Consciousness of Media Technology among Schools, Students, and Teachers

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Abstract

This study aimed to inquire the extent to which India's Schools, Students, and Teachers have access to various media, how they evaluate the credibility of the media, what they know about the media, and how they choose among different media, as well as teachers' expectations towards their students' view and consumption of media. Since little is known about young children in the context of media education, this paper fills the research gap by studying the media consciousness and use of upper primary students. A questionnaire on media consciousness and media use patterns should be given to the teachers, who were asked to answer the questions from the perspective of their students. The same questionnaire was administered to students during class time. The descriptive statistics of the data should be analyzed and compared. Students believed that the most reliable media for providing news was the television, followed by the radio, the newspaper, and the Internet; about half of the students believed that they were capable of distinguishing true from false news; students were more proactive media users than the teachers thought. The findings of this study suggest that more contextual and in-depth approaches to research would be beneficial to assess the media use patterns of students, from which relevant media education models can be derived.

Keywords: Media consciousness, use, literacy, education, Primary students.

INTRODUCTION

Media Education is the process of teaching and learning about media. It is about developing the public's critical and creative abilities when it comes to the media. Media education should not be confused with educational technology or with educational media. Being able to understand the media enables people to analyze, evaluate, and create messages in a wide variety of media, genres, and forms. Education for media literacy often uses an inquiry-based pedagogic model that encourages people to ask questions about what they watch, hear, and read. Media literacy education provides tools to help people critically analyze messages, offers opportunities for learners to broaden their experience of media, and helps them develop creative skills in making their own media messages. Critical analysis can include identifying author, purpose and point of view, examining construction techniques and genres, examining patterns of media representation, and detecting propaganda, censorship, and bias in news and public affairs programming (and the reasons for these). Media literacy education may explore how structural features such as media ownership, or its funding model—affect the information presented.

With the information explosion in recent years, the ubiquitous and immensely powerful media are considered major agents of socialization for young people today. The media have become an integral part of young people's lives and their major source of knowledge and information. Based on the taxonomy adopted by today's media planners in the field of advertising, the concept of media types has been divided into traditional media and new media. Traditional media generally refer to media that have been in existence before the advent of the Internet (e.g., traditional newspapers, TV, radio advertising, journalism), whereas new media encompass any digital media that can be accessed through the Internet.

The Internet has become one of the most influential media. Indeed, the Internet is not exactly a new medium for the current generation of young people. Children literally "grow up digitally" (Tapscott, 1998) or, to be more precise, are "born

digitally." Prensky coined the term, "digital natives" to refer to people or generations who grew up and have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using tools of the digital age such as the Internet, cell phones and so forth. Digital immigrants, on the other hand, refer to adults or individuals who only recently migrated to the digital world. In view of the influence of the media on society, the importance and benefits of media education have long been advocated. Media and education have been brought together in two different scenarios: education through the media or education about the media. In the former scenario, the media are used as tools to facilitate teaching, whereas the latter pertains to the study of the media as a subject in the curriculum.

In order to understand the importance and outcomes of media literacy education, it is necessary to specify what it aims to achieve. Although there is no standard definition of media literacy, we adopt the definition set by the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE), which is "*the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a variety of forms-is interdisciplinary by nature*" . Media education plays a crucial role in the process of media literacy and consciousness formation. The major goal of media education is to promote critical inquiry, analysis, evaluation, and creative production of media messages in a wide variety of mediums, genres, and forms (Buckingham, 2007). This enables media consumers to analyze messages critically, raises their consciousness of the political/social purposes behind media messages, offers opportunities for them to broaden their experience of media, and helps them develop the creative skills necessary to make their own media messages. Given the intertwining relationships between media education and media literacy, one cannot hope to cultivate media literacy without first ensuring that an effective media education curriculum is in place.

Media education is most effective when teachers have clear expectations about students' media consumption habits and media consciousness levels. For the purpose of this study, the concept of media consciousness refers to:

 (1) self-described consciousness of the existing media in India,

(2) perceived credibility of various media sources

(3) levels of confidence in distinguishing between true and false news.

Having clear expectations is crucial to media education as more accurate assumptions regarding media consumption habits and consciousness translate to better use of classroom time and more effective curriculum strategies, which in turn enhances learning, media literacy, and the effectiveness of media education. For instance, in the context of media consumption, teachers who emphasize critical inquiry into radio content may find that 99% of their Facebook fanatical students do not listen to the radio. Therefore, lessons should instead emphasize how to distinguish facts from fabrications on Facebook. Without knowledge of the media consumption habits and consciousness of students, the establishment of effective media education and accurate measurement of the success of such education is difficult. This study hence aimed to assess the media consumption habits and media consciousness of upper primary, and teachers' understanding and expectations concerning these aspects of their students.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

An accurate understanding of students' current media consumption habits and consciousness is not only essential for teachers to design a tailor-made media education program for their students to gain the maximum benefit but also necessary for assessing the improvement of the students and the program itself. However, little is known about young children in the context of media education, as the participants of most studies were high school students. Therefore, this paper attempted to fill the research gaps by studying the media consciousness and use of upper primary students. In particular, the current study inquired the extent to which India children have access to various media, how they evaluate the credibility of the media, what they know about the media, and how they choose among different media.

The second major problem is the digital divide between digital immigrant teachers and digital native students. Through the Internet and popular social media such as Facebook, children today are exposed to media content from a much earlier stage and at a more frequent rate than digital immigrants. Early and frequent exposure to media content can promote media literacy development through increased opportunities for informal learning. Informal learning refers to learning and engagement that occur outside school/ institutional settings. For instance, learning how to analyze and evaluate media messages on Wikipedia would be an example of an increased opportunity for informal learning in media literacy

development. To this end, it would be unwise for digital immigrant teachers to assume prematurely that their digital native students are the same as they have always been, and that the same media education curriculum that worked for the teachers when they were students still suits their students now.

As teachers are those who design and provide media education to students, it is important for them to have realistic expectations and an accurate understanding concerning their students' current media consumption habits and consciousness. On the one hand, under-estimating these factors may mean that students waste their time on learning something they have already mastered; on the other hand, over-estimating or misunderstanding these factors may mean inappropriate design and misapplied and insufficient focus on media education. As teachers' realistic understanding of students' media consumption habits and consciousness is an important factor that affects students' future performance and learning outcomes, the second focus of the current paper is on teachers' expectations regarding their students' views and consumption of media. From the findings of the current study, teachers will be able to know the extent to which their thoughts are realistic, and corresponding efforts can be made in light of the findings to implement media education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional and new media

Traditional media are generally characterized by their relatively limited methods of delivering information about social, political, and economic events (Branstetter, 2011; Leckenby, 2005). Newspapers carry factual stories and editorials accompanied by a limited amount of imagery. TV, of course, delivers pictures together with some factual coverage, some editorial coverage, and a significant amount of advertising. In the case of both newspapers and TV, content is usually produced and selected for distribution by an elite minority (Hindman, 2009).

Most importantly, it is generally unidirectional. That is, there is no productive engagement on the part of the reader; it is an exercise in information consumption only. New media, however, blur these distinctions in new ways (Branstetter, 2011; Leckenby, 2005). On the web, one might still encounter traditional journalism on the sites of the main newspapers. Blogs are examples of this, but they are qualitatively different for a variety of reasons. Even further removed are Twitter comments ('tweets'), YouTube videos, Facebook statuses and many, many more diverse phenomena. Traditional outlets have been modified with the introduction of the option to leave comments on the stories presented.

Core competencies of media literacy

The concept of access does not concern physical access to equipment; rather it concerns with the social, cultural, and technological dimensions that affect one's access to various media (Buckingham, 2005; Livingstone, 2003). For instance, parental permission to use equipment and one's knowledge of how to use equipment are important factors that can hinder one's access to media. In addition, access is much more than a one-off provision of equipment; it is also about the skillful use of media tools and the sharing of appropriate and relevant information with others (Hobbs, 2010). Therefore, media literate users need to keep themselves updated with the new technologies and skills required to maintain and promote their ability to access information through various media.

The umbrella definition coined by the NAMLE on media literacy in 2012 has been widely adopted among scholars of the 21th century (Daunic, 2013; Garcia, Seglem and Share, 2013; Johnson, Augustus and Agiro, 2012). Similarly, Hobbs (2010, p. vii), defines media literacy as a *"constellation of life skills that are necessary for full participation in our media-saturated, information-rich society"*. These skills include the ability to access, understand, create, reflect upon, and act with the information that media disseminate (Buckingham, 2005; Hobbs, 2010).

Analysis and evaluation of media content constitutes the second component of media literacy. According to Hobbs (2010: 19), this involves "comprehending messages and using critical thinking to analyze message quality, veracity, credibility, and point of view, while considering potential effects or consequences of messages." Hobbs argues that analysis skills include the ability to identify the author, purpose, and point of view of a message; evaluate the credibility and quality of a message; and recognize and resist stereotypes. To advance analysis skills, it is important to build knowledge of how power relationships shape the way in which information and ideas circulate in a culture, considering the economic, political and social context.

Content creation involves daily communication through various technologies and experiences of media production as well as the ability to compose media content creatively (Hobbs, 2010). Traditionally most people are passive recipients of information from mass media, yet nowadays most people are able to participate in creating messages in various forms (textual, audio and visual) and broadcasting through various platforms (YouTube, blogs) with the help of information technology. Effective expression is therefore increasingly being emphasized in media education. Content creation is also about being confident in self-expression and creative in generating media content, while being aware of purpose, audience, and composition techniques (Hobbs, 2010).

The concepts reflection and action are metacognitive competencies, as people come to know the power of communication to maintain the status quo or change the world; consider the potential risks and dangers of media messages; and understand how differences in values and life experience shape people's media use and their message interpretation (Hobbs, 2010). People who reflect and act apply ethical judgment and are socially responsible in online communication situations and understand how the concepts of 'private' and 'public' are reshaped by digital media (Hobbs, 2010). A media literate individual also appreciates and respects legal rights and responsibilities (copyright, intellectual freedom, fair use, attribution, etc.) and is active in participating in advocacy and self-governance at the local, regional, national and international levels, using the power of information and communication to make a difference in the world (Hobbs, 2010).

Media literacy, consciousness, and use among children

Media educators have promoted media education by referring to the positive aspects of media literacy. Hence, those advocating media education have argued, among other things, that media literacy is an essential life skill (Kubey and Baker, 1999; Hobbs 2010; Lee, 1997; Media Literacy Defined, 2012), and that media literacy can empower young people (Kellner and Share, 2005; NAMLE, 2012; Thoman, 1995). Media literacy is also believed to be a vital component of democracy education (Kellner and Share, 2005; Tyner, 1992). Moreover, scholars have argued that media literacy nurtures higher-order critical thinking skills (Considine 1995; Buckingham, 2005). The conclusion has often been that schools should waste no time in introducing media education into their curriculum. Many writers have indicated that media education has become a global movement in the past three decades (Brown, 1998; Kubey and Baker, 1999; Lee, 1997; Hart, 1998; Kubey, 1998).

Any media education curriculum will be doomed to failure if the abilities and attitudes of students are unknown. Equally important is that teachers have a realistic understanding of students' attributes in relation to media information. On the one hand, if students' behaviors are more positive than those expected by teachers (e.g., more students read newspapers on a daily basis than teachers expect), teachers will probably give unrealistic negative feedback to students or miss the chance of acknowledging or even reinforcing the endeavors of students. Both outcomes are unsatisfactory as they can lead to poorer student-teacher relationships (Burnett, 2002). In the worst case, extreme negative expectations may lead to stigmatization, which will have a detrimental effect on student learning outcomes (Madon et al., 1997; Jussim et al., 1996). On the other hand, teachers holding unrealistically positive views may not realize the need to assist students in the learning process, whereas slightly positive expectations can probably promote effective learning (Jussim and Harber, 2005).

Children's consciousness of the constructed nature of media messages is not only essential to a valid evaluation of media content but also forms the foundation of media literacy education (Kellner and Share, 2005; Masterman, 1994). "Media do not present reality like transparent windows because media messages are created, shaped, and positioned through a construction process. This construction involves many decisions about what to include or exclude and how to represent reality" (Kellner and Share 2005: 374). Masterman (1994: 33) further explained the concept of non-transparency as follows: ''the media do not present reality, they represent it''. Giroux stated, ''What appears as 'natural' must be demystified and revealed as a historical production both in its content, with its unrealized claims or distorting messages, and in the elements that structure its form'' (Giroux, 1997: 79-80). Deciphering media messages through critical inquiry is thus a crucial beginning for media literacy education. Given the importance of consciousness of the non-transparent nature of media messages, it is contended that media educators should have a clear understanding of their students' ability to recognize the turbid and persuasive nature of media messages. This ultimately requires and enables one to challenge the power of the media to present messages as non-problematic and transparent.

Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton and Robison (2009) maintained that the participatory culture, which is endorsed by the youth culture, presents three fundamental challenges to teachers today. The first is the participation gap created by differential access to new media technologies and thus, the opportunities for engagement, which has engendered different levels of capability among youth. The second is the transparency problem, which concerns the assumption that

youngsters actively reflect on their experiences with the media and can make sense of what they learn through interacting with the media. The third is the ethical challenge, which concerns the argument that youngsters should be able to adopt the ethical norms needed to deal with the complex online community. The authors concluded that all these challenges require teachers to rethink media education in terms of the core skills and competencies that they should endeavor to develop in students.

CONSCIOUSNESS AND USE OF MEDIA

Various attempts have been made to inquire the media consumption habits of students and teachers. In India, students have easy access to different types of media. Television, newspapers, radio, computers, and Internet access are affordable. Free TV programs, radio channels, and newspapers exist. The comprehensive studies inquired the consumption of new media by grade four to six students in Denmark and India. It was found that 98.6% of the India children had TVs at home, 96.2% had computers, 94.3% had computers with Internet access, and 42.2% had ghetto blasters. It seems that most India children have physical access to TV and the Internet, but not the radio. However, as radio channels can be accessed through the Internet or mobile phones nowadays did not provide a reasonable estimation of the degree of access to radio channels of Indian students.

Preliminary research has also found that children as young as two years old are aware that TV is a medium through which current or past events that happened elsewhere are presented. Students at a young age tend to believe everything on TV is true, but older ones believe the exact opposite. Until the age of five years old, children know that TV is sometimes real and sometimes not. Even children between eight and nine years old become aware of and critical of the possible motivation of TV producers. However, it seems that children are not equally capable of evaluating the authority and reliability of websites.

Few studies have inquired Indian children's consciousness of the available media sources. We argue that children's consciousness of various media is relevant to their access to media in two senses. First, as children nowadays enjoy more media choices and freedom of selection, their consciousness of available media forms the basis for their selection among them. Second, their consciousness of media that are unavailable to them may promote children's desire to gain access to them. Media access does not simply determine use, media consumption is indirectly related to media consciousness through increased informal learning opportunities.

Finally, it seems that gender probably does not hinder children from physical access to media, nor their evaluation of media, but does affect their preferences, choices, and habits regarding media consumption. More, frequent use of the Internet may be associated with better skills in using it, thus maximizing the potential benefits from it.

MEDIA EDUCATION IN INDIA

Keen competition in the media industry gave rise to the phenomenon of tabloidization and the massive reporting of sensational news stories. Gradually, more people were dissatisfied with the performance of the media. In response to this situation, there was a call for media education to help students to be more discerning in their media consumption.

As part of the numerous reforms that the education system in India has undergone over the years, increasing effort has been made to cultivate students critical and independent thinking and creativity. Media education was formally introduced as one of the cross-curricular programs in the agenda of the Curriculum Development Council (2000). Furthermore, since 2009, all senior secondary students have been required to take a new core subject called Liberal Studies in the New Senior Secondary Curriculum (NSSC) in India. As stipulated in the curriculum document, one of the important aims of the subject is "to develop multiple perspectives on perennial and contemporary issues in different contexts (e.g., cultural, social, economic, political and technological contexts. The subject also requires students to engage in an Independent Enquiry Study (IES), with its title to be selected from six themes, one of which is media.

Thus, media education has found its place in the new curriculum. Local educators have also come to understand the benefits of media education. First, media education helps develop students as independent and critical learners. Second, as the news presented in the media is of varying degrees of credibility, media education can equip students with enough media literacy to judge the trustworthiness of news from different sources. However, there is a dearth of systematic research on media education in India. With this in mind, the purpose of this study was to elucidate the current situation in

India with respect to media education by studying Indian students' level of media consciousness and their consumption habits and whether these deviate from their teachers' expectations.

Research questions

This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the media access and understanding of India upper Primary students?

2. What are the media consciousness and media use patterns of upper Primary students from their own and their teachers' perspectives?

3. How well do teachers understand the media use and consciousness patterns of upper Primary students?

PROCEDURES

Instructional design

This study was part of a wider project on inquiry project-based learning for upper primary students. In the project, some primary schools, with students' academic ability ranging from average to good, were invited to implement a collaborative teaching approach to inquiry project-based learning at upper primary levels. Previous studies have shown that it is essential to equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills to gather and process information from different sources such as the Internet and newspapers during the inquiry process, and media literacy has been identified as one of the essential skills for students to master. One of the authors of this paper held a workshop on media education with teachers in the four participating schools to introduce concepts in media education to them and to promote the incorporation of media education into their teaching. At the beginning of the workshop, a questionnaire on media consciousness and media use patterns were given to the teachers. They were asked to answer the questions from the perspectives of their upper primary students. In other words, the teachers were asked to imagine how an upper primary student would complete the questionnaire.

Participants

Written consent was obtained from these teachers to include their questionnaires in this study. The same questionnaire was administered to Primary students during class time. Consent letters were sent to all parents to ask for their permission to include their children's questionnaires in this study. Out of total students, permission must obtained from some students. The overall participation rate should be more than 50%.

Data collection

The questionnaire was drafted in English and consisted of two sections. The first part was made up of open-ended questions regarding media use and consciousness. Students had to freely recall the names of different media to answer the questions. The second part was made up of statements regarding media credibility. Students were asked to evaluate each statement on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 5 representing strongly disagree. The questionnaire was distributed to teachers of the participating schools before being administered to students to ensure that the teachers could facilitate their students' understanding of the questions. The English version of the questionnaire is provided in the appendix.

Data analyses

The data from the questionnaires should be coded by trained research assistants and then analyzed. Descriptive statistics such as percentages, means, modes, and medians will be generated. ANOVA was conducted to see if there were significant differences in credibility ratings between different media tools. Gender differences for several behaviors were examined using independent samples t-tests. Statistical significance was set at $p<0.05$.

DISCUSSION

From the findings, we can see that the upper primary students were heavy media consumers. In terms of access, around 90% of students had access to newspapers, and the overwhelmingly majority had access to paid newspapers. Approximately 80% of students frequently accessed free TV channels, and around 40% also had paid TV services at home. Although Anderson et al. (2005) found that about 95% of the Indian children in their study had access to the Internet, the current finding showed that more than 15% of the students did not have internet surfing habits. This may suggest that some children preferred not to use the Internet despite being able to do so.

Students showed a high degree of consciousness of India media. They were able to list the names of local newspapers, free TV channels, and radio channels. Their consciousness regarding television channels was particularly outstanding. Some of the students could even list less popular TV channels such as CCTV, and less popular paid TV services such as Broadband Network.

Regarding their consumption patterns, students were more proactive media users than the teachers thought. They were not merely passive recipients or victims of powerful media messages, and were more content-oriented than their teachers believed. This shows that they were cautious about the content of the media, and they were able to make independent judgments when choosing which newspaper to read and which TV channel to watch instead of simply following the choice of their parents or teachers. If students chose newspapers based on their content, it may be worth noting that tabloids were more popular among them. *Apple Daily*, *Oriental Daily*, and *The Sun* are the three tabloids with the highest circulation rate in India. *Sing Tao Daily* and *Mingpao* are the two broadsheets commonly subscribed to in schools. However, more than half of the students (54.8%) admitted that one of the three tabloids was their most frequently read newspaper. Whether or not reading tabloids is beneficial to students' growth is beyond the scope of this paper. Further research is needed to explore the reasons for and implications behind this phenomenon.

Another noteworthy finding was students' unfamiliarity with radio channels. The development of the Internet has made it possible for radio programmes to be broadcasted through the Internet and hence more accessible to students. Podcasting, for example, can act as a substitute for radio channels to a certain extent. It is thus not surprising to see a decline in interest in radio channels among the present generation of young people. Indeed, traditional media are facing an 'identity crisis' in the convergence culture in which the old and new media are hybridized. In the future, it is possible that the radio and television will be completely replaced by the Internet. In that event, all that people will need will be a computer with a connection to the Internet.

In the present discussion, teachers' understanding of students' media consumption habits deviated from reality in some domains. According to the findings, teachers overestimated the number of students who had access to paid TV, and they had no clear expectations concerning students' ability to evaluate the credibility of media. The discrepancy between teacher-student assumptions of media consumption habits might suggest that more classroom time and resources should be allocated to teaching students to understand media messages through critical inquiry. Media literacy has never been a part of the current curriculum and related research is also lacking. Given that students' perceptions of their evaluating ability can be very subjective, teachers should focus not only on fostering the ability of weaker students, but also on preventing some students from being over-confident. In the present study, teachers tended to view students more negatively in some domains; they probably overestimated students' preference for online games. They also underestimated the number of students who liked reading news and believed in the importance of reading. We should also bear in mind the possibility that some students may respond the questionnaire in a socially desirable way in order to display a more positive image, especially if they are afraid that teachers will know their true answers.

CONCLUSION

The study set out to understand the media access, media consciousness, and media use patterns of upper primary students in India from their own and their teachers' perspectives. While we are aware of the internal threats to the validity of the findings such as the use of simple items to measure media use and consciousness, the findings in this study provide preliminary evidence showing that primary school teachers have only a limited understanding of their students in terms of media use. These significant findings suggested that the upper primary students were more active and autonomous media users than their teachers expected. Students were confident in their own ability to judge the reliability of information. It was found that they did not rely merely on new media as their information source at the expense of traditional media, which is rather different from what their teachers may have believed. Since the discrepancy between students' actual ability and teachers' realistic expectations would inevitably hinder the effectiveness of media education and thus make accurate assessment of both students' improvement and the media education impossible, it is argued that more contextual and in-depth research should be conducted to assess the media use patterns of students, from which appropriate media education

models can be derived to maximize the benefits of media education to students. More importantly, although the present study was conducted in India, it is believed that the findings here have implications for students in similar contexts. After all, an effective media education curriculum is one that can be tailor-made to meet the specific needs of students, and one that is built on the information teachers have about their students' media consumption habits. Underestimating or overestimating students in terms of their knowledge of, access to, and use of media could potentially lead to ineffective use of classroom time and ineffective strategy.

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APPENDIX [Sample Questionnaire]

The questionnaire on media consciousness and media use patterns

1. Please list three English newspapers from India:

    (i) _____

    (ii) _____

    (iii) _____

2. Which of the above newspapers do you read most frequently? _____

    Why? _____

3. Please list two free TV stations in India:

    (i) _____

    (ii) _____

4. Which of the above TV stations do you watch most frequently? _____

    Why? _____

5. Please list one paid TV service:

    _____

6. Does your family have a subscription to paid TV service at home? Yes/No

    If yes, which one? _____

7. Please list two radio stations:

    (i) _____

    (ii) _____

8. Which radio channel from the above radio stations do you listen to most frequently? _____

    (i) Why?_____

9. Do you surf the Internet? Yes/No

    If Yes, how many hours do you spend online every day? _____

10. When you get connected to the Internet, which website will you first visit? _____

11. Do you agree with the following statements? (1 for strongly disagree, 5 for strongly agree)

    (i) Generally speaking, news in newspapers is reliable.

    (ii) Generally speaking, news on TV is reliable.

    (iii) Generally speaking, news from the radio is reliable.

    (iv) Generally speaking, information on the Internet is reliable.

    (v) I think it is important to read about the news every day.

    (vi) I like knowing about the latest news.

    (vii) I know how to distinguish between true and false news.