
Media Literacy: A Prime Need Amid The Covid-19 Pandemic

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's media saturated world, every individual requires to understand how to digest media. Media in its various forms is surrounding us in our daily lives. The maximum time is spent immersed in media whether in the form of listening radio, music, watching television or reading a magazine, newspaper or surfing internet. The various forms of media consumption are impacting us at an unprecedented rate. It has become extremely important to explore the various tools needed to effectively navigate the various forms of media. Media literacy has become necessity as it helps to develop the skill to analyse, evaluate and understand the media content. Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the fake news is spreading like wildfire and media literacy is helping the citizens to develop the necessary skills to understand and critique messages that are received through television, film, print media, and the Internet. Media literacy is closely related to education. The ability to recognise multiple forms of media and identify the message they are communicating is media literacy. Today, every citizen receives a massive amount of information from a large variety of outlets, way beyond conventional media such as TV, radio and newspapers; there are text messages, memes, viral images, social media, and much more. The misinformation and disinformation during COVID-19 pandemic is observed globally.[9] At present, it has become easiest to spread wrong information within a fraction of second and here, digital literacy comes at rescue. There are numerous online platforms for debunking fake information, such as altnews, boomlive, webqoof, vishwasnews, factly, smhoaxslayer, etc. which have become very helpful. This research paper attempts to understand the importance of media literacy during the pandemic. It also reviews the fake information which went viral on various online platforms and was debunk on online websites with proper facts.

Keywords: Media literacy, corona pandemic, infodemic, misinformation, fake news.

Understanding Media Literacy

The concept of literacy is still changing. Previously, the basic skill of reading and writing defined literacy but at present, the skill to critically analyse the content before consumption defines 'literacy.' The present era has dominance of polarised content and it becomes extremely difficult for the individuals to make choices. For making the right choice, one should learn to raise some questions before consuming any content. The basic knowledge about the origin, circulation, and context of the content forms the part of literacy. This will ensure circulation of right information to people without misinformation. The literacy which is concerned with media content through print, broadcast or digital medium is termed as media literacy.

Media literacy can be referred to as a set of communication skills which makes a person capable of accessing, examining, and engaging in numerous form of print or digital content. Media Literacy can be very effective in promoting social change and therefore, should be given utmost importance.[8] It helps the individuals to develop the sense of critical analysis and understand message in form of image, text or audio. In simple words, the ability of an

individual to access, analyze, evaluate, and create content by using any form of communication is referred to as media literacy. With the evolution of various platforms of digital media, the user has become the content generator. The content is generated for a reason and understanding the reason behind the content production is Media Literacy.

Traditional Literacy

Traditionally, the ability to read and write made an individual 'a literate'. In the present century has observed the massive transformation in the modes of information sharing, such as radio, television, and internet. As we have come across various new media forms, there is side-by-side change, which is witnessed in literacy in term of content presentations or consumption. Media Literacy has its roots way back in Ancient Greece to moving forward through the printing press, newspapers and yellow journalism. With the arrival of television, films and the present social media that permeate our live, different approaches of media literacy has been brought through the journey of these inventions. Before introduction of mass media, people were concerned about receiving of content then, they became interested in the source of getting information. At present, there is no restriction to information and multiple sources are available but the major thing of concern is how to analyze or evaluate this excess of media. The sources of information have become questionable and different volumes of misinformation is found in each platform.[6] It has become difficult to manage bulk of information which is causing information overload and hence, media literacy has become need of the hour. Technology can become very helpful in understanding media, if people know how to access and use it.[7]

Pandemic accompanying Infodemic

In times of corona pandemic, it has become more urgent to work in the field of media literacy. With a single click; false facts, figures, and information, is circulated very easily. Identifying the nature of information, the credibility and usefulness, every individual has to protect the information he/she is surrounded with. It is not only observed in a particular region but globally, we have come across information which was shared and passed on unprecedentedly. The edited images claiming the source of news as WHO, UNICEF, government authorities were shared blindly by the social media users. Along with the pandemic, the infodemic became a major cause of concern. The spread of information about the coronavirus, its cure and symptoms were proliferated in form of misleading information and even WHO warned against the infodemic.[10]

There were people who are aware and wanted to know about the source or origin of particular information before sharing. There was news like: PM Modi is selected by US & UK to lead the corona virus task force[1]; some videos such as video of Muslim vendor's unhygienic handling of fruits was linked with spreading corona virus[2]; and many more. Such information was rubbed off by the various websites which debunk false news.

2. CASE STUDIES

During the corona pandemic, spread of fake news and information in form of videos, text or images became quite common. The information was circulated among the masses on social platforms but also news channels. One of such news was that United States and United Kingdom have selected PM Narendra Modi as a leader to head a corona virus task force. [1] Thousands of people shared this false information and it went viral on social media. The WION news broadcast, one of the Indian news channels under Zee Media, stated that 18 countries, including the US and the UK, wanted PM to lead the task force to resolve pandemic of corona. Even, Maharashtra BJP General Secretary Atul Bhatkhalkar tweeted the same information. It has been found by Altnews that it was mere exaggeration by the anchor and she didn't quote anything as such but the people who were sharing the

information were using hyperbole to present the information. The actual context of the news was related to SAARC leaders' video conference where PM Modi contributed \$10 million as Covid-19 emergency aid. The anchor praised Modi for the same, while the information tweeted or shared was presented in entirely different manner as shown below. This explains how people share anything and everything to use it to meet out their own interpretations.



Another message which became viral was related to Ratan Tata, where he discredited the expert's views. As shown in the image below, people shared this information and were highly tweeted. Celebrities like Arshad Warshi and Huma Quereshi retweeted the same graphic image, praising Ratan Tata. It leads to more than 1,100 retweets from Arshad Warsi's tweet. Later, Ratan Tata tweeted that the viral message is false, he urged to verify and prevent its sharing on WhatsApp and various social platforms.[3] Altnews have conveyed that the closer look to the text in the graphic image easily shows that it is having grammatical errors. The name of a prominent personality along with the false information was enough to befool the



masses.

The false claim that Covid-19 is not a virus but a bacterial infection and can be cured in a day was shared on WhatsApp in the form of video.[4] This information could lead to so much easy contracting of COVID-19 due to carelessness and false assurance made through the video. The false news debunking website, Altnews have found that there are ample amount of evidence to prove that COVID-19 is caused by a novel corona virus named SARS-CoV-2, not a bacterium. There are several conspiracy theories which are thriving through the internet every now and then. Such information makes the situation worsen. There is an urgent need to

lessen the gap between the experts and masses, also, to gain the trust of masses so that they can believe in the information shared by the authorities.



The video of Muslim vendor's went viral on various social media platforms. The man was handling fruits in unhygienic manner and this video which was falsely linked with spreading of coronavirus.[2] Altnews found that the man was from MP and the video was from February 2020. There was a report which was published in Dainik Bhaskar on 3rd April, 2020. Also, the man's daughter claimed that he is mentally unstable. The old incident video was reused at the pandemic time and caused panic among the public whosoever came across it. Several such content from past in form of videos, graphic images was made viral on various social platforms. These case studies clearly indicate the need to prioritize literacy for the world to adeptly deal with a virus of false information.[5]



3. CONCLUSION

The various case studies show the importance of media literacy amid the corona pandemic. The understanding, analysis and, evaluation of the content is one of the major things that should be focused upon. Not only the national crisis but the global crises call for the need of digital literacy. The corona pandemic has accompanied the information epidemic which is referred as infodemic. A person who is not a media literate cannot differentiate between right and wrong information. The citizens of the twentieth century are going through onslaught of information and find it difficult to differentiate between fake or true content. The new media age has brought up new challenges and to overcome such challenge, one has to become skilful and equipped with the process of information sharing. The various case studies covered provide an in-depth analysis about how the information be it in form of graphic images, videos or text can be falsely presented to the people. People should understand that which information is good for their welfare and should re-check content before consuming and re-sharing. The various online websites are working very efficiently and investigating the content by giving proper evidence to false information.

The positive cases of the corona virus are still exceeding every day. There is a sense of panic among everyone and misinformation caused due to message sharing on various online platforms increases it to twofold. Misleading images, graphics, videos have been shared regarding treatment of corona to cure of it. Especially during the times of crisis, the misinformation can take lives. The caution of verifying smallest piece of information on any social media platform before forwarding can prevent many loses. This study suggests the urgent need to become media literate and not share any type of unverified content. Every individual if access the information by analysing and evaluating the origin of content will prove beneficial and would prevent any type of misinformation to the masses.

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