Media Literacy: Building Critical Media Awareness

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Abstract: The effect of media on society and the world at large is always under constant scrutiny. Researchers across the globe persistently studying the effect of media on the social, political, economic, and cultural discourse of our society. Due to rapid development of Communication Technologies and enhanced access to internet, the challenges posed by media have grown manifolds. To overcome those challenges researchers have been arguing since long about the importance of media literacy. Recent incidents of mob lynching, political turmoil, religion led clashes, etc. are testimonies to the lack of media awareness among the people. It has become crucial than ever for the audience/ consumers of media to understand the media content, its source and know how to utilize the received information.
This study aims to discuss the meaning of media literacy in the present context and explore thesignificance of media literacy. An attempt has been made to highlight the contemporary challenges arising because of the upgradation in communication technologies and demonstrate how media literacy can play an instrumental role in overcoming these challenges.

Keywords: Media Literacy, Communication Technologies, Media Awareness, Society, Media Effect

1. INTRODUCTION

The meaning of media is medium it means to mediate or disseminate the information among the masses. Without medium the process of dissemination and receiving of information isnot possible. Medium enhances the power and effect of information, for example the information becomes viral because of the social media. So normally we can say that the media is not only helping to provide or disseminate the information but also playing a very important role by providing entertainment and education.

In the present context the concept of literacy is fast evolving and we come across a new concept of literacy every day. The word "literacy" is prefixed to any term and a new literacy field is derived apart from the dictionary meaning. These concepts can be listed as picture

literacy, graphic literacy, web (network) literacy, distance education (learning) literacy, economic literacy, legal literacy, library literacy, political literacy, consumer literacy, critical literacy, civic literacy, and
water literacy (Snavely & Cooper, 1997). The word "literacy" used together with these terms means having necessary knowledge and skills in the relevant field (Snavely & Cooper, 1997). For example, political literacy does not mean being a politician. Still, it means to have basic knowledge of politics, understand politics from communication point of view, and knowledge of functioning of a political system and its organs, etc. Other common points of literacy concepts can be summarized as follows. Competences levels can be measured as beginner, intermediate, and advanced, and consist of learnable skills, positive attitudes, and behaviors (Horton, 2008).

The skills and competencies that a media literate individual should have been among the most discussed topics in the literature. According to the European Charter of Media Literacy, There are seven core competencies that media literate people should have. These; using the media effectively, making informed choices about and accessing media content, understanding media content creation, analyzing media techniques and messages, using the media for communication, avoiding harmful media content, and using services and media for democratic rights and civic purposes (Bachmair & Bazalgette, 2007).

In addition to these competencies, the literature highlights four primary skills to be an effective media literate. These skills include access, analysis, evaluation, and communication (Silverblatt etal., 2014; Sahin, 2014).

In the first approach, media literacy is defined as obtaining information from media such as television, radio, newspapers, and the Internet, and critically evaluating it (Bawden, 2001).

The second approach is defined as the ability to understand and use the environments in which information is produced, stored, and transmitted and media types such as text, graphics, newspaper, radio, television broadcast, CD, and DVD (Yılmaz, 2020).

A. Effect of Media: -

Masses today are receiving a lot of audio visual and textual content from different media and generally without thinking much about the content they are getting affected by it. Studies suggest media contents are affecting people's behavior, their thinking process and personality. Sometimes the media contents are leaving a positive impact and sometimes negative impact on people. Without knowing about the agenda of the received information or having any keen interest to know about the sender and meaning of that information, people tend to get affected by the messages which they receive from media. Also, people do not realize the impact of such received information on their future. Researchers have found that the people use the information according to their requirement and interest. In general people are using the media for mainly four objectives which are explained below:

1. Entertainment: -
Entertainment is a basic need of people and there are many ways in which media is providing entertainment to the people. People are watching TV serials, listening to Cricket commentary, reading novels using social networking site to share their experiences, and going to cinema halls for enjoyment, etc. People are not only enjoying these activities but also sharing their experiences and discussing about the content of media with their friends, colleagues, and family members, etc. and motivating others to get connected with media

activities.

2.   Companionship: - Media is creating companionship among the people. Social media is helping people to stay connected with each other irrespective of physical distance. For example, during the pandemic we have witnessed how social media helped the elderly people, patients, pregnant women and others who were in dire need of help and medical assistance receiving relief and aid from others. People who are staying alone or away from their families, social media is providing them entertainment and other platforms where they can spend time and escape from the grief of feeling lonely.

3.   Surveillance: - People watch television, listen to the radio and read newspapers to know about the happenings in the world. To know about the politics people are watching news. To know about the weather people are checking the websites of weather department of government. To avail the opportunity of jobs people are searching the sites of recruiters. People are also using online shopping sites to purchase product and check for new arrivals and learn about recent trends in fashion.

4.   Interpretation: - People are not only using the media to know about the information, but they also use media to know about the reasons of why something is happening. Media make us aware about what kind of steps or policies the government is undertaking to control a situation. People gather information from different media sources and try to analyze the situation and conclude.

B. Media Effect and Culture
Culture can be understood in the simplest terms as those ways of life which are passed on to the members of the society over time and it holds the society together. Society refers to a large number of individuals, groups, and organizations, who live in the same area and feel connected to each other because of sharing learned behaviors, beliefs and values. Like in India we welcome our guest by joining our hand, *Namaste* gesture and in a similar way or we take off our shoes before entering the temples, these are an integral part of the Indian culture. Today, when people are geographically dispersed, the media creates a sense of people's common life experiences, common culture subcultures. Media houses are focusing people's attention on what is culturally important to talk about today. Media mainly presents the ideas of culture in the following three broad forms:

1. Identifying codes of acceptable behavior: -
Media is helping people in identifying and discusses codes of acceptable behavior. Like what should be the acceptable behavior of government servant or police. What will be the dress of a police constable, his/her hairstyle, or how will s/he treat women. One may disagree with these views but at the same time these views are shared and widely accepted in the society.

2. What and who matters in our world: -
Media presentations and propagates a sense of the expected qualities of each member of a society. For example, media demonstrates the qualities of a leader and thereby educates us about what we should expect from our leaders. Media tells us who is famous: Film Star, Cricketer, Politician or Scientist. Media also defines what people see and follow. For example, movies like *Khaki, Singham, Sarfarosh* and *Gangajal* etc. portraits an honest image

of a police officer.

3. Media determining what others think about anyone: -

Media helps people by informing what others think and like or dislike about them. Media will help us find answers to questions like: Can I be a leader? Do I look good? Do other people like what I eat?

When we watch any TV serial or films, knowingly or unknowingly we develop an urge to compare the portrayal of its character with ourselves. This inspires us to buy new clothes, shoes, and watches, etc. With such exercises one just tries to find out whether he/she fits in or not. The trends, way of life or behaviors shown in the films tends to be seen as the norms of the society. Similarly, news reports, live telecast of national events, public service advertisements, etc. makes us feel that we are part of one country, we sympathize with the people who have been affected by the floods, feel sad for the soldiers who are martyred on the border.

C. Media literacy:

Media acts as a reflector and even a builder of culture, sometimes it presents prejudice about the world where we live in using stereotypes. Media literacy is a broad concept in which information is used to bring change in the world. Media literacy is a broad concept in which information is used to bring change in the world.

Media literacy is a broad concept that includes the ability to access and analyze media messages as well as create, reflect and act using the power of information and communication to bring about a change in the world. Media literacy is not limited to a single medium and is understood as a set of defenders that are essential to work life and citizenship. Media literacy education is the process used to advance media literacy skills and it aims to promote awareness of the impact of media and to create a proactive attitude towards both consumption and creation of media.

Media literacy develops critical awareness about media in the following ways: -

1. Stay up to date: -

Media literate people stay updated on the issues and events happening around them across the globe. They use different forms of media to gather information, like if anyone wants to understand which political party has the potential to win majority of seats in the upcoming election then he/she would read newspaper editorials of various newspapers and watch debates on television regularly to form his or her own views.

2. Awareness about the use of media: -

People need to be made aware about the use of media content. They need to look at media content critically from the point of view of learning about different aspects of life be it technology, politics, society, culture, or economic situations etc. And for critical analysis, people need to have a comparative understanding of different forms of media and know how to utilize the received information.

3. To have understanding about that visible isn't always reliable: -

Media literate people should have an adequate understanding about any information presented in the media directed by media organizations, business houses or political parties. Thus, there is a need to develop significant media awareness among the people. One must be aware of fake news and know how to verify the source of received information. Spread of fake

news in the recent past has created lot of political turmoil in the society and unfortunately, many lives have been lost too.Following are the important theories of media literacy

A: Media creates our personal realities –

Media content along with our observations and experience helps us to form our own personal concept of reality. The reality we see comes from the media. For example, the foreign concept of an Indian and his/her culture is mostly propagated by the Bollywood movies. The idea that *India is a land of snake charmers* etc. is mediated by media only.

B: Media is affected by industrial pressure: -
Media content is produced by organizations that are present in a business setting that are created by business houses to make a profit. A large portion of Indian media agencies/ houses are owned by either political leaders or businessmen.

C: Media is influenced by political pressure: -
Politics refers to the way in which a society is governed. Many media researchers have found that the media operate in a politically coercive environment and that political pressure influences the media content. People need to be aware that ideas in media could have political implications.

2. CONCLUSION

The literacy phenomenon has progressed from literacy, including classical reading and comprehension actions, to audio-visual literacy and media literacy. Communication tools, which have increased quantitatively due to developments in information technologies, offer a new time and environment to the individuals bringing social, economic, political, and cultural changes.

The intertwining of real-life and cyber life brings up serious problems. To keep up with this transformation and new media developments, consumers must be media literate. Consumers need to continually update themselves against the media updates caused by ever changing communication technologies.

As an equivalent to the media's transformation process, updating literacy through new communication technologies is of great importance (Akgül, 2015). Everything we know about the world we have learned from the media thus there is a need to think critically and develop critical media awareness and skills.

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