Media Literacy in Germany and Italy

Media literacy is a wide and general topic that existed before social media and other technological progressions. As the world evolves so does the people within it. In order to see if the term has involved to a different meaning nowadays we focused on Germany. We went to the German television and news ' agency' ZDF and asked some Berliners about their opinion concerning media education, transparency and awareness in media within Germany.

In 1988, Professor William G. Christ from Trinity University in Texas – whom is a specialist in communication - describes media literacy as a term that has been used to refer to great ideas though can also been interpreted as an pedagogical tool for school teachers or parents. The term can also be used in the same context as media education.

Since the reformation of the social law in 2017 there is an German act called "Kinder-und Jugendstärkungsgezetz" concerning the responsibility for teaching media literacy to child and youth services and considers it part of educational child and youth (erzieherische Kinder-und Jugendschutz).

The goal is to teach digital literacy and learn how to handle digital media. The act aims to educate children when it comes to media and more specific digital media. It starts from early learning during vocational trainers and goes on to higher education till professional training. The strategy was created in 2016.

What does the German population think about media literacy in their country? Student Olga (16): " it's really obvious when you read German media if it's right-winged or left. Especially when it comes to subjects such as foreigners and immigrants. It's written a certain way. The comments are also pretty explicit and express a certain ideology."

The teenager thinks there is an massive awareness when it come the media in Germany. Yet people aren't actively doing something about the popularisation.

"I don't understand it why media is like this, but there's nothing you can do." According to Olga, media needs to be more transparent. But the nuance is in the journalist or medium that brings it.

Olga doesn't necessarily think schools need to dedicate time to media literacy but reading articles and discussing them from a critical point should be sufficient. On the question of if ZFD is transparent enough, Olga couldn't answer as she doesn't watch TV anymore.

Unlike Olga, Andreas (50) thinks German media is transparent. He thinks youngsters aren't well informed when it comes down to media knowledge. "It's overrated but necessary. Of course there's one-sided reporting and polarisation in media but such things occurs in all areas of society. I think Germany is doing quite well reporting transparent messages and at least when it's political bias I do agree with it ." In general Andreas thinks ZDF is quite transparent. "Media can manipulate its inhabitants but it depends on which topics their using and who the author is".
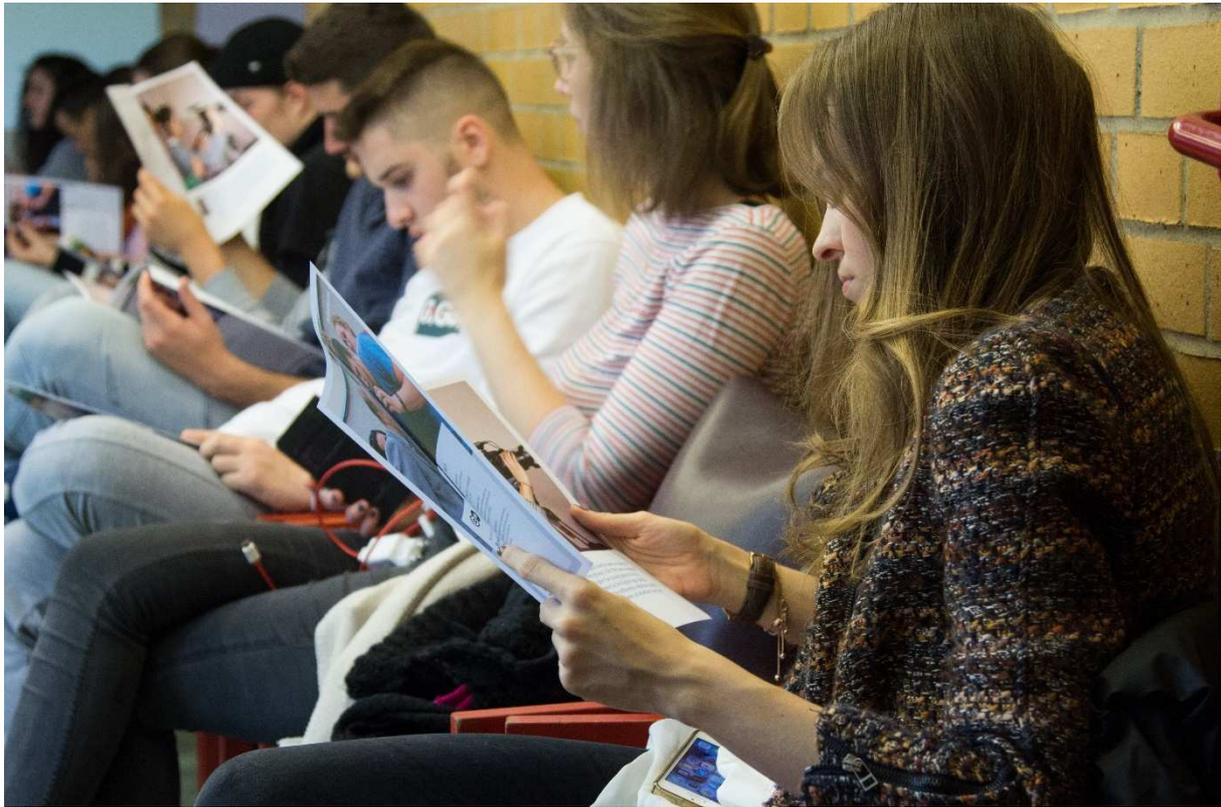
Irene (45) thinks the 5 key questions to apply to media literacy skills are quite important. The first question you should ask yourself is "who created this message?" Then comes "did the media use certain techniques to attract my attention?" Afterwards, you should ask yourself if "people might understand this message differently?" Beside that you should look to the values or points of the messages that have been brought or why this certain message is being sent?

Irene thinks that should spread more awareness about the 5 key questions. Just like Olga, she thinks schools should provide time to pick for instance a newspaper and be critical about it; compare articles about the same topic by finding different techniques that have been used.

German public-service television broadcaster ZDF runs as an independent non-profit institution, which was founded by all federal states of Germany (Bundesländer). The broadcaster is financed by television licence fees and advertising revenues. The spokesperson of ZDF, Ann-Kathrin Oster replied on the statement from the interviewed Germans.

According to Ann-Katherin, media literacy is all about creating awareness for children and how to use media correctly. ZDF tries to be as transparent as possible as it's a public broadcaster. They give tours regularly at their sister location in Berlin sometimes people also pass by out of curiosity. Children from the between 11 and 12 are also welcome but it's logical that they don't receive the same information as the adults who come to visit. Children like to ask technical questions such as the financial side or how the editorial aspects work. ZDF tries to involve people in their process of making media so that it becomes accessible.

Unlike Germany, Italy has no binding act assigning responsibility for teaching media

literacy to child and youth services and considers it part of educational child and youth protection. The declaration of Internet Rights consider just the importance of transparency and free accessibility.
Germany's more advanced cause see it from a legal point of view considering people's safety on the net.

On July 28, 2015, the Italian chamber Laura Boldrini presented the declaration of Internet Rights, a fundamental document to guarantee to each individual the exercise of an active digital citizenship respecting freedom, dignity and diversity of each person.

"*This Declaration of Internet Rights is founded on the full recognition of the liberty, equality, dignity and unique diversity of each individual. preserving these rights is crucial to ensuring the democratic functioning of institutions and avoiding the predominance of public and private powers that may lead to a society of surveillance, control and social selection*"

The text identifies a series of general principles that embrace the various issues related to the use of the internet: the right to knowledge and education on the net, the neutrality of the network the right to identity. The declaration is based on the full recognition of freedom, equality, dignity and diversity of each person. The guarantee of these rights is a necessary condition to ensure the democratic functioning of the institutions.

After the declaration the Italian case study " Generazioni Connesse" followed. A project developed by the Italian 'Safer Internet Centre' co-funded by the European Commission.

The aim is to become a national reference point on topics related to a safer and better internet for young people as well as encouraging the right conditions for the promotion of initiatives that help make the internet a better and more trusted place for children and young people.The project is addressed primarily to children and adolescents aged between six to 18-years-old. However, parents, educators, teachers and youth professionals will be involved.

This is a landmark online platform (powerful impact - punto di riferimento) concerning internet awareness and safety in order to address topics as diverse as media sustainability and media and information literacy. Moreover, it gives users emergency tools such as Hotline, responsible for collecting and giving notice to reports, also sent anonymously, regarding child pornography and other illegal / harmful contents disseminated through the network.

Helpline is the listening line 1.96.96 and the Telefono Azzurro chat welcome any request for listening and help for children and adolescents up to 18 years of age or adults who want to deal with situations of hardship / danger in which they find themselves. Its goal is therefore to support young people to deal with the relationship with new technologies offering them information and critical tools useful to promote a positive use of the network and to prevent possible situations of danger, as well as ensuring a space for listening and comparison.

Italy went a step further in media literacy was made on July 2015 with the "Internet Rights Charter". In particular, Article 3 mentions

"Everyone has the right to knowledge and education on the internet - Public institutions are always entrusted with the task of ensuring "the creation, use and dissemination of knowledge on the Internet as an accessible and usable asset on the part of every subject".