

Understanding the Nexus of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) and Critical Thinking (CT): A Critical Study

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Abstract

In the age where the internet and the digital world are advancing and evolving, becoming the major source of information. It is requisite that people must be arrayed with Media and Information Literacy skills to securely access the complex media landscape and critically engage with the content they receive. Media and Information literacy (MIL) and critical thinking (CT) are closely related concepts that are imperative for individuals to navigate a complex and rapidly changing media environment. This study offers a literature review of the published scientific literature on the interconnection of media and information literacy and critical thinking. The reviewed literature revealed that students are able to distinguish the media content with hate speech and offensive language because of the intensive training in media and information literacy lectures. Teaching critical media literacy as a mandatory subject in schools can effectively equip youngsters to critically engage with the media content.

Keywords

Media and Information Literacy (MIL), Critical Thinking (CT), Literature Review, Media Education, Social Media Literacy.

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Introduction

In the age where internet and the digital world is advancing and evolving, becoming the major source of information. It is requisite that people must be arrayed with Media and Information Literacy abilities to securely access and maneuver the complex media landscape and to develop critical thinking to analyze the content they receive.

Media and Information literacy (MIL) and critical thinking (CT) are closely related concepts that are imperative for individuals to navigate a complex and rapidly changing media environment. MIL, refers to the skills, knowledge and attitude that enable and empower citizen to access, use, evaluate, understand, create and share media content and other information from various sources, whether it is traditional or digital in an ethical and effective way. MIL develop and enhance lifelong learning skills and critical thinking for socializing and becoming active citizens. ("Media and Information Literacy Strategy and Guidelines," 2013).

Media and Information Literacy being a broad topic, keeps many important concepts under one umbrella. Critical thinking is one of them, and one of the core skills of the 21st century. Critical thinking refers to the skill to examine and analyse information, evaluating discussions and arguments and taking informed decisions. ("Media and Information Literacy Strategy and Guidelines," 2013) (UNESCO Communication and Information Sector in close collaboration with UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2013). The critical thinking approach accentuates adopting a critical perspective on one's informed decision-making and learning process, rather than criticizing media, information sources, or politicians. ("Media and Information Literacy Strategy and Guidelines," 2013). Critical thinking requires more than logical and rational empirical thinking and argumentation skills. This requires recognizing that belief systems are based on certain subjective assumptions that includes religious, social, ethical, political, and cultural aspects. We must try to assess the rationality of one's justification.

The goal of Media and Information Literacy is to expand both critical understanding and active participation of the people. It means that people should always maintain an active mindset while consuming the media content and other information rather than being a passive audience towards everything shown and delivered to them. It is significant that people must learn to distinguish between facts and opinion, facts from propaganda and essential news from a wide range of coverage. In today's mediated society, it is consistently imperative that we must be equipped with critical thinking skill and become a diligent user of media and

other content rather than being docile consumers. What it demands is a more vigilant engagement with the media and information that we receive from different media platforms and others information providers. The objective of the study is to explore the concept of Media and Information Literacy in developing the critical thinking skills.

Methodology

The study offers a literature review of the published scientific literature on the interconnection of media and information literacy and critical thinking. In order to explore how Media and Information Literacy is required to develop Critical thinking, research papers, articles, reports have been selected for the review from different online sources and database like Google Scholar, Sage Journals, ProQuest, Science Direct and Eric. A systematic search for the literature was done by using the keywords Media Literacy, Information Literacy, Critical Thinking, Social Media Literacy, Digital Literacy, Literacy, Media Education. After the initial search they were first selected by title, second by abstract and then the full papers and articles were reviewed. A total of 11 research papers and articles were selected for this study.

Result

Zou'bi (2021) adopted a quantitative method in the study to determine the impact of media and information literacy on student's acquisition of critical thinking skill within the educational faculty. The study administered the sample of 134 students from educational faculty who were enrolled in the media and information literacy course. Statistical methods like Cronbach Alpha Coefficient, means and standard deviation were adopted to measure the reliability of the tool and the analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire from the students. The result showed an acceptable degree of critical thinking in discerning and criticising media content. Students face challenges in understanding media message consisting of misleading content due to spelling error on the other hand media content with hate speech, inappropriate behaviour and offensive language were adequately differentiated by the students due to intensive training in media and information literacy lectures. The finding of the study also suggests that regular training in media and information literacy over a semester can substantially enhance student's skill to interpret and criticise diverse media messages efficiently.

Kachkaeva et al. (2020) adopted survey method approach to study the effect of news and media literacy course on the critical thinking abilities of students. The survey involves 166

students of media and non-media specialization studying in one of the university in Russia. They applied two surveys, pre- and post before (2014-2017) and after the course (2018). The study revealed a significant improvement in student's critical thinking and media literacy skills after completion of course. Students showed a more intellectual approach towards media content and information as they started verifying information from different sources. The study emphasises media literacy education as an important skill that helps students to safely and effectively navigate the complex landscape of media and take informed decisions about the information and content they receive.

Ku et al. (2019) examined the relationship between news consumption on social media, critical thinking and media literacy in adolescents aged between 12-18 years. The study administered a sample of 1505 adolescents of grade 7th to 12th from 12 schools in different districts of Hong Kong (China). To measure news media literacy of adolescents the study used two scales, 1. The News Media Literacy Scale (Ashley et al., 2013), 2. The Media Locus of Control Scale (Maksl et al., 2015) was used to evaluate the extent to which people understand themselves as being in control of the influence of news. They developed a 4- item task to evaluate the sub skills of critical thinking as recommended by the researcher (Ashley et al., 2013; Fleming, 2013, Maksl et al., 2015); 1. Understanding News Content and purpose; 2. Distinguishing Facts from claims; 3. Identifying Stands; 4. Evaluating Evidence. Results showed that adolescents aged between 15-18 exhibited stronger critical thinking abilities as compared to adolescents aged between 12-14, notably in understanding news content and purpose and distinguishing facts and claims. However, all participants showed a much weaker performance in evaluating evidence.

Share and McBride (2022) applied theoretical framework and educational literature to discuss the concept of critical media literacy for civic engagement in the United States. The study highlights the importance of critical media literacy in preparing students for civic engagement in the digital landscape. It also emphasise the need for educators to endowed students with the skills to critically immersed with information, different forms of media and technology. It suggests that educators need to adapt their teaching practices to include critical analysis of audio, audio visual, print and social media to broaden student's understanding of different media messages & information and their implications in society. It discusses that the educational institutions are not sufficiently equipped to focus the challenges posed by the digital world for civic engagement and democracy, suggested a pedagogical response to these challenges by integrating critical media literacy in educational curriculum to intensify

student's critical thinking abilities and to advances themselves as a responsible and empowered citizen.

Pérez-Escoda et al. (2017) Administered an in-depth review of national and international studies and program related to media literacy and digital competences. The study aims to provide evidence-based guidance to teachers and families who are accountable for the education of young people and children on the appropriate consumption of the accessible digital media tools and knowledge. It accentuates the significance of integrating media literacy and digital skills into educational framework to develop critical thinking of children and youth in the digitalised society. It concluded that the teachers and families required specialised and specific training to educate the children on media literacy and responsible media consumption practices.

Chen and Rattray (2017) Employed a problem-based learning approach to pedagogy in a media literacy class to analyse the development of student's critical thinking capabilities. By using the Baxter Magolda's model of the development of critical thinking, the study analysed the participation level of the student's in a short-term course to evaluate changes in critical thinking abilities. Results showed that student's demonstrated varying level of critical thinking capabilities in distinct areas (assumptions, questioning, reflection on wider contexts, sources of information), showed the highest capability in seeking the alternative sources of information, while self-reflection was identified as the lowest capability. The study concluded that critical thinking can be described as a threshold concept and emphasis its application in the media literacy context in enhancing higher standard of thinking capabilities in the contemporary environment.

Aybek (2016) applied relational screening model to study the relationship between the prospective teachers' media and television literacy and their critical thinking dispositions. Relational screening models aim to establish the relationships among variables (Sonmez & Alacapinar, 2011). The study sample consists of 166 prospective teachers (114 females and 52 male) from distinct majors were enrolled in teachers training course in a state university in Turkey. The data collection tools were used are: 1. The Personal Information Form created by the researcher, 2. The California Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory adapted by Kokdemir (2003), 3. The Media and Television Literacy Scale developed by Korkmaz and Yesil (2011). Descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation and MANOVA were used for data analysis of this research. Finding revealed that critical thinking dispositions as well as media and television literacy level of prospective teacher's differ

significantly based on their majors and gender. They possess a medium level of media and television literacy and a low level of addiction to media and television.

Fairuz et al. (2019) adopted a quasi-experimental research method with the matching-only pre-test-post-test group design to evaluate the critical thinking skills and information literacy of students through integrated science teaching materials. Sample of the research were eighth- grade students who were grouped into two groups, experimental and control. For the experimental group, integrated science teaching materials were used and for control group commonly used teaching materials were used. Data analysis involved normalised gains, t-test and Cohen's D. The study findings shown a positive result in improving critical thinking skills and information literacy by the use of developed integrated science teaching materials. It also highlighted the significance of reading among students as it proved to be decisive in building information literacy and influencing the level of knowledge. They concluded that both information literacy and critical thinking were complementary to each other, hence integrating these skills in science stream is important.

León (2016) adopted qualitative descriptive method to examine the critical thinking of the ninth-grade students engaged in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) media literacy activities, comprehension of media messages specifically focusing on the television advertisements. The researcher implemented media literacy approach such as questioning and discussion as a part of pedagogical proposal to develop students thinking skills in a public school in Bogotá, Colombia. Results of the study emphasis the significance of systematic guidance from a teacher in developing critical viewer attitude in student (distinguishing between facts and fiction, identifying social issues of injustice and inequality), that helps them to shifts from a passive acknowledgment to an active analysis of the media messages. Media literacy activities proved to develop a critical capacity in students and also advances analytical skills.

Šuminas and Jastramskis (2020) empirically examine the influence of media and information literacy on the evaluation process of new trustworthiness among the youth of Lithuania. The experiment was conducted between two groups (journalism student's vs publishing and advertising students) using a survey and eye tracking device. Results revealed that journalism students shown better news literacy skills in examining news credibility in comparison to the students of publishing and advertising who have minimal exposure in media and information literacy (MIL) course.

McDougall (2019) applied ethnographic research approach to assessed the role of media literacy education to facilitate resilient media engagement by young citizens. This study conducted interviews with media educators and journalist, dialogic workshop for multi-stakeholder and an extensive field review or literature, pedagogic practice and educational resources. A total of 88 sample chosen for the study both including the interview and participants in the workshop from China, The UK and Russia. Research finding concluded that teaching critical media literacy as a core subject in schools can better equip youngster to critically engage with media content and be resilience to 'information disorder' (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017).

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper presents a literature review of previous scientific studies on the convergence of media and information literacy (MIL) and critical thinking (CT). It discusses the fact that how media and information literacy and critical thinking are related to each other and their dependency on each other. In the last few years, especially till 2019, there has been an increase in research on this topic, with researchers studying MIL and CT together to know their interrelationships. Importantly, to deal with the growing concern about 'information disorder' and its adverse effects on society, it is necessary that these two research areas are studied together.

Most of the research presents empirical findings in favour of MIL and CT relationship. Different streams have attempted to conceptualize MIL and CT in their field of study. The literature reviewed by the researcher has shown that due to intensive training in media and information literacy lectures and continuous training in MIL, students are able to distinguish media content from hate speech and offensive language. Such training programs help develop critical thinking skills in students to effectively understand and critically analyze various media messages. Based on the study, it was found that critical media literacy is a very essential part for civic engagement in society in this digital world, so it is important to integrate critical media literacy in the educational curriculum to empower students with critical thinking abilities. The findings show that the responsibility of educating and using the available digital media tools and knowledge in a legitimate way lies with teachers and families. Therefore, it is important that they also need specific and specialized training to educate children and youth about media consumption patterns and how to deal with media content.

These findings have laid a strong foundation for the need to include media and information literacy education in civic training. In this situation, where adolescents and young people are more vulnerable to mass media content and do not have enough knowledge to resist misinformation, disinformation, and other media threats, raising awareness about MIL and CT among adolescents and youth is a remarkable idea. According to the study, the research found that adolescents showed strong critical thinking abilities, especially in understanding news content and purpose and differentiating between facts and claims. Therefore, it can be concluded that MIL and CT are effective among adolescents. However, they were weak in evaluating evidence. According to the study, media literacy activities not only develop critical thinking abilities in ninth grade students but also enhance analytical skills in them. Teaching critical media literacy to youth as a compulsory subject in schools can effectively prepare them to critically engage with mass media content and make them resilient to information disorder. Empirical studies evaluate the impact of media literacy curriculum on students' critical thinking skills before and after the curriculum, the results have shown that students' critical thinking and media literacy skills increased significantly after the completion of the curriculum. In conclusion, according to the reviewed literature, MIL and CT appear to be effective in countering hate speech and offensive language used in media content. MIL and CT prove to be important in critically engaging citizens with wide and diverse media content. It is therefore important to integrate media and information literacy into the educational curriculum. In general, the reviewed literature suggests that media and information literacy helps enhance critical thinking.

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