promoting of media education in recent years. There has been done a lot. The Russian science has done a significant breakthrough in the theoretical understanding of the processes of media, dozens and hundreds of scientists and practitioners have got involved in the work on the development of modern technologies and techniques. However, the activities of individual enthusiasts have not become a system, like it has been done in Canada, the US, Germany, France, Finland, Australia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Serbia and many other countries where media education was included in the national curriculum (Barlow, 1999, p. 65-69).

Perhaps it is the lack of clearly defined objectives explains the obvious lack of success in promoting of media education in recent years. There has been done a lot. The Russian science has done a significant breakthrough in the theoretical understanding of the processes of media, dozens and hundreds of scientists and practitioners have got involved in the work on the development of modern technologies and techniques. However, the activities of individual enthusiasts have not become a system, like it has been done in Canada, the US, Germany, France, Finland, Australia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Serbia and many other countries where media education was included in the national curriculum (Somin, 2004).

Of course, the experience of using the models, which have shown good results in some particular circumstances, should not be hastily copied. According to Professor EhetskelDror, a consultant at the Department for Development Support and Management Services of the United Nations Secretariat, "one and the same model of policy-making can suit for most countries, provided that governments' attention is paid to primarily professional, administrative and technical aspects but not to political ones" (From the speech..., 1996).

Nowadays, the need for media education policy in Russia is overdue. This is spoken out by professionals, also administrative staff are already aware of the need. In this respect, there is known the opinion of the former Minister of Communications and Mass Communications of the Russian Federation I. Shchegolev, who in 2009 talked about the importance of development of media and appealed to the representatives of the education sector with a proposal to start teaching media literacy to schoolchildren. Today the Ministry of Communications and Mass Communications of the Russian Federation has made media education a priority area of the media industry development. This exactly is the stage when "yesterday was too early, and tomorrow will be too late". It's time to start developing conceptual documents of Russian media education policy, based on the values of the highest order - morality, freedom, responsibility (Fedorov et al., 2014, p. 29).

The effectiveness of media education policies depends on the feasibility and reality of the tasks set. Examples of politicized youth projects, such as "Information flow" on Seliger or "Civilization" by Mikhail Khodorkovsky, show a very productive use of media education technologies in the service of political parties and movements. If we talk about the humanistic ideals, the strengthening of national traditions and openness to the new, the leaders in the formation of the foundations of the personality must be socially responsible

government, media and public institutions (Inglehart and Welzel, 2011, p. 57).

The purpose of media education is the cornerstone against which the best techniques could be crashed. This purpose should coincide with the views of the society about ideals and values.

Depending on the goals, the means of achieving them will be changing. If the purpose of media education is the formation and development of a society of free thinking citizens, the means will include the whole range of social assets that will manifest through integration, dialogue, critical thinking, civil contract.

4. Conclusions

However, media education might turn out to be, as it often has happened in Russian history, in the service of other objectives, in particular, it might be used for creation a managed, non-critical person who is captivated with stereotypes. In this case, media education technologies become the technologies of propaganda, manipulation and information influence. As the documents of the Council of Europe read, "free and independent media are a real power in promoting democratic change, while in the hands of totalitarian forces they might become tools for inciting ethnic hatred and suggestion of negative stereotypes" (Recommendation 1466, 2000).

In case media business starts dominating in the use of media education technologies, the audience as the subject of media education will be considered solely as a source of profit. Citizens turn to users, while media education technologies turn into media technologies in terms of capitalization of human instincts.

While developing media education policies the existence of manipulative type of educational strategies must not be excluded, since population is under influence of various political, ideological and financial institutions which purpose their aims and interests. It is important always to remember that, in its true sense, media education can develop only in a free democratic country, where there is freedom of access to information and personal expression, where the society established control over the government and the political processes, where there are advanced civil institutions and people have a high level of media-information literacy.

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Revista ESPACIOS. ISSN 0798 1015 Vol. 39 (Nº 20) Year 2018

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