ISSN 3093-0359
ISSN 3093-0471

MEDIA LITERACY, MISINFORMATION AND COUNSELLING INTERVENTIONS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract
The study reviewed media literacy, misinformation and counselling interventions in the digital age. It gave the meaning of media, types of media such as traditional media like newspapers, magazines, radio, and television; Digital media like, online news websites, social media platforms, blogs, podcasts, and streaming services; Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. The importance of media literacy was discussed such as the ability to meet and safeguarding responsibilities, promoting positive mental health and wellbeing. It also highlighted the needs for media literacy in digital age. Also discussed are principles of media literacy, effects of media misinformation on students' academic performance such as academic consequences, cognitive and emotional as well as social and behavioral effects and long-term consequences. The paper posed to some counselling Tips for managing media misinformation among the students. Some counselling therapies for managing media misinformation were highlighted such as Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Media Literacy Therapy, Critical Thinking Therapy, Mindfulness-Based Therapy, Psychoeducational Therapy and Solution-Focused Therapy.
Keywords: Media literacy, Misinformation, Counselling interventions and Digital age

Introduction

The spread of misinformation and fake news has become a significant problem in recent years. While this issue is often discussed in the context of politics and social media, it can also have serious consequences for academic research. The difficulty of individuals in accessing reliable sources and credible advice when needed, and this phenomenon, in turn, leads to the ease and speed of fake news especially on social media. There is not a single agreed definition of media literacy (Reem and Al-Moubi,2024) but Ofcom (the UK's independent communications regulator) according to Yang and Tian (2023) defined media literacy as the 'ability to use, understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts particularly at this digital age. Media literacy is equally referred to the ability to critically think about, analyze, and evaluate the media messages we consume (Aoun, Dabbous & Terhimi, 2023).

Media is referred to large scale communications which could cover~~s~~ a wide range of ways ~~we~~ that messages are received and shared information from one person to another (Lazie & Zezeli, 2021). These include among others as Newspapers, leaflets and other printed material, Television and radio broadcasts, Websites, Online news feeds and information services. It is also included information received and shared via social networking platforms, such as TikTok, Facebook and Instagram. On the other hands, 'Literacy' refers to competence and knowledge – in this case with reference to being able to access different types of media to gain information and then interpreting and analyzing the information that we receive via the media. Although at this digital age, media literacy does encompass printed and 'offline' media alone, when we are referring to developing media literacy skills, we primarily mean in reference to both online and electronic media.

Literature Review

Media Literacy

Media Literacy according to Sahoo and Gupta (2024) involves understanding the role of media in society, recognizing biases and agendas, and making informed decisions about the media we engage with. Media literacy enables individuals to make informed decisions about the media they consume, promotes critical thinking and skepticism, encourages responsible media use and creation.to enhances communication skills and promotes effective expression. Therefore, media literacy plays a large part in the present digital lives, and there are now more media platforms and ways to access content and information than ever before. Developing media literacy skills is therefor, more vital for all of us at this digital age, and it is especially important that

ISSN 3093-0359
ISSN 3093-0471

we provide opportunities for the students and every young people to understand the need for media literacy so as to build their own skills for the present live challenges.

Media types according to Brasoveanu and Andomie (2021) refers to various channels and platforms used to communicate information, news, entertainment, education, and advertising to a wide audience. Media can be categorized into several types which includes: Traditional Media such as Newspapers, magazines, radio, and television; Digital Media like, Online news websites, social media platforms, blogs, podcasts, and streaming services; Social Media Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube that enable user-generated content and interaction; Mass Media such as, large-scale media outlets that reach a broad audience at a time, such as television networks and major newspapers with large coverage; These identified media contribute significantly to the human development in the present digital age which according to Bode and Vraga (2021) include Information dissemination providing news, updates, and educational content; Entertainment by offering movies, TV shows, music, and other forms of entertainment; Advertising through promotion of products, services, and ideas through various media channels in order to reach the market target; Public opinion shaping such as influencing public opinion and sparking discussions on important issues within the society.

Media Literacy and Digital age

As education professionals, it is important that you take the opportunity to help promote and develop the media literacy skills of the children that you work with. Media literacy in the present digital dispensation could not be over estimate due to the underline advantages (Balod & Hameleers, 2021). As part of the statutory duties to safeguard children, there is a responsibility to teach children how to keep themselves and others safe, both online and offline. Many of the skills mentioned in the section above relate to online safety. By developing children's media literacy skills, you are better enabling them to both recognize, and respond to, online risk and harm. This includes (but is certainly not limited to the critically evaluating information that can help to safeguard against radicalization and extremism among the students. this, includes culture of encouraging children to the question the validity of claims, explore other viewpoints and build awareness of the dangers of 'echo chambers' (Gluer & Wikforss, 2022).

According to Ball (2021) media literacy helps to understanding what is and isn't acceptable behaviour which can equally help them to recognize child on child abuse online, and respond appropriately. Also helps them to recognize a healthy online relationship and realize the potential consequences of their own conduct online. Media literacy skills can help children inhabit the online space in a positive way and also be aware of how it might negatively impact their wellbeing. This includes having an awareness of how the amount of time spent on devices might impact them and finding a good balance. Online bullying and child on child abuse have a hugely detrimental effect on a child's wellbeing. Media literacy skills relating to online safety can help children recognize such abuse and know where to go for support. Social media has been linked to negative effects on young people's mental health. One cause is the feeling of comparison to others and their lives. Media literacy skills can help children realize that what they see in others' feeds is not 'truth' (Lee, Choi & Britt, 2023) It is also important for the students (and parents to understand the role of algorithms in content generation, especially if they know that they are accessing platforms which are aimed at older teenagers (most social networking platforms have an age limit of 13 (Madrid & Wasserman, 2023)

Relationship Education according to Suarez and Alverez (2023) includes similarities and differences between online and in-person relationships, and rules and principles for staying safe online; appropriate boundaries in the context of digital friendships, appropriate and inappropriate contact, privacy, recognizing when something is concerning and knowing how to report concerns and seek support. Health Education includes consideration of the impact of cyberbullying on mental wellbeing, the benefits and risks of online lives, the impact on health and wellbeing when spending too much time online, age restrictions in the online world, thinking critically about online information and knowing where to report concerns and access support. Computing which includes the safe and respectful use of technology, protecting personal information, acceptable and unacceptable online behaviour and identifying different ways to report concerns about online contact and content.

Sex and Relationships Education that includes characteristics of positive online relationships; the notions of privacy, consent, tolerance, bullying and sexual harassment; rights and responsibilities online; online risks and their impact; how to report

ISSN 3093-0359
ISSN 3093-0471

online concerns and how to access support and the concepts and laws relating to some potential online harms. Health Education that deals with unhealthy comparison with others, over-reliance on online relationships, risks of online gambling, reporting concerns and accessing support. Ball (2021) opined that media literacy in the digital age saves as the basic of competencies that allow citizens to interact with the media effectively, and develop critical thinking and lifelong learning skills for socialization that makes them active citizens, therefore its needs in this digital age cannot be over estimate. Media and information literacy (MIL) has become a social necessity owing to the massive development of modern media resources in the digital age, such as social media, digital channels, and electronic news sites, which together confront individuals with a vast amount of information, headlines, new technologies, and different opinions. This makes the new generation aware of how to interact with different forms of media. This is crucial because they will convey the news and information they encounter to other people.

According to Sahoo and Gupta (2024) almost 300 million new social media users are added each year, which equates to 550 new users per minute. MIL has evolved gradually since 1960, a time when it was referred to as "media literacy" where the focus was on teaching diverse segments of the public (children, young people, and adults) to consume mediated information critically and deliberately in both formal and informal contexts. The concept of media literacy in the digital age becomes more concerned with educating and informing individuals as a "defense project", the aim of which was to protect children and young people from the dangers created by the media, and to encourage them to reject and overcome "false" messages and "inappropriate" values. Early in 1982, Grunwald's declaration according to (Yang &Tian, 2023) recognized the need for political and educational systems to promote a critical understanding among citizens of "communication phenomena" from childhood to university. This was achieved by providing training workshops for teachers to master media education skills (Sahoo & Gupta, 2024). Supporting UNESCO's global initiative to disseminate MIL concepts was an early step toward the development of today's composite concept of media literacy

Media Information Literacy can be described as a set of skills that enable users to understand, objectively assess, and respond wisely to media content. This helps them to raise awareness of human rights on the Internet, fight hate speech, false news, and online bullying, and utilize media technology to foster equity and self-expression (Sahoo & Gupta, 2024). Ball (2021) define MIL as the ability to decode, encode, analyze, evaluate, and produce media content in its various forms. Ball (2021) believes that MIL refers to the acquisition of the skills that help individuals understand, produce, and criticize media content. These previous definitions combine three basic elements: understanding media content, the ability to produce it, and the ability to employ critical thinking. Therefore, it is considered one of the optimal methods to stop the spread of fake news as it enables the public and students to become better educated so that they can critically and constructively evaluate the stories they see on social networks. It assumes that fake news can be addressed by being extra careful when publishing or sharing news that receives a multitude of comments and "likes." The recipient must be aware that their constant presence on a particular media platform will substantially limit their perceptions of fake news and they will become more receptive to accepting and passing on false stories. Accordingly, the recipient must diversify their preferred trusted media outlets. When they detect a fabricated story or false news, they must inform others about it. Simply refraining from publishing the story is not sufficient; they must be proactive in stopping the spread of false news (Aoun, Dabbous & Terhimi, 2023).

Principles of Media Literacy

For every initiative, there bond to be principles under guide such initiatives in other not to use its usefulness. According to Carlson and Robinson (2021), the followings are identified principles that under guide medial literacy. However, these principles are interrelated and inform each other. Users should be aware of the fact that their personal data can be used by others, and have an understanding of how to protect their privacy online. This ranges from understanding the importance of password protection, knowing what it means when you 'accept cookies', to knowing how to set privacy settings on social media accounts or parental settings on apps.

Yang and Tian (2023) asserted that it is important that users understand some of the key elements of how the online world works. For example, users should understand that much of the online content that they are presented with is driven by algorithms based on their online behaviour. This could relate to commercial information such as tailored advertisements based on recent searches. However, it is also important to realize that such algorithms influence news feeds. You are presented with

ISSN 3093-0359
ISSN 3093-0471

the news that the algorithm thinks you will interact with. This can lead to a risk of echo chambers – meaning there is a potential lack of balance in the information you receive, giving a skewed picture of an issue or topic (Aoun, Dabbous & Terhimi, 2023). Balod and Hameleers (2021) remarked that, being able to analyse and evaluate the information that you encounter is an extremely important part of media literacy skills. Users should be able to determine whether information is from a trusted source and know how to check and assess the reliability of the information they are given. The users must equally realize that every piece of media content can carry bias. It has been created for a purpose with an audience in mind and is designed to produce an outcome. Those with good media literacy skills will understand what misinformation (information that is unintentionally misleading) and disinformation (information that is deliberately misleading) are. They should know what to do should they need to report false content, and will be able to differentiate between fact and opinion (Balod & Hameleers, 2021).

At the very core of this principle is to maintain a questioning attitude and not to simply assume that all information that you encounter is true or trustworthy. Young people can be particularly impressionable and therefore it is especially important to foster this principle from a young age. Knowing what acceptable and unacceptable behaviour is online is vital to good media literacy. Users should be able to use that knowledge to influence their own interactions, and know to report any incidents of harmful content or conduct that they witness, or are subject to. It is important to understand that we each have a digital footprint and that our interactions online contribute to our online reputation. Posting or liking content is not anonymous. For example, it is now a requirement of Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) that an online search of publicly available information is conducted on potential candidates applying for roles in education settings, as part of safer recruitment processes (Brasoveanu & Andomie, 2021).

Suarez and Alveraz (2023) opined that, this principle covers a range of skills that help media users participate safely in the online world, and contribute to creating a positive online environment. It encompasses knowing how to create content, how to engage effectively in online conversations and how to control who is able to access their content. It also includes knowing how to keep themselves safe, to seek help and to recognize if they are experiencing online harm. Together, these principles work towards enabling people to benefit from the advantages of engaging with online media, whilst making them aware of the potential risks and consequences. Importantly, by developing their understanding of how content is created and how to critically evaluate the information they receive, they will be able to make informed decisions as to the reliability of the information. Media literacy allows people to have the skills, knowledge and understanding to make full use of the opportunities presented by both traditional and new communications services. Being media literate online is fundamental to how people act as consumers, users and digital citizens (Yang & Tian, 2023).

Media Misinformation

Media misinformation refers to the spread of false, inaccurate, or misleading information through various media channels, including: News outlets such as Newspapers, magazines, online news sites; social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Online platforms likeBlogs, forums, websites. Carlson, Robinson and Lewis (2021) remarked that media misinformation can take many forms such as False news stories Fabricated or distorted news reports; Propaganda like Biased or manipulative information, disinformation intentionally false or misleading information as well as Rumors like unverified or false information spread through word-of-mouth. The spread of media misinformation can have significant consequences on students including: Public confusion Misinformation can lead to confusion and misunderstanding; Influence on opinions misinformation can shape public opinion and influence decision-making as well as social unrest and misinformation can contribute to social unrest and conflict,

Media misinformation can significantly impact students' academic performance in several ways. Media misinformation according to Reem and Al-Moubi (2024) could lead to poor research quality because through that, it can lead to flawed conclusions, weak arguments, and inaccurate data, ultimately affecting the overall quality of research projects. Media misinformation according to Lazie and Zezeli (2021) equally lead to students' lower grades because assignments based on misleading sources may receive lower marks due to inaccuracies and lack of credibility in response to the questions asked in the examination questions. Repeated instances of citing misinformation can damage a student's academic reputation and credibility because the facts and responses are misleading not only to the students but as well as to the teachers

ISSN 3093-0359
ISSN 3093-0471

Cognitive overload such as sorting through conflicting information that can cause mental fatigue, hindering decision-making and critical thinking skills which might make life meaningless for the students (Brasoveanu & Andomie, 2021). The students Anxiety and Stress levels will be increased due to pressure in an attempt to verify information and fear of using incorrect sources can lead to anxiety, stress, and self-doubt. Erosion of trust a result of repeated exposure to misinformation can weaken trust in reliable sources, making it challenging for students to distinguish between credible and false information. Aoun, Dabbous and Terhimi (2023) observed that distraction and decreased productivity are manifestations of media misinformation because sensational headlines and clickbait content can distract students from their studies, decreasing productivity and loss of focus in all their activities Misinformation can fuel Social Interactions and Cyberbullying which can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and cyberbullying, affecting students' social lives and mental health as well as other related affairs Misinformation can equally escalate the levels of students Isolation and Loneliness. Also, excessive social media use at this digital age can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness, negatively impacting students' overall well-being

The Long-term Consequences according to Sahoo and Gupta (2024) can lead to poor academic habits because the students might over rely on misinformation that can develop in them into a habit, affecting future academic and professional pursuits. Critical thinking skills and excessive exposure to misinformation can hinder critical thinking skills, making it challenging for students to evaluate sources and discern credible information.

Conclusion

Looking at the above critically, one could sum up that media literacy could hardly be avoided in the present digital age. On the other side of the coins, the misinformation inherent in the use of media literacy would make someone doubt its positive contributions to the human development at this present dispensation of digital age. However, with counselling interventions, all the sides' effect inherent in the use of media literacy could easily be averted

Suggestions and Counselling Implications

In all the media literacy models, one can hardly avoid misinformation. These misinformation does not really mean that MIL could be totally condemned but could be averted through counselling. Here are some counseling tips for managing media misinformation among students in the digital age

1. **Building Awareness:** Discuss media literacy Educate students about media misinformation and its impact by recognizing that bulling is inevitable. By recognizing it, it will help students identify biases in media content and encourage critical evaluation of every information by sieving the information, accept the acceptable and discard the unnecessary one.
2. **Promoting Critical Thinking**: There is need for the students to always analyze and assess credibility and reliability of any sources of information before rejection and acceptation. Also encourage students to question and verify information and seek multiple perspectives to foster consideration of diverse viewpoints on any information.
3. **Managing Emotions:** Address emotional responses of the students and manage emotions triggered by misinformation. This could be achieved by developing coping strategies and coping mechanisms for dealing with misinformation. The counsellor at this stage need to develop in students foster resilience to encourage resilience in the face of misinformation.
4. **Encouraging Responsible Behavior:** Encourage the students to verify information before sharing and share social media responsibly. Allow the students to report misinformation immediately as well as encouraging them to report false information. Effective Counseling Strategies could equally be used to address media misinformation.

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