

Internet Literacy—the Way to Information Equality

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In the beginning of 20th century, in epoch of telegraph agencies, Czech writer Karl Chapek said ‘Only dilettantes might think, that the basic content of newspapers is made of original news which journalists obtained in daily searches. The reality is that more than 60 % of newspaper content compiled in editorial office from telegraph news’.

Nowadays, in epoch of Internet, more and more global recourses are being allocated to ICT and it’s evident that more than 90% of the World news is circulated in Internet. Realizing that ICT is direct answer to many basic needs of mass media it may be expected that Internet has become a dominant means to get, to share and to use information.

It is a force equalizing opportunity for human progress and access to information among regions, communities and cultures.

Internet is a most available and relatively free of censorship medium for channeling all kind information. In transition countries there are limited number of really independent TV and radio channels through which journalists and citizens could realize their democratic rights to obtain and disseminate information.

The challenges associated with ICT developing ultimately energize the journalists and mass media to increase the availability information recourses for majority of people lacking access to benefits of ICT.

With its ever-expanding wealth of information, journalists to deepen their coverage should use the Internet, especially as it relates to international issues and business.

The question is “are the journalists always prepared to effectively use benefits of on-line medium in their professional activity?”

Along with different problems regarding the affordability of Internet access, the major issues for slow growth of journalists’ implication in new online medium is insufficient awareness of ICT challenges.

The survey carried out in NIS countries identified the specific needs and essential problems in rising of Internet literacy in media:

- ✓ The journalists graduated universities aren’t advanced in using Internet.

The Universities education programs for journalists give only general knowledge on ICT at most.

There is still lack of special developed academic courses for journalists providing firm understanding of role of any technology-assisted communication medium.

The journalists training manual and curriculum needs to be improved allowing students to get more specific knowledge and vocational skills on Internet.

- ✓ The digital divide existing between urban and rural areas has regard to the level of Internet literacy of journalists. All training courses are mostly conducting in capital that is why the journalists from regions are restricted in getting basic practice in new media, led by Internet. It is necessary to develop and launch the special journalists training programs, combined the on-line training courses on ICT practice with periodical seminars in central cities.

That brings down the restriction in access to competitive information and help them working in on-line medium to produce news, features and analysis about most critical global and local issues of today and disseminate balanced and competitive information to population of regions. That people derive daily news mostly from few state TV channels broadcasted on regions. The journalists advanced in ICT significantly improve the amount of information they convey to people of province.

- ✓ There is a restriction for mature journalists in getting on-line working practice. They face psychological barrier in learning new skills through Internet training courses along with young peoples.
It is necessary to develop special on/off-line vocational courses for that group of peoples to let them totally use their professional potential in building of Information society.

- ✓ One of the major issues for local media is a pure Internet literacy among native language speaking journalists.
The foreign speaking journalists are more advanced in ICT therefore they are working more effective.
Native speaking journalists often face restriction to get vocational practice in Internet because of lack of special training courses and learning programs in local languages.
Other point is lack of on-line information in local languages. Though a lot has being done but it is still not enough to meet the basic needs of mass media. Insufficient volume of on-line news and regular official information doesn't encourage journalists' striving for Internet literacy.
The special on/off line Internet training courses combined with foreign languages learning needs to be arranged .
It is necessary to facilitate the realization of many e-government projects that foster citizens' freedom to receive and circulate on-line information regarding government and state bodies activity.

The above findings are merely the highlights of the issues faced by media in raising the Internet literacy.

GIPI with partners in NIS countries carried out the projects addressed some of these issues. The last project "Internet Training and Web Page Improvement for Azeri Journalists " accomplished in Azerbaijan was aimed to advance the professionalism and independence of the media, creating more access to information by the public and an increased professionalism among journalists.

Project comprise many details of local media landscape.

In Azerbaijan with population of 8 million, there are:

- ◆ 436,000 Internet users;
- ◆ 0.24 DAI (digital access index);
- ◆ ICT services covered 73% of territory with population of 93%;
- ◆ more than 500 newspapers are published;
- ◆ about 23TV stations are broadcasted regularly;
- ◆ 4 TV stations broadcast on-line;
- ◆ all main newspapers and information agencies have frequently updated websites;
- ◆ there are no any specialized social-politic oriented web sites, though there are several on-line news agencies (Bakutoday.net; Xeber.net; Day.az; show.az; sport.az etc.);
- ◆ about 80% of journalists haven't got a permanent Internet access;
- ◆ 60% don't use Internet at all;
- ◆ only 20% regularly use Internet;
- ◆ the journalists being fluent in foreign languages (mostly Turkish, English, Russian) are more often using of Internet;

Journalists in Azerbaijan don't extensively use such powerful tool as the Internet in their professional activity.

In view of such a media landscape, increasing information to the Azeri public—when it combined with a steady effort to improve the professionalisms of journalism—is an essential part of realizing the principles of media freedom on the Internet.

Project included six-day seminars focused on training of 15 journalists from regions to navigate the Internet, identify useful sites and, in general, begin to rely on this modern reference tool to improve the amount of information they convey to the public.

The second component of the training was the web design. A local webmaster assisted newspapers in improving their website design and operation.

The course will cover the following activities:

- Navigating the Internet;
- Identifying useful sites as they pertain to Azerbaijan;
- Using the Internet to establish information contacts outside of Azerbaijan;
- Searching for parallel stories to compare and contrast events in Azerbaijan with those of other countries;
- Using the Internet to form a “local angle” to an international story;
- Researching the track records of international companies through press release archives and news stories.

This project ultimately increased the amount of information available to the Azeri public through better reporting methods, and will improve the professionalism of the Azeri media.

Following the trainings, all participants completed an article or news piece in which they have used the Internet to increase the amount of information published or broadcast.