Puroik Students and Digital Media: A Media Literacy Intervention

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
	This paper explores the impact of a media literacy intervention on marginalized Puroik students in Arunachal Pradesh, India. In an era dominated by digital media and information overload, the study investigates the transformative potential of media literacy education in equipping these students with critical thinking skills essential for navigating the digital landscape. Drawing upon insights from scholars such as Castells, McLuhan, Beniger, Jenkins, and Shirky, the research emphasizes the pivotal role of digital media in shaping contemporary society. It highlights the need for media literacy education within marginalized communities and discusses the unique challenges faced by Puroik students. Employing a quasi-experimental design and a culturally sensitive media literacy campaign, the study assesses changes in media literacy skills and their implications for informed digital citizenship. This research contributes to the discourse on media literacy and its capacity to empower marginalized communities, particularly the Puroik students, in an increasingly digital world.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a profound transformation in the way people communicate, driven by the pervasive influence of the internet and mass media. The emergence of digital media has revolutionized the dynamics of sharing, receiving, and accessing information, leading to a complete democratization of the concept of communication. This digital revolution has had a profound impact on our thoughts and lifestyles, often in ways that we may not fully comprehend. Scholars and prominent institutions have endeavoured to encapsulate this era through various terms such as the "Global village," "Technocratic era," "Post-industrial society," "Information society," "Information age," "Great orientations age," or the "Knowledge society" (Castells, 1996; McLuhan, 1964; Beniger, 1986). The digital age has effectively rewritten the narrative of traditional media forms, enabling the dissemination of information in more

convenient and expeditious ways. Gone are the days when sharing news and information necessitated the involvement of post offices or labour-intensive door-to-door deliveries. Digital platforms like social networking sites, email, YouTube, and tech giants like Apple and Google have not only streamlined these processes but have also significantly economized time, cost, and energy expenditures. The cumbersome requirement for heavy machinery, extensive manpower, and exorbitant budgets to produce and distribute media content has been rendered obsolete, as the digital landscape allows for the creation of content with a relatively modest financial investment. This transformative shift in communication has been extensively explored in the academic sphere. Castells (1996) introduced the concept of the "Information Age," emphasizing the central role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in shaping contemporary society. Castells argued that the rise of digital media has given rise to a new social structure characterized by networked individuals and global interconnectedness.

Furthermore, McLuhan's (1964) notion of the "Global Village" posited that electronic media, such as television and the internet, would create a sense of global interdependence and proximity. This idea remains relevant in the context of the digital age, where individuals across the globe can instantaneously connect and share information. Beniger (1986) discussed the transition from an industrial society to an "Information Society," highlighting the significance of information processing and the role of digital technologies in the transformation of economic and social systems. The democratization of media production and distribution has been a focal point in the works of Jenkins (2006) and Shirky (2008). They argued that digital platforms have empowered individuals and grassroots movements to create and share content, challenging the traditional media gatekeepers.

However, the contemporary era, often referred to as the "great orientations age," is characterized by an unprecedented reliance on digital technologies, which has profoundly shaped the way individuals perceive and interact with the world. In this digital age, reality is intricately intertwined with how the media portrays the world and its functioning. The internet, in particular, stands out as a revolutionary force that has transformed society by providing unfettered access to an ever-expanding reservoir of online information through a plethora of web services and applications. While the convenience of accessing an immense wealth of information online is undeniably advantageous, it is equally essential to acknowledge and address the accompanying drawbacks. Research findings have underscored the detrimental impact of excessive internet use on individuals' cognitive faculties, rendering them increasingly dependent on online sources for various types of information. Consequently, there arises a pressing need to cultivate critical thinking abilities that enable individuals to discern, interpret, and

constructively engage with the content disseminated through various media channels. This imperative underscores the significance of media literacy skills in the contemporary digital landscape.

The pervasive influence of media on the psychological development of children, particularly their attitudes toward education, cannot be overstated. The proliferation of sophisticated gadgets and intricately designed media platforms has ushered in a transformative shift in the behavior and preferences of students. Notably, social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Gmail, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and others have revolutionized the way information is accessed, making it readily available at the touch of a finger, anytime and anywhere. Research has illuminated a concerning trend, indicating that, on average, students now allocate more time to media consumption than any other activity during their waking hours (Alvermann & Harrison, 2016). The unprecedented accessibility to the internet and the ubiquity of social networking sites and digital communication channels have augmented the importance of parental supervision in monitoring children's media engagement. This heightened vigilance is essential because media, as observed by Marshall McLuhan (1960), is not merely a passive conduit of information; it also actively shapes the cognitive processes of individuals.

Over time, a growing awareness has emerged among researchers and educators that parental oversight alone is insufficient to address the pervasive influence of media on children. Simultaneously, it has become increasingly evident that educational institutions, particularly schools, play a pivotal role in shaping children's understanding of media and its multifaceted implications. As Wood (2011) aptly emphasized, our contemporary society is characterized by unprecedented levels of media saturation and engagement. Kellner (2005) echoed this sentiment, underscoring the imprudence of educators in ignoring the intricate nuances of the media landscape that children of all ages are immersed in today. The advent of the internet has exponentially amplified the accessibility and dissemination of information, thereby transforming the way individuals interact with media. With the internet serving as an expansive repository of news, job opportunities, business ventures, and an array of websites, it has also revolutionized entertainment and socialization through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, MySpace, email services, and streaming providers such as Netflix and YouTube. The ubiquitous nature of these digital channels has resulted in an unceasing consumption of media by students, a phenomenon that, if left unchecked, could potentially have detrimental consequences on their academic trajectories.

Moreover, unrestricted media consumption can leave individuals susceptible to the manipulation of personal opinions and agendas driven by vested interests. Lisa (2016) cogently articulated the importance of transitioning from passive and acquiescent media consumers to active and discerning users. To this end, the imperative of imparting media literacy education in schools becomes evident. Equipping students with the critical skills necessary to decipher intended messages in technology-mediated communications is of paramount importance in today's digitally immersed society. It is also imperative to acknowledge that today's youth are profoundly influenced by the digital environment, making it crucial to ascertain the effectiveness of media literacy campaigns in educational settings. Thus, this study seeks to assess the impact of a media literacy campaign conducted for students at Government Middle School, Puroik Colony, Papu Nallah, located within the Papum Pare district. By delving into the level of influence this campaign exerted on students' media literacy skills, this research endeavor aims to contribute to our understanding of the pivotal role that schools can play in nurturing a generation of critical and discerning media consumers. Moreover, the existing body of scholarly literature on media literacy also underscores the significance of this research. Scholars such as Livingstone (2004) have highlighted the need for comprehensive media education in addressing the challenges posed by the contemporary media landscape. Additionally, Buckingham (2007) emphasizes the importance of media literacy in empowering individuals to engage with media content critically. These insights underscore the relevance and urgency of the study in assessing the impact of media literacy education within the context of Government Middle School, Puroik Colony, Papu Nallah, and its potential implications for media education policies on a broader scale.

Statement of the Problem

In today's rapidly evolving world, a pressing concern of paramount significance is the pervasive issue of "information overload." The advent of the internet has ushered in an unprecedented era of boundless knowledge dissemination, rendering access to information vastly more convenient in comparison to traditional media outlets such as newspapers, radio, television, and books. This digital revolution has not only brought about a qualitative enhancement but also a quantitative proliferation of advancements across all facets of human existence. Consequently, digital media now constitutes an integral component of our daily lives, catalysing a profound transformation in contemporary society. However, the unbridled and unregulated utilization of this omnipotent medium carries the potential for alarming consequences. In this era of digital supremacy, instances of academic underperformance among students, escalating conflicts fuelled by the circulation of misinformation and propaganda, and a pervasive inability to

distinguish between authentic and counterfeit news have become disturbingly prevalent. A notable study conducted at Stanford University underscores the gravity of this issue, revealing that a staggering 80 percent of millennials struggle to differentiate between fake and genuine news sources. The repercussions of this phenomenon extend far beyond the confines of academic institutions and permeate various dimensions of society.

Within the context of Arunachal Pradesh, a remote and culturally diverse region, the Puroik community constitutes a minority group characterized by a significantly low literacy rate. Historically, members of this community were subjected to bonded labor, but efforts have been made to rehabilitate some of them at Puroik Colony, located in Papu Nallah, Naharlagun. Despite the challenges faced by the Puroik community, the region of Arunachal Pradesh as a whole is experiencing a digital transformation, much like the global trend. Young individuals are increasingly immersing themselves in the digital realm to fulfil various informational, entertainment, and social needs. However, a noticeable gap exists in research endeavours aimed at understanding the media consumption habits of Arunachal Pradesh's youth, especially among school students. Furthermore, there is limited research assessing their awareness of both the advantages and disadvantages associated with digital media usage. Therefore, there is a pressing need for a comprehensive study to investigate the digital media habits of Arunachal Pradesh's youth, with a particular focus on Puroik students attending Government Middle School in Puroik Colony, Papu Nallah. This study aims to shed light on the challenges posed by information overload and the potential consequences of uninformed digital media consumption among this specific group. By addressing these concerns, the research endeavour seeks to facilitate the development of informed strategies and policies that promote responsible digital media usage among Puroik students, contributing to the creation of a more informed, aware, and resilient society in the region.

Significance of the Study

The paper holds considerable academic and societal importance due to its investigation into the impact of media literacy campaigns on school students, with a specific focus on the marginalized Puroik community in Arunachal Pradesh. In the digital age, the concept of media literacy has evolved into a critical life skill. The study addresses a significant gap in media literacy research by focusing on an underrepresented and marginalized group—the Puroik community. By doing so, it seeks to empower this community with essential media literacy skills, thereby contributing to digital inclusivity and social equity. One of the most pressing issues in today's digital landscape is information overload. The constant

influx of information through digital media channels has raised concerns about its overwhelming nature. This research delves into the consequences of information overload, which includes academic underperformance and the inability to distinguish reliable sources from misinformation. By examining the impact of media literacy campaigns, it offers strategies for effectively managing information overload, providing valuable insights into the broader discourse on information consumption in the digital age.

Media literacy education is fundamental to fostering critical thinking skills. As students increasingly engage with media, the ability to critically assess and interpret information becomes essential. This study explores how media literacy education contributes to the cultivation of critical thinking skills among students. By nurturing independent thought and responsible citizenship, it aims to equip students with the capacity to navigate the complexities of the digital age. Furthermore, the study delves into the potential impact of excessive media consumption on academic performance, a concern that has gained prominence as media consumption patterns evolve. Investigating how media literacy education can positively affect academic outcomes, it provides valuable insights for educators and policymakers. This, in turn, may inform decisions regarding the integration of media literacy education into academic curricula.

Acknowledging the cultural diversity of Arunachal Pradesh, this study underscores the importance of tailoring media literacy campaigns to align with the specific cultural context and needs of the Puroik community. This approach not only ensures the effectiveness of media literacy education but also highlights the significance of culturally sensitive education in promoting digital literacy. Beyond its local relevance, this research carries broader policy implications. It contributes to the discourse on media education policies, offering insights into how such policies can promote responsible digital media usage at regional and national levels. In an increasingly interconnected world, where digital media transcend geographical boundaries, the study's findings have global relevance. Its insights into media literacy are applicable worldwide, aiding individuals in diverse settings in becoming more discerning consumers of media content.

Literature Review

A literature review plays a vital role in any research endeavour, serving as an essential means to recognize and acknowledge the prior research efforts in the specific field of study. Engaging in this review process fosters critical thinking, contributes to one's understanding of the subject under investigation, and helps identify shortcomings in previous research. In the context of this particular study, the researcher has conducted an extensive examination of existing literature pertaining to media literacy and digital media studies, encompassing all relevant aspects of the research at hand.

Media literacy refers to the skills and capabilities possessed by media users to access, scrutinize, and assess the content presented by various forms of media. According to Burniske (2008), Media Literacy encompasses the perspectives individuals actively employ to decipher and comprehend the significance behind the mass media messages encountered in their daily lives. Linde (2010) emphasizes the pivotal role of media literacy in the democratic process, as it contributes to the cultivation of informed citizens. She highlights that media education enhances critical thinking abilities, enabling individuals to question media messages and their creators.

In today's highly mediated society, it is imperative that we evolve from passive media consumers into discerning users. This transformation necessitates a deliberate and thoughtful interaction with media content and the information originating from diverse sources. The significance of media literacy has become even more pronounced in the era of new and convergent media, which has revolutionized how people access and share information through various media platforms. Furthermore, the escalating misuse of the creative potential of digital media has already resulted in detrimental consequences, such as mob violence and escalating communal conflicts. Additionally, the media's perceived role in disseminating false propaganda and promoting negative agendas, particularly against humanity, frequently leads consumers to fall victim to deceitful media practices, ultimately jeopardizing their freedom and liberty.

Renowned author Len Masterman, in his book titled "Teaching the Media," coined the term "critical autonomy" to define media literacy as the capacity for independent thought. He characterized it as the essential counterbalance to the pervasive influence of media and emphasized that media literacy education is an imperative universal requirement as long as media continues to shape human existence. This concept delves into the extent of students' knowledge within educational institutions and their ability to scrutinize and comprehend media critically.

Expanding beyond the mere comprehension of media, Carr (2005) posits that media literacy empowers young individuals to engage with mass media in a constructive manner, embracing the idea of 'understanding and action.' In a society grappling with pressing issues like corruption, unemployment, inequality, and various other forms of distress, media literacy mobilizes the youth to actively participate in addressing and resolving contemporary global challenges. It encourages them to become active participants in civil society, question government policies and decisions, and fosters their understanding of the importance of a diverse and pluralistic society in sustaining communal harmony.

Given the alarming proliferation of fake news online, Larry Atkins (2016) underscores the paramount importance of raising awareness about media literacy, especially in the face of the myriad channels through which information is disseminated. Similarly, Gleason (2016) suggests that media literacy education can be promoted through awareness campaigns, workshops, seminars, and various other mediums. One effective strategy to cultivate informed individuals is the inclusion of media education in school and college curricula. Media literacy can be integrated into almost every course and subject in the classroom, as emphasized by Craig (1997). Equipping students with media literacy skills within the educational system equips them to navigate the media-saturated world effectively. Given the excessive consumption of media by the modern generation, it is imperative for them to understand and critically analyze media content, as misinterpreted media messages can have detrimental consequences.

It's undeniable that today's youth are inundated with the overwhelming volume of data and information available on the internet, which has left them unable to think or act independently. Modern technology has simplified the process of accessing, consuming, and creating media content. Social networking platforms, in particular, have become an integral part of every student's life, exerting profound effects on their memory retention, classroom focus, critical thinking, social behavior, contemplation, and self-reflection (Carr, 2010).

Beneath the surface of the internet lies a vast expanse of information, entertainment, ideas, and knowledge, which has only intensified the allure of online browsing for younger generations. The 21st century has ushered in a media-rich environment for students, making learning and information acquisition more accessible than traditional classroom settings, but with limited supervision. Today, students are deeply immersed in the internet and social media, with almost everyone using smartphones for various purposes, such as watching videos, sharing updates, expressing themselves, gaming, staying connected, conducting business, utilizing search engines, and more. Social networking sites like

Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snapchat have become highly addictive, to the extent of dictating people's behavioral patterns. This overreliance on the internet has not only made students passive but has also left them uncertain about their own cognitive abilities, with the internet seemingly assuming the role of their mental faculties.

As Cramer (2015) has pointed out, unchecked exposure to mass media can render individuals unproductive and prone to faulty reasoning. Massey (2001) encourages media consumers not just to passively consume whatever is offered but to become discerning users who grasp the complexities of the internet and its potential adverse consequences. There is an urgent need for the current generation to be equipped with media literacy skills to protect and empower themselves. This entails safeguarding against negative influences and exploitation through digital content while also gaining the ability to make responsible choices, think critically, and create their own digital content. Scholars advocate for comprehensive media literacy training and education for every media consumer, emphasizing the importance of integrating media education into the curriculum, starting from high school, to ensure that students exert control over media rather than being controlled by it.

Therefore, as responsible citizens of today, it is imperative that we comprehend how media functions in our society and its impact on our lives. This knowledge is crucial to harnessing media for our personal development. Consequently, teaching young minds how to use media for constructive purposes becomes essential, as misuse can have moral, mental, and emotional repercussions. For example, consider the case of the Blue Whale Challenge, an online game that assigns risky and dangerous challenges to players, potentially leading them to self-harm or even suicide. Recent news reports have documented cases of a 14-year-old boy in Mumbai jumping from a building and a 15-year-old boy in West Midnapore suffocating in a plastic bag after participating in this online game.

However, on a positive note, when used appropriately, media can bring about remarkable improvements, growth, and development in all aspects of life (Lavin and Cash, 2000). Given the rightful freedom to act as the fourth pillar of democracy, the media can serve as a watchdog against corruption, disseminate essential information rapidly, and play a pivotal role in uniting today's fragmented and polarized world, marred by dangerous online trends. Therefore, it is crucial that media literacy skills, a valuable asset, be imparted to the masses so that they can truly understand, evaluate, analyze, interpret, and identify any mass media content, ultimately becoming informed and discerning citizens.

Meece (2006) emphasized the role of social media in facilitating students' access to knowledge from their teachers, even beyond the confines of the campus. This utilization of social media diversifies the learning experience. It involves the creation of social media accounts and groups tailored to specific student cohorts, classes, or courses. These platforms serve as repositories for sharing information and study materials, providing students with a convenient resource accessible anytime and anywhere, essentially transforming the virtual space into a classroom. Furthermore, the benefits extend to educators, as teachers who actively share their expertise through online mediums like Facebook, Twitter, blogs, websites, and YouTube channels often amass a substantial following, enhancing their reputation.

In the context of today's digital landscape, where students increasingly allocate more time to digital media and less to traditional reading, Schmidt (2012) noted a potential issue. Such trends raise concerns about students' capacity to critically evaluate media content, leading them to consume it uncritically. Remarkably, the incorporation of media literacy education within the conventional classroom setting has garnered limited scholarly attention (Scharrer 2007). Scholars and educators have underscored the imperative to prioritize media education at all educational levels, spanning from primary schools to higher education curricula. The goal is to foster problem-solving skills and impart valuable insights in this domain (Kellner and Share 2005).

Schunk proposed that the optimal time to instill media literacy is during adolescence, before individuals become susceptible to the pervasive influence of social networking platforms. The rise of social media giants such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Instagram accentuates the urgency of media education, given the growing number of young people exposed to and engrossed in social media. The prevalence of media usage will continue to escalate in the days ahead. In today's modern world, news, both genuine and false, disseminates rapidly through social media groups, posing a potential threat to adolescents who may not have received comprehensive media education during their schooling.

In a similar vein, Angwin (2009) contended that integrating media education into the school curriculum aims to empower students, fostering critical discernment as active consumers of media content. Furthermore, media education can be seamlessly integrated into various academic courses and subjects, enhancing the teaching-learning process. Classrooms, in particular, offer an effective platform to elucidate the merits and pitfalls of media (Craig, 1997). Nevertheless, this study diverges from examining how students employ media in their academic pursuits and instead concentrates on assessing

their fundamental comprehension of media operations and evaluating the impact of media literacy campaigns on school students' attitudes and behaviors towards mass media.

Research Objective

To assess the effectiveness of a media literacy campaign on improving the media literacy skills of school students from the Puroik community in Arunachal Pradesh, India.

Research Design

This study will employ a quasi-experimental research design to assess the impact of a media literacy campaign on school students from the Puroik community in Arunachal Pradesh. The research will consist of pre-test and post-test measurements to evaluate changes in media literacy skills and related outcomes. The participants in this study will be students from Government Middle School, Puroik Colony, Papu Nallah, which serves the Puroik community in Arunachal Pradesh. A sample of students will be selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different grades. Prior to the implementation of the media literacy campaign, a pre-test will be administered to assess the baseline media literacy skills, knowledge, and attitudes of the participants. The pre-test will include questions related to media consumption habits, ability to distinguish reliable sources from unreliable ones, critical thinking skills, and awareness of digital media's impact. A targeted media literacy campaign will be designed and conducted for the selected students. The campaign will include interactive workshops, discussions, and activities aimed at improving their media literacy skills. The content of the campaign will be culturally sensitive and tailored to the needs of the Puroik community. After the completion of the media literacy campaign, a post-test will be administered to the same group of participants. The post-test will assess changes in media literacy skills, critical thinking abilities, and awareness of media-related issues compared to the pre-test. Ethical approval will be sought from relevant authorities, and informed consent will be obtained from participants and their guardians. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained throughout the study. The results of the data analysis will be interpreted in the context of the research objectives, and findings will be discussed in relation to existing literature on media literacy and its impact on students' academic performance and critical thinking abilities. The study however, may encounter limitations such as the availability of resources, potential response biases in self-reported data, and the specific cultural context of the Puroik community, which may limit the generalizability of findings.

Structure of the campaign

The researcher conducted a well-organized media literacy campaign program aimed at educating school children. This program took place at Government Middle School Puroik Colony, Papu Nallah, with the goal of informing students about the media's role in their lives and society. Additionally, it aimed to educate students on the proper and improper use of media, its advantages, and to inspire ethical interaction with media for accessing and sharing information. The campaign modules consisted of an introductory session on media, a short play on the topic of 'Mob Lynching,' a participatory role-play exercise to illustrate communication and how messages can be distorted, manipulated, or misunderstood, and a media quiz to assess the students' media knowledge.

Findings and Interpretation

The media literacy campaign had a significant positive impact on the respondents, enhancing their knowledge about media substantially. Consequently, it can be inferred that the communication methods employed in the campaign effectively conveyed media literacy information to school students. The respondents encompassed students from grades VI to VIII, totalling 40 individuals, with 66.7% being boys and 33.3% being girls. The majority (53.3%) of the respondents fell within the 13 to 16 age group. Notably, the demographic details of the respondents remained consistent between the pre-test and post-test phases, as the same individuals completed both sets of questionnaires.

Significant findings of the study in the pre-test and post-test

Aspects	Pre-Test (%)	Post-Test (%)
Improved comprehension of media usage	35%	43.3%
Use of smartphones	43%	43%
Usage of social media	54%	54%
Awareness of age restrictions on Facebook	40 %	54%
Awareness of legal ramifications of offensive content	10%	54%
Internet usage for social connections	50%	50%
Internet usage for educational purposes	5%	48%
Social media as primary news source	40%	65%
Reliability of WhatsApp messages	86%	10.7%
Understanding of fake news	26.6%	70.3%
Commitment to verify forwarded messages	15%	91.3%

Awareness of adverse effects of excessive media use	60%	92.2%
Understanding of journalists' roles	20.6%	80.0%

In the study, the researcher examined the impact of a media literacy campaign on school students from the Puroik community in Arunachal Pradesh by conducting pre-test and post-test assessments in various aspects of media literacy.

It was observed an improvement in participants' comprehension of media usage from the pre-test to the post-test phase. In the pre-test, a relatively low 35% of participants demonstrated a good understanding of media usage. However, after the media literacy campaign, this percentage increased significantly to 43.3%, indicating an enhancement in participants' comprehension of how to use media effectively.

Regarding the use of smartphones, the findings remained consistent from the pre-test to the post-test, with 43% of participants reporting smartphone use in both phases. This suggests that the campaign did not have a substantial impact on this aspect of media consumption.

Similarly, the researchers noted that the usage of social media remained stable at 54% in both the pre-test and post-test phases. This indicates that the campaign did not significantly alter participants' social media usage patterns.

One notable change was observed in the awareness of age restrictions on Facebook. In the pre-test, only 40% of participants were aware of age restrictions on the platform. However, after the campaign, this awareness significantly increased to 54%, suggesting that the campaign effectively conveyed information about age restrictions on Facebook.

Furthermore, the campaign had a significant impact on participants' awareness of the legal ramifications of offensive content. Prior to the campaign, only 10% of participants were aware of the potential legal consequences of posting offensive content. However, after the campaign, this awareness increased dramatically to 54%, indicating a substantial positive change in participants' understanding of the legal aspects of online behaviour.

The researchers also investigated participants' internet usage patterns. While the use of the internet for social connections remained stable at 50% from the pre-test to the post-test, there was a notable shift

towards more educational internet usage. In the pre-test, only 5% of participants reported using the internet for educational purposes, but this percentage increased to 48% after the campaign.

Moreover, the reliance on social media as a primary news source increased significantly from 40% in the pre-test to 65% in the post-test, indicating a higher dependence on social media for news updates.

One of the most substantial changes was observed in participants' perceptions of WhatsApp message reliability. In the pre-test, a significant 86% of participants believed WhatsApp messages were reliable, but this perception dropped significantly to 10.7% in the post-test, suggesting that the campaign led to a substantial change in how participants evaluated the reliability of WhatsApp messages.

The understanding of fake news also improved significantly, with the percentage of participants who understood the concept increasing from 26.6% in the pre-test to 70.3% in the post-test, highlighting the campaign's effectiveness in enhancing participants' awareness of fake news.

Furthermore, the commitment to verify forwarded messages increased dramatically from 15% in the pre-test to 91.3% in the post-test, indicating a strong positive shift in participants' willingness to fact-check information before sharing it.

Additionally, participants' awareness of the adverse effects of excessive media use increased significantly from 60% in the pre-test to 92.2% in the post-test, demonstrating that the campaign successfully raised awareness about the potential negative consequences of excessive media consumption.

Lastly, the understanding of journalists' roles also improved substantially, with the percentage of participants who comprehended the roles and responsibilities of journalists in media increasing from 20.6% in the pre-test to 80.0% in the post-test, underscoring the campaign's profound impact on participants' media literacy skills and awareness.

Collectively, these findings illustrate the positive changes in media literacy skills and awareness among the participants as a result of the media literacy campaign, highlighting the campaign's effectiveness in addressing various aspects of media usage and comprehension.

Conclusion

In the wake of the digital age, a profound transformation in media consumption and communication dynamics has become manifest. The emergence of digital media has catalyzed a democratization of information dissemination, fundamentally altering the conventional paradigms of information access and sharing. This transformative phenomenon, characterized by scholars as the "Information Age," the "Global Village," or the "Knowledge Society," has significantly reshaped societal structures and human interaction with information (Castells, 1996; McLuhan, 1964; Beniger, 1986). It has revolutionized media production and distribution, rendering traditional modes of communication obsolete and heralding an era of instantaneous global interconnectedness.

While the advantages of this digital revolution are indisputable, it is imperative to acknowledge the concomitant challenges it poses. Excessive internet use has been linked to cognitive dependence on digital sources of information, necessitating the cultivation of critical thinking skills. This imperative underscores the centrality of media literacy in the contemporary digital milieu. Moreover, the influence of media on the cognitive development of children, particularly in their educational pursuits, is a matter of substantial concern. The proliferation of digital media platforms and devices has irrevocably altered the media consumption habits of students, necessitating vigilant parental oversight and, more critically, educational institutions' engagement in media literacy education.

This study, conducted at Government Middle School, Puroik Colony, Papu Nallah, offers valuable insights into the impact of a media literacy campaign on students' media literacy skills. The findings illuminate the transformative potential of such campaigns in enhancing students' comprehension of media usage, fake news detection, and the critical evaluation of digital content. Notably, the campaign succeeded in altering participants' attitudes towards media consumption, instilling a commitment to fact-checking and responsible media use. In a broader context, this research underscores the indispensability of media literacy education in nurturing critical thinking skills among students. It emphasizes the pivotal roles of parents, guardians, and educational institutions in guiding students' digital interactions and cultivating media literacy. Furthermore, the absence of media-related subjects in the school curriculum underscores the necessity of integrating media literacy education into formal education systems.

The ramifications of this study extend beyond the immediate context of the Puroik community. It contributes substantively to the discourse on media literacy and its multifaceted implications for contemporary society. Culturally sensitive media literacy campaigns, tailored to marginalized

communities, stand as a testament to the importance of equitable digital inclusion. In sum, the transformative potential of media literacy education is underscored by this study. It signifies a pivotal tool for fostering informed, responsible, and critical media engagement, essential attributes in navigating the complexities of the digital age. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, media literacy remains an indispensable cornerstone for the cultivation of a discerning, resilient, and well-informed society.

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