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Analyzing Media Literacy and its Importance in India

Hajira Bano

Research Scholar,

School of Liberal and Creative Arts, Journalism and Mass Communication Department,
Lovely Professional University, Phagwara Punjab

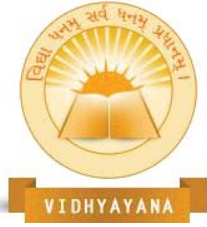
Dr Azamat Ali

Assistant Professor,

School of Liberal and Creative Arts, Journalism and Mass Communication Department,
Lovely Professional University, Phagwara Punjab

ABSTRACT:

With the advent of different media, youth are exposed to all kinds of information. In a country like India, most of the people are not media literate because of which fake and misinformation often misleads the youth. They sometimes fail to identify reliable and unreliable sources of information. It is imperative to impart knowledge about Media Literacy and how content is generated. If not used carefully and wisely, media like face book, whatsapp, twitter and YouTube can take them to the wrong directions. Despite media boom in India, the awareness level in terms of media literacy is almost unaddressed. Young minds must be trained and equipped to screen different media critically and use them selectively. This study intends to emphasize the importance of media literacy in minimizing rumors, misinformation, disinformation, fake news, and propaganda.



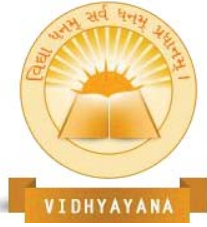
Keywords: Media Literacy, Education, Youth, Social media

INTRODUCTION:

In today's time, media has become an inevitable part of human lives. Different media platforms like Television, Radio, Newspapers, Magazines, OTT platforms, digital media, social media, smart TVs, Mobile OTT devices, etc are easily available. Media literacy is the ability to create, understand and use media content properly (Livingstone, 2004). Media literate people comparatively understand how media messages and content are created. Children and youth are the most vulnerable to media content that is not healthy. Today, internet is the most common and primary source of information and entertainment in both rural and urban areas. The spread of misinformation and fake news is a major concern. With the development of different technologies, the large amount of information is being generated in different formats raising question at its authenticity and reliability. Most of the youth spend their leisure time on different media platforms consuming different contents some knowingly and some unknowingly. Media Literacy helps in recognizing and comprehending the reasons behind the creation of different media content. Media has different effects like cognitive, attitudinal, emotional, physiological, behavioral effects (Potter, 2011).

Cognitive effects are learning of information and retaining that information in the either short-term or long term, attitudinal effects includes creation of opinion, change in opinion or reinforces already existing attitudes; as such it is essential to be a critical consumer of information rather than being a passive recipient. If over-exposed to violent media content, children may face a feeling of fear, and also encourages violent behaviors (Kelly, 1999).

Everyone has a mobile phone now, and most children are part of different social media groups, and because of this they fall prey to misinformation often misguiding them. Media literacy helps youth to escape from negative exposure to media messages. People of all age groups are directly or indirectly affected by media contents. If proper trainings or awareness is given, most people would be able to analyze media content critically. Media literacy teaches people to interpret media messages and provides them with a vision to analyze the aim of the producers of media content (Kellner, 2005).



Media is the different platforms available to us for gathering and disseminating of information and Media literacy is more focused on Media, the producers and processors of information on how and why a particular message has been shaped. Media can help in educating and informing our children but if not taught to use media reasonably, this could also be the most harmful and dangerous tool that children and youth are exposed to. Media literacy is also the ability to access, evaluate and transmit information. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in the society. It helps the younger generation to analyse and appreciate the importance of monitoring the world. India is one of the world's largest content providers and is quickly becoming the global content back office. In 2021, India generated 150,000 hours of TV content, 2,500 hours of premium OTT material, and 2,000 hours of movie content, with the help of more than 950 animation and VFX firms, 185,000 electronic artists, and 139 Institutions/Universities (Dubey, 2022). In India, low-cost mobile phones, data plans, and the local language of the content have cut across the socio-economic strata of the people. Media Literacy is the ability to critically think and analyze different media messages. It enables us to evaluate all media messages and make smart choices about what to watch and listen to. In today's time, people are surrounded by different type of medias, young people in particular tend to spend a large amount of time on social media platforms and in such a situation, it is imperative to know whether they are ready for such content or not, who created the message and what is the real purpose of different media messages. Many of the youth shape their opinion based on media and undoubtedly media influences our lives in many ways (Anderson, 2003).

Media Literacy helps students in building leadership, self-expression, and conflict resolution. From the morning till evening we are surrounded by different forms of media, sometimes spreading false information, Young minds should be able to distinguish facts from propaganda. According to the National Association for Media Literacy Education, media literacy is the ability to use all kinds of communication to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act. It also includes understanding messages, viral video content, advertising etc. Gone are the days when only teachers and parents used to be the major sources of information for children, nowadays children are exposed to all kinds of materials on which parents have very little control. Children and youth who are over-exposed to media sometimes face short-term or long-term psychological effects. Media literacy is an informed, critical understanding of the mass media.



It involves examining the techniques, technologies and institutions involved in media production (Sayantani, 2017). Studies have revealed that media has a major impact on the behavior of the young children like cigarette smoking, exposure to sexual content, eating disorder, body shaming etc. The curriculum of students does not directly include media literacy study. Most students prefer social media for access to information followed by television, newspaper, magazines, and radio. Apart from this, social media platforms have also become a major platform for the youth to express their ideas and opinions. The youth who actually understand the meaning of media literacy is very low. The aspect of media literacy skills highlights the ability to think about the media's representation of how it constructs reality in terms of different socio political characteristics such as class, gender, race, etc (Hobbs, 2011). In a world full of information from different platforms circulating messages and information without gatekeeping, media literacy can help students to develop critical thinking skills and protect themselves from media manipulations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media Literacy is necessary to understand the concept of fake news. Social media has made the accessibility to information very easy but not provided any means to protect oneself from half-truths and misinformation. Preventing the dissemination of fake news requires awareness and prompt action from social media outlets. However it is very difficult to control the content on social media sites. Media literacy is to understand media content, the ability to produce it, and the ability to employ critical thinking, which is the optimal methods to stop the spread of fake news (Zou'bi, 2022).

Media literacy is yet to saturate in India. Relatively few discourse or projects are planned to advance media education in the nation. Digital mediums like computers, laptops, mobile phones and internet have undoubtedly revolutionized the world. It has helped in easy access to information and news by being an interactive and quick medium. With the coming of mobile phones, the concept of mobility, and internet services gave a boost to digital media. It has proved to be a very strong tool for those who know how to judiciously use it but is a dangerous tool for those who have little idea about media. The spread of fake news has gone up to

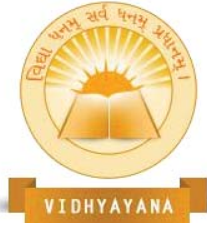


enormous proportions in India so much so that it has led to mob lynching and killings in different parts of the country and social media platforms escalating it further (Sayanika, 2019).

With access to easy and unfiltered content, the youth in today's time has a much greater threat as compared to earlier generations. The media these days acts like a double-edged sword bringing in lots of advantages as well as disadvantages. With adolescents still growing mentally and physically, the type of content impacts a lot on their psychological well-being and growth. With so many digital content available from different sources, thinking critically has become a challenge. All the content available on different media has been developed with a purpose, and media literacy helps to evaluate that purpose. It is impossible to control the availability of content on different social media platforms, media literacy could be the tool to equip youth in order to prevent themselves from exposure to negative media content (Sukriti Pant, 2023).

Researches have found out that it is very difficult to regulate media content like violent or vulgar among youth through censorship, in such a condition, media literacy is the only way forward to protect adolescents who are also the most vulnerable group. People consume media to fulfill their educational and entertainment needs and however many times they fail to understand that media does not always portray the reality and the content is biased and incorrect at times. The youths are overexposed to media contents including violence, drug abuse, sexual relationship, body image, crimes etc. Such concerns could only be controlled by media literacy. Media studies and trainings have shown significant effectiveness in the critical assessment towards media messages. There is also a reduction in negative behaviors among the youth like tobacco consumption, alcohol abuse if properly counseling is done (Narjes Geraee, 2015).

The abundance of media users in India calls for proper programs and policies toward building media literacy. Keeping in view the rising effect of social media and the engagement of younger generations, critical media literacy becomes the need of the hour. Media literacy empowers people to be active respondents rather than passive recipients. India is recognized as the country with the world's largest young population, it is very essential to impart media literacy for a healthy and smooth functioning of democracy but in India, media literacy is yet to be explored and studied properly. Media shapes the perception, beliefs, and attitudes of the individual. This social consciousness becomes possible when students learn to understand the social, economic,



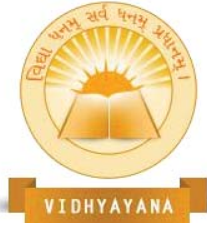
political and cultural context of the mass media through inculcating media literacy (Boruah, 2019).

When being online, youngsters are often subjected to abuses and hateful messages from Social media literacy strangers, so it is necessary to equip them with tools that help in making sound decisions. Social media literacy can be come a relevant resource for positive online participation only if proper education regarding media usage, content development and its purposes is made (Wendt, 2023).

The 21st century brought a technological boom that became a part of our lives. This has led to an impact on the way information is being gathered and disseminated. Media Literacy can be utilized in increasing awareness and promoting a deeper understanding of the different media messages. There is immense competition among content providers leading to compromises on the accuracy and credibility of the message. India still has a long journey to cover an organized, well-planned policy that is practical. Until then the need is of self-regulation and protecting oneself from fake news and propaganda. This is where Media Literacy could play its role (Sharma, 2019).

The rise of exposure to media does affect children and youth. Media literacy helps the analysis and evaluation of media content. Media literacy helps in understanding about how a true democracy functions and the importance of having diverse opinions and why it is necessary to participate in policy and decision-making. It enhances young people's understanding of how media functions and represents reality. In 1990, The Media Literacy Conference by UNESCO was held that defined four levels of media education around the World, of which India was labeled as second-level country where media education is not even. There is no proper curriculum, frameworks or policies for teaching media literacy in India. New strategies should be adapted for a critical interpretation of both the traditional as well as new media (Desai, 2009).

Studies have shown that Media Literacy increases the chances of critically evaluating media messages and also verifying photos, videos etc before actually believing in them. MIL is necessary to train individuals especially the younger children who are vulnerable and empower



them with the appropriate skills to criticize and distinguish between facts and false news or information. In this study done by the researcher, critical thinking attributed to the fact that these methods were presented to students who received online training sessions on how to detect fake news. This training enables users to distinguish between facts and opinions and helps stop the spread of false news and prevent it from reaching larger numbers of recipients. After studying Media Literacy, youngsters were seen more to apply critical thinking on contents available online that they hardly did earlier. (Zou'bi, 2022)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

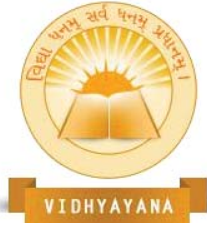
Studies by researcher's shows that messages on social media platforms are more prone to misleading and manipulation. Most of the people especially youngsters of India uses different media platforms not only for entertainment purpose but also for interacting on the personal and professional front as well as for seeking information and education. India is a country with many youth using digital platforms everyday for different purposes. Media literacy helps youth to filter the message and understand the real aim of the content. Media literacy level is higher in males than females. Media literacy helps in handling the message efficiently and understanding its impact on society. The study reveals that the media literacy level is quite high among the youth. Females are lacking behind males in terms of receiving, processing, and evaluating the correct meaning of messages, The reason may be that the media following of female youth is restricted to few media sources (Kumar, 2019). Age is a major factor that defines the extent of media literacy. Due to exposure to different media, media literacy among youth has slightly increased.

On an average, a youth spends 2-3 hours per day on the Internet and it is likely to increase more in the coming years due to the availability of high-speed broadband. The Indian youth are aware about media literacy to a fair extent but more awareness regarding the creation of media messages and its usage needs to be done. The study found that the main aim of media literacy should be the ability to think critically. Facebook is the most commonly used media platform followed by YouTube, Instagram and Whatsapp (Tripathi, 2019). With an overflowing of it is



vital to authenticate the content and the origin of media messages to establish media literacy. Youngsters often accept everything that is being fed to them by the media without filtering. Media literacy and media education is to be made an integral part of the course curricula. Efficient media training can actually lead to the formation of informed pressure groups to ensure balanced reporting by the media. If students are imparted knowledge on the history, social and psychological biases of technology, they would grow up as responsible adults who use technology and not get used by technology. The numbers of different social media users is bound to increase in the next few years. With challenges like fake news, harassment, hacking, pornography etc, media literacy becomes necessary. The focus should be more on Content literacy like user's ability to seek content, shift through the bulk of available information, analyze, interpret the information and derive meanings. A person's socio-cultural background, age, educational qualification, social environment, family environment and peer pressure have a bearing on an individual's frame of reference that plays a major role in how they interpret information. Except for few, most of the users rely on traditional media to judge the authenticity and credibility of the information. In terms of digital media literacy women are somewhat lagging behind men due to their prior engagement with household chores, however some women still do have the mobile handset is an empowering tool by bringing the world to their fingertips (Sayanika, 2019). Media literacy helps in modernizing the society as it keeps media persons conscious of their role thereby reshaping society and benefitting everyone involved. The media has played a commendable role in highlighting social injustices. Its contribution in terms of education of the underprivileged sections of the society is also major. Media often has become the voice of the voiceless and raised the issues of the grassroots. Media Literacy also encourages dialogue among various sections of media consumers. Media Literacy has also been an important tool in conflict resolution within and across the borders (Nayak, 2014).

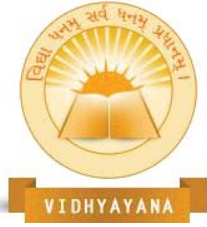
The present study found that economic issues are the least preferred aspect for students to express their opinions on media platforms. Youth agree that media creates a bias in representing reality, especially in the political aspect as media sets the agenda and guides the audience what to think about. It is necessary that children are exposed to different opinions or viewpoints. Still they should develop critical thinking abilities to decide which side they are on. In this



scenario, media literacy is essential so youth can take unbiased decisions in the democracy (Boruah, 2019).

There is a need of good pedagogy and availability of teaching resources. Ways of dealing with the huge influx of media messages is the need of the hour. Steps should be taken at school and higher education level for creating awareness and teaching media literacy. We must urgently promote media literacy among citizens so that they can be critical consumers of information capable of effectively contributing to the public discourse. In India the basic concerns are the promotion of equality, social justice, democracy, freedom, human dignity and a more humane society through media literacy. It is essential for self-understanding and self-expression. Media Literacy must develop an understanding of media and enable the young people to appreciate the potential and limitations of various media platforms. It can be utilized for raising awareness on social issues, participation in the decision-making, and also contribute to peace and intercultural dialogue. Parental training shall enable to help scrutinize and protect children and youngsters from consuming harmful contents (Kundu, 2014). Another way to develop critical media literacy is to encourage the children to produce their own newspapers, books, videos etc thereby encouraging them to be a creative thinker. Teachers may encourage the youth to analyze specific topics and present the discussions in the classroom and evaluate how different students perceive the same media content. Although creating media product is a section of media literacy that actually starts by understanding, evaluating and shaping the message in the correct way. Media Literacy also focuses on the fact that messages in media are created in a certain manner and different people may respond to the same messages differently.

Media has been an important part of the information and communication system in any country. It shapes the values, ideas and opinions of the people on different issues. With the growth of different media industries like television, theatres, FM channels etc, it has been evident that media is also commodified. As compare to the level of exposure to different media, the media and information literacy is still in the nascent stage in India. There is an urgent need to reach out to media experts and measure the level of understanding of the youth regarding different media content. Awareness programmes to be run in schools and colleges to see if Media literacy could be imparted in the institutions. Awareness on media ethics and sensationalism is also



essential to educate youth about the impact of news and information. Keeping in mind the language diversity in India, calls for a decentralized framework including media and civil society (Desai, 2009).

Running of educational programmes at college and university levels could be a major step in creating media awareness. Planned educational programmes could promote positive media usage and behavior among adolescents. Self-censorship is an important step in controlling the consumption of media messages. Government laws and regulations and creating strategies for monitoring media consumption could help in reduction of the adolescents' exposure to the media but adolescents mostly use the media at home. Therefore, parents' role, as well as the children's perception, should be taken into account in directing children's media consumption. It is imperative to create motivation and awareness to youth for consuming age appropriate and clean content (Narjes Geraee, 2015).

CONCLUSION:

There is an urgent need to teach youngsters to treat media content critically. There is a need to improve media literacy among young children and youngsters as well. Web violence, cybercrime, violence of all forms etc has been common term these days due to unfiltered and over exposure of children to different media. It is almost impossible to spend even a single day without using any type of media. In such a situation it is important to understand how media operates and how it can be used for positive development of the individual and society on the whole. Exposure to different media affects the viewers' perception of the ongoing problems in the society. The government and social media platforms must organize literacy campaigns, training programmes, workshops for the youth in different educational institutions. The media does not always reflect reality, and its content is not always thorough, accurate, or neutral. Media platforms must ensure that the content they are presenting is reliable, unbiased and authentic. Media Education should be made compulsory in School Curriculum. It is essential for youth to question and contextualize the information they receive via different platforms. If taught properly and used correctly, media can entertain and educate the children and youth in a positive way. It encourages them to determine if the message is correct and informational. Teachers and educators shall be trained to develop curricula and guidelines for media literacy.



Training programs and workshops for policy and decision-makers are also needed. There should be inter-face between educators, professionals of media proficiency and guardians to guarantee that media literacy had more prominent effect. The need of the hour is to be vigilant and only trust information when we are sure of the credibility of the source.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

I, the undersigned author of the review paper titled, “**Analyzing Media Literacy and its Importance in India**” certify that:

1. The research conducted and presented in this paper is free from any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest that could inappropriately influence or bias the work.
2. I have not received financial support, grants, or in-kind support that could influence the interpretation or results of this research, except as disclosed below (if applicable).
3. The author does not hold any affiliations, financial interests, or relationships with organizations or entities that could be construed as influencing the content or outcomes of the research.
4. All sources of financial and material support for the work have been fully disclosed in the acknowledgments section of this paper.
5. I certify that the manuscript is my original work and has not been submitted or published elsewhere.



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