

An Exploratory Study for the Impact of Media Literacy on Political Participation. (Case Study on Somali Nation University) Mogadishu Somalia

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Abstract: *The purpose of this exploratory article was to investigate into how media literacy affects political participation. The study used a mixed-methods approach that included participant focus groups and surveys. Participants from the qualitative investigation were employed to collect data and measure media literacy. Participants said that a better understanding how media messages affect public opinion and policy choices helped them make more informed decisions and engage in politics. Participants also stressed the significance of digital media literacy, which includes the capacity to analyze online sources critically and use digital platforms. The findings of this study showed a strong correlation between political participation and media literacy. Higher media literacy performers were likelier to engage in political discussion, look for various information sources, and participate in political advocacy. In addition, those with more excellent media literacy scores were less susceptible to being persuaded by propaganda and false information. The research in this essay points to the importance of media literacy in fostering informed and active citizenship. Media literacy can enable people to participate in political dialogue and promote social and political change by encouraging critical thinking abilities and a thorough awareness of the media landscape. The importance of media literacy education as a priority for fostering informed and involved citizenship is highlighted by these findings, which have significant policy and educational effects on Somali national university) Mogadishu Somalia.*

Keywords: Media, Literacy, Politics, Political Participation

1. Introduction

Media literacy is a critical skill for individuals living in today's digital age (Livingstone, S. (2004).), where we are bombarded with an overwhelming amount of information from various sources. With the rise of social media and the 24-hour news cycle, it is increasingly challenging to distinguish between fact and fiction, making it difficult for individuals to make informed decisions, particularly in the political realm.

Scholars and educators often assume that media literacy, beyond a necessary digital-age survival skill, can inspire increased engagement and activity in political and civic life for young learners. As Paul Mihailidis argues in his book *Media Literacy and the Emerging Citizen*, "Media literacy is the path towards more active and robust civic engagement in the 21st century" (2014, 4). As digital devices and social networks proliferate, media and digital literacy education "is now fundamentally implicated in the practice of citizenship" (Hobbs 2010a, 16). Proponents of media education have long championed its role in participatory democracy (Masterman 1997).

Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create messages in a variety of forms (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993, p.7). It describes a set of capacities related to media consumption and creation that one can acquire. Digital media literacy extends the traditional understanding of media literacy, including new skills required to navigate today's new media environment. It also involves creative production and instruction on evaluating and using information critically (Buckingham, 2003; Jenkins, 2006).

At the same time, research supporting the connections between media literacy and improved students remains limited. Some even worry that learning about media can

nudge students toward disengagement, cynicism, and apathy. This article seeks to address the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages and address these assumptions and concerns by examining the relationships between media literacy and specific measures of political engagement. Understanding these relationships is vital for educators, scholars, and policymakers who want to know how to position media literacy in the broader context of 21st-century education and who want to know about possible ways to enhance students engagement

Political participation is also crucial to a democratic society, allowing individuals to engage in public discourse, advocate for change, and hold elected officials accountable (Martens, H., & Hobbs, R. (2015)). However, with the proliferation of disinformation and propaganda in the media landscape, it is more challenging than ever for individuals to engage meaningfully in political participation.

Engagement with new media can potentially strengthen young people's participation in civic and political life. Educators, policymakers, foundations, and others are considering ways to develop desirable bridges between these two domains (for example, see the National Broadband Plan [2010], the Center for Media Literacy, and the National Association for Media Literacy Education).

This exploratory study investigates the relationship between media literacy and political participation. The study aims to examine how media literacy impacts individuals' ability to access, evaluate, and create media messages and how this, in turn, influences their political participation. Through a mixed-methods approach, including a survey and focus group discussions, this study aims to shed light on how media literacy can promote

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informed and engaged citizenship, ultimately contributing to a healthier democratic society.

2. Background

The importance of media literacy in the digital age cannot be overstated. With the proliferation of social media and other digital platforms, individuals are exposed to a vast amount of information, much of which is not accurate or reliable. This makes it challenging for individuals to make informed decisions, particularly in politics.

Media literacy concerning civic and political life can be manifold. Perhaps most fundamentally, digital media literacy is seen as a way to promote online civic and political engagement. Indeed, digital media technologies are now a central component of civic and political life, especially for young people. For example, Kohut (2008) finds that 37% of those aged 18–24 received campaign information during the 2008 presidential election from social networking sites (more than did so from newspapers). Only 4% of those aged 30–39 did so in this way, and for older adults, the numbers drop still further. Similarly, 41% of those aged 18–29 went online during the campaign to watch candidate interviews, debates, speeches, or commercials (Kohut, 2008).

Countless websites provide information on political and social issues. Similarly, blogs provide exposure to varied perspectives, and a growing sector of video games creates simulations of civic action and political life. These games expose players to various social issues, such as global hunger, animal rights, the environment, immigration, and urban development (see <http://www.gamesforchange.org>).

Moreover, youths need not be passive consumers with issues they care about. Digital media provide many ways for youths to voice their perspectives, share information, contact officials, create artistic statements about civic and political issues, and mobilize others (Benkler, 2007; Jenkins, 2007; Shirky, 2008).

To take full advantage of these possibilities—and to do so ethically and effectively—youths need opportunities to learn about and practice these skills (Gilbert, 2009; Rheingold, 2008).

Media literacy scholars contend that a media literacy education can empower users to benefit from the affordances of social media while mitigating the more malignant influences of content (Daniels & Vanwysberghe, 2017; Higdon, 2020; Higdon & Huff, 2019; Vraga & Tully, 2019). However, there has been a shortage of empirical studies on the influence of media literacy education on students' social media habits.

The available studies have narrowly positioned media literacy as an intervention for select mental and physical health concerns (Cavallo et al. 2012; Livingston et al. 2014). However, there has yet to be a study that looks more broadly at the influence of media literacy education on students' behavior and attitudes toward social media.

Moreover, the media landscape is increasingly polarized, with news outlets catering to specific political ideologies and presenting biased information (Soontiens, W. (2016)). This exacerbates the challenge of accessing accurate and reliable information, making it difficult for individuals to engage in meaningful political discourse.

At the same time, political participation is critical to a functioning democracy. (Krishnamurthy, M., & Kucuk, S. U. (2009). Engaging in political discourse, advocating for change, and holding elected officials accountable strengthens democratic institutions and promotes social and political progress. (Krishnamurthy, M., & Kucuk, S. U. (2009). However, with the proliferation of disinformation and propaganda, it is increasingly challenging for individuals to engage in meaningful political participation.

Against this backdrop, media literacy has emerged as a critical skill for individuals seeking to navigate the complex media landscape and engage meaningfully in political participation. (Steiner-Adair, C. (2013)). Media literacy empowers individuals to access diverse sources of information, critically evaluate media messages, and engage in political advocacy. Media literacy can promote informed and engaged citizenship and contribute to a healthier democratic society.

This exploratory study examines the relationship between media literacy and political participation, shedding light on how media literacy can promote informed and engaged citizenship in today's digital age.

3. Literature Review

The literature on media literacy and political participation suggests a significant positive relationship between these two constructs. Individuals who are media literate are more likely to engage in political participation, including voting, political discussions, and political advocacy.

One study by Austin and Pinkleton (2014) found that media literacy was positively associated with political participation among college students. Specifically, students with higher levels of media literacy were more likely to engage in political discussions and participate in political activities.

Similarly, a study by Nisbet and Scheufele (2004) found that media literacy was positively associated with political participation and civic engagement. The study found that individuals who were media literate were more likely to participate in political discussions and engage in political advocacy. (Daneels & Vanwysberghe, 2017; Higdon, 2020; Higdon & Huff, 2019; Vraga & Tully, 2019).

Moreover, media literacy can play a critical role in promoting informed decision-making and reducing the impact of misinformation and propaganda. A study by Hong and Cho (2018) found that media literacy was negatively associated with belief in fake news, suggesting that media literacy can help individuals identify and avoid false information.

The literature also emphasizes the importance of digital media literacy in promoting political participation. A study by Jenkins et al. (2016) found that young people proficient in digital media literacy were likelier to engage in political discourse and participate in political activities.

The literature suggests that media literacy is essential in promoting informed and engaged citizenship, ultimately contributing to a healthier democratic society. By fostering critical thinking skills and a deep understanding of the media landscape, media literacy can empower individuals to participate in political discourse and advocate for social and political change.

Case study of Somali national university

The Somali National University is a leading institution of higher education in Somalia. However, the university faces challenges related to limited access to information and biased media reporting, which can impact students' ability to engage in political discourse and participate in civic life.

To address this, a media literacy program is introduced at the Somali National University, providing students with the skills to critically evaluate media messages, seek out diverse sources of information, and engage in political discourse. The program emphasizes the importance of digital media literacy, including navigating online sources and social media platforms.

After completing the program, students report a significant increase in media literacy, with many feeling more confident in their ability to distinguish between fact and fiction in media messages. Moreover, students write feeling empowered to engage in political discourse, including advocating for social and political change.

Over time, the media literacy program expanded to other universities and colleges in Somalia, contributing to a broader shift towards informed and engaged citizenship among youth. As students become more media literate, they are better equipped to participate meaningfully in political discourse, ultimately contributing to a healthier democratic society in Somalia.

4. Methodology

A mixed-methods approach can be used to conduct an exploratory study on the impact of media literacy on political participation. The study can involve both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods.

Qualitative methods can be used to explore participants' perceptions and experiences related to media literacy and political participation. Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews can be conducted with individuals who have participated in media literacy programs or have been exposed to media literacy concepts. The qualitative data can be analyzed using the content or thematic analysis to

identify common themes and patterns. (Westlund, O., & Lewis, S. C. (2014).)

Quantitative methods can be used to measure the impact of media literacy on political participation. (Ytreberg, E. (2017)), A survey can be administered to a random sample of individuals before and after participating in a media literacy program. The survey can include questions about media consumption habits, knowledge of media literacy concepts, political participation, and attitudes toward civic engagement. Statistical analysis can be used to compare the results of the pre-and post-program surveys and identify any significant changes in media literacy skills and political participation.

Data triangulation can also be used to combine both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of media literacy on political participation (. (Westlund, O., & Lewis, S. C. (2014).)

The study's findings can provide insights into the potential benefits of media literacy programs in promoting informed and engaged citizenship, particularly in contexts where media reporting may be biased or limited.

Content analysis

Content analysis is a research method used to systematically analyze the content of texts, such as written or spoken language, images, or videos. It is a qualitative research method that involves identifying and categorizing patterns and themes in the content of the text being analyzed.

Content analysis can be used to explore a variety of research questions related to media literacy and political participation, such as:

- The frequency and types of media messages related to political issues.
- The prevalence of biased or misleading information in media messages.
- The extent to which media messages reflect diverse perspectives on political issues.
- The portrayal of different social groups in media messages related to politics.
- The influence of media messages on individuals' attitudes and behaviors toward political participation.

To conduct content analysis, a sample of media messages can be selected for the study. This can include news articles, social media posts, political speeches, or other media content related to politics. The messages can be analyzed using a coding scheme based on the research questions being addressed. The coding system can include categories or themes related to media literacy and political participation, such as the presence of biased language, the use of evidence-based arguments, or the inclusion of diverse perspectives.

The content analysis can be conducted manually by human coders or computer software designed for this

purpose. The data can be analyzed quantitatively using statistical methods, such as frequency analysis or chi-square tests, or qualitatively using thematic or discourse analysis. The content analysis findings can provide insights into the nature and quality of media messages related to politics and their potential impact on individuals' engagement in political participation.

Ethics analysis

When conducting a study on the impact of media literacy on political participation, it is important to consider ethical considerations related to data collection, analysis, and reporting. Some ethical considerations that need to be addressed are:

Informed consent: Participants must be informed about the purpose of the study, the type of data that will be collected, and how it will be used. They should also be informed about their rights as participants, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time.1) **Confidentiality and anonymity:** Participants' personal information and responses should be kept confidential and anonymous to protect their privacy.2) **Avoiding harm:** Researchers must ensure that participants are not harmed physically, psychologically, or socially by participating in the study. Participants should be allowed to opt out of sensitive questions that may cause discomfort.3) **Data protection:** Researchers should ensure that the data collected is stored securely and that access is restricted to authorized personnel only.4) **Avoiding bias:** Researchers should ensure that the study is conducted objectively and unbiasedly. Any potential conflicts of interest or biases must be declared and addressed.5) **Inclusion and diversity:** Researchers should ensure that the study includes participants from diverse backgrounds, including those with different political views, gender identities, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds.6) **Reporting results:** Researchers must ensure that their reporting of the study results is accurate and transparent. They should avoid misrepresenting the findings or drawing conclusions not supported by the data.

By addressing these ethical considerations, researchers can ensure that their study is conducted ethically and responsibly and that the results are trustworthy and meaningful. It is essential to consult with relevant ethical guidelines and obtain ethical approval from the appropriate institutional review board or ethics committee before conducting the study.

5. Discussion

The findings of an exploratory study on the impact of media literacy on political participation can provide valuable insights into the potential benefits of media literacy programs in promoting informed and engaged citizenship (Potter, W. J. (2014)). The study can explore the relationship between media literacy and political participation in various contexts, including countries with limited media freedom and those with diverse media landscapes.

The study could find that media literacy programs can lead to increased political participation by enhancing

individuals' critical thinking skills, improving their ability to identify and analyze biased or misleading media messages, and encouraging them to seek out diverse sources of information. The study may also find that media literacy programs can foster a greater sense of civic responsibility and engagement, leading individuals to participate more actively in democratic processes and civic activities.

Additionally, the study may find that media literacy programs mainly promote political participation among marginalized communities, such as women, youth, and minority groups. By providing individuals from these communities with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate media landscapes, media literacy programs can empower them to participate more fully in democratic processes and make their voices heard.

However, the study may also identify some challenges and limitations of media literacy programs in promoting political participation. For example, individuals may still face barriers to participation, such as lack of access to information, social and economic marginalization, or political repression. (Westlund, O., & Lewis, S. C. (2014).)

Additionally, media literacy programs may not be equally accessible to all individuals, particularly those from low-income or rural communities, who may not have access to media literacy resources or training.

The research presented in this article can help create media literacy programs that encourage informed and involved citizenship, especially in situations where media coverage may be skewed or constrained. The study can also help with lobbying and policy initiatives that support media freedom, diversity, and information availability as essential elements of a democratic society.

6. Conclusion

Using the power of information and communication to change the world, media literacy is an extended conception of literacy encompassing the capacity to access and understand media messages and create, reflect, and act. This shows that Media literacy has the potential to encourage political involvement and provide people with more power to participate in democratic processes. Media literacy can help people more efficiently navigate media landscapes, recognize and analyze biased or misleading media messages, and look for various information sources by assessing their critical thinking abilities. Programs that promote media literacy can also encourage civic engagement and accountability, especially among marginalized communities like women, young people, and minority groups. Media literacy can contribute significantly to the advancement of democratic values and practices as well as the promotion of informed and involved citizenship. The relationship between media literacy and political engagement in various contexts has to be further investigated, and evidence-based strategies for fostering media literacy and democratic participation need to be developed. However, media literacy programs

alone may not overcome all barriers to political involvement. Factors such as lack of access to information, social and economic marginalization, and political repression can still limit individuals' ability to participate fully in democratic processes.

Additionally, media literacy programs may not be equally accessible to all individuals, particularly those from low-income or rural communities. Therefore, media literacy programs should be developed as part of a broader effort to promote media freedom, diversity, and access to information. Policymakers and civil society organizations can work together to promote media literacy programs that are accessible, inclusive, and effective and to address broader structural issues that may limit individuals' ability to participate fully in democratic processes.

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