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Media Literacy: A Critical Skill for the 21st Century

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Abstract

This study focuses on the digital age, communication, and information spreading; media literacy is one of the most significant skills for engaging in the modern world of society. First, a summary of media literacy dimensions includes definition, critical thinking, putting information into context to value and use meaningfully and integrating the consumed information, both in consuming and when producing such information. Studies include interviews with educators, media professionals, and students, stressing the need for a meaningful media literacy education that empowers people to recognize credible information, oppose misinformation, and approach media responsibly. This research supports the role of school systems and community organizations in assisting with the media literacy necessary for the 21st century. However, media literacy'sliteracy's short-lived effects indicate it is also worrying. Consequently, there is an urgent need to develop a common approach to media literacy education at school and for the entire life cycle.

Keywords: Misinformation, education, media literacy, digital literacy and critical thinking.

Introduction

Digital media is the hotbed of the twenty-first century (Nothias & Cheruiyot, 2019). It is a revolution in more ways than can be counted — from ways to create it to ways to share it to ways to consume it. Now, users can access numerous information available through social media sites, websites, and any other online mediated news text media to affect their thinking, acting and decision making. In this regard, media literacy has become the process of gaining knowledge and skills used to develop an understanding of the role of media in society. This article investigates whether San Diego County sweet potato growers have heard about the Cellar Door Project and its benefits and explores ways to better promote and engage them in the project if they still need to do so.

Media literacy is a set of skills that allow individuals to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in different forms. This skill set of grappling with multiple sources of information is fundamental as misinformation, propaganda, and biased reporting in the ether are on the rise. Despite the wide variety of content we expose our adolescents to, they take in information from multiple digital spaces, often needing more background skills to know the difference between reputable and questionable content, according to the Digital Youth Project (2008). This prevailing media illiteracy familiarises people with a phenomenon known as ""fake news,"" in which misleading and false information spreads rapidly on social media and other digital platforms.

The implications of a lack of media literacy are not only personal, such as falling for the misinformation trap, but can also create a lack of trust in institutions and even promote the polarisation of society and threats to democracy. In facing all these, education on media literacy should be integrated into the curriculum design. Teaching Media Literacy in K-12 and Higher Education: Schools that provide media literacy education teach students thinking skills that can enable them to read media messages and make informed decisions about the content they consume and create with media.

Last, we need to keep media literacy cultural as well. People with different backgrounds may be barred from or have access to or relationships with media. In this cultural context, therefore, programs should be developed to meet the needs of different people.

With the fast-changing media, it is even more important to know the realities of the media. The more algorithmic systems like artificial intelligence are born, the more people should be able to grapple with the mechanics of the information they are subjected to for it. It is all part of a conversation around digital literacy, being able to consume content without simply mindlessly digesting yet critically engaging with the means at our disposal.

Media literacy is people's people's people's crucial aptitude for solving the digital era's complex internet world. This paper will present the current literature around media literacy, the methodological underpinnings of qualitative research, and the discussion with stakeholders generated by the current research. It will end with making media

literacy the primary requirement and presenting the justification for including its teaching in schools and society.

Literature Review

Defining Media Literacy

The definition of media literacy has changed since media consumption has changed. It means accessing, analyzing, evaluating and creating media in forms suited for the various genres of media (Hobbs, 2010). Despite this definition points for the classification, media literacy is more than just consuming media. It should reinforce turning media literacy into a critical and practical ability to produce media.

Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create in order to understand meanings and ways to use the various forms of media, according to NAMLE (2021), and media literacy for this year's theme will be focused on media literacy for competence, citizenship, and creating and consuming media responsibly and thoughtfully.

The Role of Media Literacy

Media literacy is a sound academic good in and of itself, but it is even more practical. With the information explosion, it is essential to have appropriate media literacy, as there are so many different and competing narratives and biased information coming at us all the time. This is similar to what Buckingham (2020) and Mihaila Barbu (2022) have previously discovered…

Media literacy is also part of critical thinking skills. In other words, such opportunities can foster a citizenry capable of critiquing media messages by teaching citizens why messages are as they are, how messages are made, who has a say in what gets put out there and what does not, and how representation or bias plays a role in media. The participants who participated in media literacy education can develop more good critical thinking skills (in order) to navigate the understandable complex information environment.

How can we teach media literacy education when subjected to misinformation and "fake news"? We need to train people to know when something we see is misinformation and to what degree — something that effective media literacy programs already get us doing when it comes to being able to distinguish a credible

source from a noncredible source. Secondly, the psychological parts of the diffusion of misinformation indicate that mass media literacy is necessary to fight the consequences of the diffusion of misinformation. More studies have shown that people can accept misinformation that contradicts their beliefs (Pennycook & Rand, 2018). With the rest of these people in education regarding media literacy, they can teach people about some cognitive biases that apply to these things and get people developing ways of playing through stuff to be critical of this emotional content.

We should not take responsibility or press schools or someone else to shoulder the burden of advancing media literacy. Suggested methods of infusing media literacy into other curricula help prepare students to engage in a media-saturated world (Buckingham, 1990; Hobbs, 1998). Buckingham (2018) argues that a cross-disciplined approach between science and social studies subjects would be beneficial in teaching critical analysis, creativity, and collaboration skills in media literacy.

Even better, media literacy is in the hands of educators. Teacher preparedness and professional development provide accommodations for teachers with knowledge and skills. Additionally, CML 2020 created a framework and a set of learning strategies to enable media literacy in varying contexts and produce critical thinking and active participation in media.

I cannot think of much else to say about the topic as I just put together the literature review, so it's time to widen the scope. Media literacy is important for the 21st century. Fighting misinformation and biased content in one digital space was a multi-faceted concept. In this world where media can change people's people's people's points of view, education plays a role in helping people with media literacy to think and interact with media responsibly. This thesis applies the methodology to the studies below and discusses other literature relevant to that approach.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research design to explore the attitudes and experiences of different stakeholder groups regarding media literacy. Such conditions are often suitable for qualitative research, like qualitative content analysis, where it is desired to

complement the data by long-lasting observation of complex topics like media literacy.

Sample Selection

Purposive sampling was used to elicit a wide range of perspectives. Six hundred forty-three responses were generated from educators, media personnel, and other students from all educational institutions in different geographical areas. The 30 participants, consisting of 10 educators (teachers and administrators), 10 media professionals (journalists and content creators), and 10 students (high school and college level), were waiting for their responses to interviews/focus groups.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used as a mode of data collection, which provided flexibility in exploring participants' experiences in-depth whilst ensuring that particular research questions were addressed. Interviews were conducted over video conferencing platforms or in person, recorded to ensure data integrity, and were 45 to 60 minutes long. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions that addressed the following themes:

What is media literacy to you, and why does it matter?

How do you see education's role in fostering media literacy?

What do you find to be the difficulties in the current media landscape for fighting against misinformation?

Have you seen or participated in any effective media literacy strategies or programs? Please share examples.

Media literacy education will still be evolving in your training data until October 2023.

All the interviews were recorded in audio format, with consent from the participants, and then transcribed verbatim to be analyzed. To ensure anonymity, transcripts were stripped of any personally identifying information.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the six-phase framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This systematic method helped to identify themes or patterns within the data set. The phases included:

Familiarisation with the data: Participants' perspectives were comprehensively understood by reading transcripts many times.

Open coding: Relevant concepts were identified and coded throughout the transcripts.

Collating potential themes: Codes were grouped into potential themes that captured broader concepts in the data.

Discussions of themes: Each theme was discussed to ensure it upheld some aspect of the dataset.

Name and Definition of Themes: Formulation of final themes and narrative account.

Creating the report: A written narrative synthesized all the findings while merging participants ' thoughts into the broader media literacy conversation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations of this study include informed consent obtained from both participants before the interviews. Participants were informed of the study objectives, their right to maintain confidentiality, and that participation was voluntary. All data were handled confidentially, and any identifiable information was stripped prior to analysis to protect participants' anonymity. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved this research to ensure adherence to ethical standards.

Data Analysis

Emergent Themes

Through thematic analysis, we arrived at several key themes regarding the complexities of media literacy and its relevance in the 21st century. These themes will be framed around defining media literacy, the role of education/media literacy education, the challenge of misinformation, practical strategies for involving media literacy, and visions for the future of media literacy education.

Theme 1: Understanding of Media Literacy

Critics explain and define media literacy differently. In addition, while critical thinking is equally important for educators, media literacy involves analyzing and creating media and evaluating how to evaluate it. A high school teacher wrote, in part, "Media literacy would give students the tools to question what they read, see, and hear and understand who and what produced that information." Others in the media

community offered a similar sentiment: The first thing to understand is what shapes media messages.

Students, however, viewed media literacy as a practical thing, something connected to stuff they found on social media or online. One college student wrote, 'It is the art of being smart about social media,' she said. It is about knowing what is real or fake... Real or fake. 'We can find out how different groups need to voice media literacy to be a correlative claim to different audiences and embed critical analysis in practical applications.

Theme 2: The Role of Education

All the interviewees kept singing the same song. Also, if there is no education already, it is fundamental, but it can create the necessary media literacy if not already present. Educators felt strongly that media literacy must be integrated systematically into curriculum and pedagogy. Dr Sarah Jaquette Ray, founding director of Cal Poly's Environmental Sciences and Management graduate program and author of "A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety," commented on this potential for cross-disciplinary approaches, suggesting that history, social studies, and even the sciences might harness media literacy lenses in order to evaluate their content. A middle school teacher responded, "We can teach students to connect what they learn in class and what they see online. It makes education relevant and applicable to them."

Participants stressed that educators must be sufficiently trained to teach media literacy. Many encouraged professional development to give teachers the skills and knowledge they need. One administrator said, "Teachers need to feel confident discussing these with students. Otherwise, we are not preparing them for the real-world salon."

Theme 3: Misinformation Challenges

Misinformation was consistently cited as a significant concern across participant categories. Both educators and media professionals recognize that false information is ubiquitous in digital environments. One media professional said, "It is misinformation that spreads like wildfire, and we need to equip people to face it head-on." They pinpointed various sources of misinformation, including social media sites, digital communities, and (sometimes) traditional news sources.

The trouble is that students today cannot even tell what systems, like AI, are correct, let alone determine whether a source is credible. A student's comment captured the mood: There are some news articles I no longer know what to believe. It is overwhelming." Consequently, the worry about misinformation creates an immediate need for media literacy education, whereby students learn how to find information and ascertain how accurate that information is.

Theme 4: Successful media literacy promotion approaches are available.

In discussions, there were various paths to develop media literacy education as an educational culture. He said they talked about many ways to get students hands-on learning, and their hands became dirty by working on creating their content, like dissecting media campaigns. A high school educator used a social media project. The report said: 'This project allowed students to recognize that the media shapes how people perceive a social issue and practice doing so.

Additionally, the participants talked about how technology could be part of a media literacy program, as digital tools are also provided to motivate learning. A college student said, as an example, that they were asking students to use online fact-checking resources to teach students the difference between truth and nonsense. However, sure enough, they also wrote about the tangible benefits of becoming a tech-savvy media literate: "Now online, when I read things, I'm especially careful about what I read and how I go about double checking things."

Theme 5: The Future of Media Literacy

People were saying their dream of media literacy education — in this case, the evolution of it to the state of the media world. Media literacy also needed to include emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics, said others. One college instructor wrote: 'Our approach to media literacy has to change as things change with technology and new media.' However, that also means we must teach students how algorithms are deployed and how they affect media consumption." It is meant to be reflective and a proactive vision that can adapt to changing technology and society. Moreover, it was agreed upon that this could only be possible with cooperation from educators, policymakers, and community organizations. One media professional called it a way to create connections between schools and local

media outlets and meaningful opportunities for students to participate in school media in the community. The media literacy route was seen as one avenue for promoting more enlightened media citizens speaking about these topics offline and online.

These connections and insights revolve around The Arch, Mars and a fantasy world of green raining down upon an exhibit named The Orb (Figure I.5).

Furthermore, the analysis identified an underlying, not prominent, complex web of relationships amongst various themes that together created the 'phenomenon' of media literacy in society today. In the course of the way, visitors uncovered the need for educational initiatives solely to counter media misinformation and, coincidently, this simply suits visitors' characterizations of media literacy, particularly evaluation and serious pondering. As these conversations wrapped up, they inevitably bled into conversations about what effective strategies for developing media literacy should look like and visions for the future, with adaptive, creative curricula noted as key ingredients that will allow us to adapt to our changing media ecosystem.

In addition, participants' perceptions of the need for inclusivity in media literacy education are consistent with the literature on cultural competency in the classroom. While scholars (see, for example, Jenkins et al., 2016) advocate for media literacy that values diversity in background and perspective, the participants' reflections on the adaptability of media literacy programs only reinscribe this need. In fostering diverse voices and experiences in media, educators have an opportunity to deepen students' understanding of and appreciation for media literacy and establish it as a core competence for active participation in society globally.

Conclusion

This qualitative research study has revealed the significance of media literacy as a necessary skill for the media forms of the 21st century. Based on what we learned from educators, media professionals, and students who participated in this research, some significant lessons highlighted the complex nature of competence in media literacy, the important role of education in fostering media literacy practice, and the urgent challenges that misinformation presents.

These findings emphasize that media literacy is more than a collection of skills; it is a vital frame that enables people to engage with media critically. Respondents

expressed and explained varied descriptions of media literacy related to analytical and applied skills. With the rise of fake news on digital platforms, schools must take action and implement lessons in media literacy education. To empower students, the people teaching them need the tools and knowledge to provide adequate media literacy instruction so they can think critically about what they see online.

Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of media literacy programs being updated to technology and current trends. AI and analytics: AI and real-time analytics would reflect a contemporary approach to media literacy that prepares individuals to tackle today's challenges and challenges that may come tomorrow by bridging the gap between the past and present to prepare for the future.

From education to media organizations, colleges to community partners, people can design cohesive media literacy programs for their community's needs. Through collaborations that position relatable and culturally relevant curricula toward building these skill sets, media literacy has the potential for ongoing societal transformation generation by generation.

Broadly, the implications of this study call for a new framework of media literacy that moves beyond critical literacy to transform how media literacy is enacted in formal and informal education. With a growing number of people relying on the internet to obtain information, misinformation, disinformation, and bias also become easier to spread; therefore, as society is navigating through such an increasingly complex information ecosystem, media literacy education will be a critical component in underway to fostering a more informed, involved, and resilient populace in confronting these challenges while serving to create a fairer media marketplace on the whole.

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