Assessment of Media Literacy Competencies of Young Media Consumers in Pakistan

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Abstract

This cross-sectional research work was carried out to assess the media literacy competencies of the youth of Pakistan. A self-reported survey questionnaire was developed, consisting of 21 items, to measure the media literacy competencies. A sample of 554 youths took part in this study. Cross-tabulation of the overall media literacy score and gender depicted that there is no major difference among the participants based on their gender. Whereas youngsters with education levels between intermediate to bachelor's degree scored better on the scale as compared to the rest of the respondents. Overall levels of media literacy competencies of the youths are good but there is a need to improve their critical understanding of the media 'texts'.

Introduction

Innovations in the field of media and communication technologies have made it easy for youngsters to search information with few clicks, learn complex and new ideas from the vicinity of their homes, make and maintain relations, buy and sell things and create and share personal content on these platforms (Cappello, Felini, & Hobbs, 2011; Simons, Meeus, T'Sas, & Sas, 2017). The constant inflow of new information and communication technologies has offered a variety of choices and opportunities to young media consumers worldwide (Potter, 2013; Simons et al., 2017), and Pakistani youth is no exception. The

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& Sas, 2017). The constant inflow of new information and communication technologies has offered a variety of choices and opportunities to young media consumers worldwide (Potter, 2013; Simons et al., 2017), and Pakistani youth is no exception. The plethora of available media outlets and their content, demands that 'media literacy competencies' of media users must be assessed, and strategies should be devised to improve it.

This exponential growth of media and communication technologies in the world has urged many global organizations, including the United Nations(UNESCO, 2021), European Commission (Eurobarometer, 2013), The American Academy of Pediatrics (Turner et al., 2017), European Association for Viewers Interest (EAVI) (Celot, 2012), UK's Office of Communication (Office of Communications, 2018), and National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE, 2018), to call for the development of media literacy competencies of youths to neutralize the latent harmful effects of media consumption on their health and well-being (Celot, 2012; European Commission, 2011; Sonia Livingstone, 2019; National Association for Media Literacy Education, 2021; UNESCO, 2013). There is no denying that the media are now omnipresent in Pakistan. Social networking websites and applications have attracted millions of users from Pakistan ('Social media - Statistics & Facts', 2021; 'YouTube for Press', 2021).

Media literacy is defined as the capability of media users to skillfully access, evaluate and construct messages in different media formats (Aufderheide, 1993). In this study, the term 'media literacy' refers to the ability of Pakistani youths to skillfully access,

competently utilize, critically analyze, and sagaciously create and share media content using various digital and media platforms to be active participants of the society, wise-consumers, and responsible citizens.

The foremost purpose of enhancing the media literacy capabilities of youth is to increase their critical self-sufficiency in relationship to their all media interactions. It is aimed to develop the competencies of youth to improve their aesthetic appreciation of the media content, augment their communication skills, increase their social advocacy abilities and supplement their consumer competencies (Aufderheide, 1993; Paul Mihailidis, 2008; Sauerteig, Gutierrez, Toven-Lindsey, & Dahl, 2019). Experts have pointed out that media literacy enables people to deal with the media messages in a learned manner that inform, entertain and sell on a daily basis (Tallim, 2002). It has been elaborated as the skillful collection, analysis, and application of the information in a purposeful manner (Anderson, 1981). Media literacy scholars have emphasized that like all human actions, media literacy is basically rooted in the social interactions of people (Barton & Hamilton, 1999). Some expert argued that it is a set of multiple competencies which helps people to acquire, analyze and communicate messages in varied media platforms (Hobbs, 2011; Potter, 2010). Experts proposed that media literacy must be considered as a political, communal and cultural activity (Sholle & Denski, 1994).

It is reasoned that media literacy means the exploration of media contents to suit the unquenchable human need of getting information and having the awareness of how to differentiate

between the good and the bad media content as available through different media outlets (Haynes, 2004). These skills help to develop a learned and intelligible comprehension of the functioning of mass media in the world (Shepherd, 1993). It involves critically thinking about the techniques, technologies, and organizations involved in media production and intelligently analyzing the effects of media messages on people (Shepherd, 1993). Researchers have argued that media literacy enables youths to become active citizens and keenly participate in the happenings of society (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017; Sauerteig et al., 2019). While families of adolescents understandably play an important role in this regard, modern media gadgets are not restricted within the walls of the houses or purlieu of their schools.

Keeping this perspective in view, this study was designed to measure the 'media literacy competencies' of 'youths' in Pakistan, between 15 years to 29 years, who are about 63% of the total population (Hafeez & Fasih, 2018; Tariq, Mehboob, & Khan, 2012; World Bank, 2019; Youth Policy, 2014). The development of the media literacy skills of youth is inevitable for the development of countries as it aims to provide the necessary skills that will enable young media users to function as self-sufficient and sensible citizens (Sonia Livingstone, 2014; Mihailidis, 2009). It is highlighted that the more youngsters learn about the who, why, what, and how of the media industry, the more media literate they will become (Potter, 2019). Some scholars have asserted that media literacy is the attainment of various capabilities by the youth that are required to comprehend, scrutinize and consume media messages competently in their day to day activities

(Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012). Media professionals have pointed out that media literacy is a 21st century literacy methodology to educate the masses (Thoman & Jolls, 2003). Media literacy skills can also inspire youth to question and to express themselves which is necessary for citizens of a democratic country (Culver & Jacobson, 2012; Karaduman, 2015; Kellner & Share, 2007). Along with the understanding of mainstream systems, media production through new digital media platforms can also empower youths to produce their own content that can resultantly contest the existing media narratives and expand their own perspectives (Kellner & Share, 2007).

The review of the media literacy literature also shows that most of the scholars, action groups, and other media literacy organizations agree that there are five essential concepts, essential for a person to become media literate (Buckingham, 2005; Center for Media Literacy, 2021; Hobbs, 1998; Maksl, Ashley, & Craft, 2015; Mallon, 2018; National Association for Media Literacy Education, 2021; Navarra, 2012; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1989; Papaioannou, 2011; Potter, 2010; Potter & Thai, 2019; Pungente, n.d.; Silverblatt, Smith, Miller, Smith, & Brown, 2014). According to the Center of Media Literacy (Center for Media Literacy, 2021), in harmony with many other experts and organizations, the key questions asked by the media literate people are: Who produced this content? What procedures and production techniques were used to attract my attention? How same media content is understood differently by different people?

Why some selected values, perspectives and lifestyles are signified in the media products? Why was a specific media product created and shared?

Keeping these fundamental questions and the evolving media landscape of Pakistan in view, this study measures the contemporary 'media literacy competencies' of youth.

The basic inquiries of this research work were: -

RQ1. What is the present state of media literacy competencies of youth in Pakistan?

Methodology

A quantitative research design was employed to assess the media literacy competencies of youth in Pakistan (Berman, 2017; Cabrera, 2011; Caldas, 2003; Cameron, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013; Snelson, 2016). Previously, many researchers have employed this research designs and reported its efficacy to assess the media literacy skills of targeted population (Cernison & Ostling, 2017; Hobbs, 2017; Hobbs & Frost, 2003; Maksl et al., 2015; Simons et al., 2017).

The theoretical framework of this research work is predominantly associated with the media effects tradition of mass media research that comprises of the theories aimed to explain how the media messages influence the audience (Baran & Davis, 2013; Dominick, 2005; Holmes, 2005; Miller, 2005). In specific, its theoretical and conceptual frameworks are inspired by the "Media Literacy Theoretical Framework" of Brian A. Primack and Renee Hobbs (Primack & Hobbs, 2009). These experts have proposed to assess three key dominions of media literacy, labeled as Authors and Audiences (AA) , Messages and Meanings (MM)

and Representation and Reality (RR) (Primack & Hobbs, 2009). Previously applied strategies to measure media literacy skills along with the recommendations of various media literacy experts (Ashley et al., 2013; Hobbs & Frost, 2003; Maksl et al., 2015; Primack et al., 2006; Primack & Hobbs, 2009), were also considered to assess the media literacy competencies of youth in the Pakistani context.

Accordingly, a self-reported survey questionnaire was developed to assess the media literacy competencies of the understudy population. Initially 45 items were developed but after the expert opinion and review of existing literature, it was reduced, and the final media literacy competencies assessment scale was based on 21 items. The final questionnaire was based on various elements of the conceptual framework such as demographical factors, understanding of media industry, personal media usage competencies and knowledge of media system in Pakistan. It contained questions like "Social media influencers and media celebrities play a big part in influencing the people regarding the decision of purchasing things or services" and "Media outlets exaggerate about things and events and make them look more dramatic than they really are", with options given on the 5 Likert Scale 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 4= Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree. Knowledge about media system in Pakistan was assessed with 4 items i.e. "To your knowledge, do some rules exist that regulate "copyrights" in Pakistan" and item like, Do you know there is an authorized national institution in Pakistan where you can report if you notice something insulting, unlawful, or offending on

Television?, with options given on the 5 Likert Scale 1= No, not at all, 2= Probably Not, 3= May Be, 4= Very Probably, and 5 = Yes, definitely. Socio-demographic information included gender, ethnicity, monthly income, location, and education level to assess the socioeconomic status of the respondents.

Validity of the research instrument was a key concern of the researchers. Scholars have pointed out that in all the social science research activities, the issue under research must be precisely explained and if this does not happen then its validity is flawed (Field, 2005; Middleton, 2019; Pallant, 2005; Primack et al., 2006). It is asserted by the experts that validity is primary in the development of measuring scales (Bond, 2003). All the items of the media literacy scale depicted good measure of internal consistency with Cronbach's Alpha =.863 (Field, 2005; Julie Pallant, 2007).

All the participants of this study were between 15 years to 29 years, representing the 'Youth', as defined in the 'National Youth Policy of Pakistan' (Ashraf, Ali, & Hosain, 2013; Youth Policy, 2014). The data collection tool was hosted online on a survey platform called "Google Forms". This method was assessed to be the most cost-effective method of questioning a very large and geographically spread-out youth population of Pakistan (Kumar, 2011). The simple random sampling technique was employed to collect the data (Field, 2005; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2017; Wimmer & Dominick, 2012).

Results

A sample of 554 youths, 304 male (54.9%) and 248 female (44.8%), and only two transgenders (.4%) participated in this study.

Results of 'Media Literacy Competencies Assessment Survey of Youth in Pakistan' depicted that a well representative sample of youths participated in this study, belonging to all the seven federating units of Pakistan (i.e. Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Baluchistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, Islamabad Capital Territory, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Sindh). Detail of the demographical features of the survey partakers is shown in the table 1.

Table 1: *Demographic Characteristics of the Media Literacy Survey Participants (n=554)*

Variables	Youth *(n)* f (%)
Gender	
Male	304 (54.9)
Female	248(44.8)
Transgender	2(.4)
You belong to which federating unit of Pakistan?	
Azad Jammu and Kashmir	30(5.4)
Balochistan	92(16.6)
Gilgit-Baltistan	22(4.0)
Islamabad Capital Territory	30(5.4)
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	118(21.3)
Punjab	164(29.6)
Sindh	98(17.7)
Monthly household income	
Less than 40,000 rupees/ month	170 (30.7)
41,000 - 80,000 rupees/ month	190 (34.3)
81,000 - 120,000 rupees/ month	114 (20.6)
120,000 - 160,000 rupees/ month	36 (6.5)
More than 160000 rupees/ month	44 (7.9)
Education	
Matric or below	128 (23.1)
Intermediate/ FA / F.Sc.	202(36.5)
Bachelor's Degree -14 Years Education	66(11.9)
Bachelor's Degree/BS -16 Years Education	92(16.6)
Master's Degree	36(6.5)
M.S. or M.Phil.	28(5.1)
Ph.D. or higher	2(0.4)
Urban / Rural	
Urban	338 (61.0)
Rural	174(31.4)
Prefer not to say	42(7.6)

Table 2: *Media Literacy Competencies Levels of the Young Media Users (N=554)*

Media Literacy Level	Youth (n) f (%)	Grading Criteria	Std. Dev.	Mean
Excellent	52(9.4)	≤90 %	1.17	2.6
Very Good	62(11.2)	≤71 – 89 %	490	85 9
Good	204(36.8)	≤51-70 %		
Satisfactory	132(23.8)	≤41-50 %		
Poor	104(18.8)	40 % or Less		

Table 3: *Gender & Media Literacy Levels: Cross Tabulation (n=554)*

		Media Literacy Levels					Total
		1.00 Poor	2.00 Satisfactory	3.00 Good	4.00 Very Good	5.00 Excellent	
Gender	Male	56	74	112	34	26	302
	Female	48	58	90	28	26	248
	Transgender	0	0	2	0	0	2
Total		104	132	204	62	52	554

Cross-tabulation of the educational level with their overall score on media literacy scale in Table 2 showed that youngsters with the education levels between intermediate to bachelor's degree (n= 362) performed better, 38 (6.8%) securing Excellent grades, as compared to the rest of the respondents. Detail of the cross tabulation of education and media literacy levels is presented in table 4.

Table 4: *Education & Media Literacy Levels: Cross Tabulation (n=554)*

		Media Literacy Levels					Total
		1.00 Poor	2.00 Satisfactory	3.00 Good	4.00 Very Good	5.00 Exc elle nt	
Education	Matric or below	20	26	64	14	2	126
	Intermediate	36	50	68	28	20	202
	BA/14 Years Education	17	16	23	4	8	68
	BS -16 Years Education	19	24	28	11	10	92
	Master's Degree	2	6	15	4	9	36
	M.S. or M.Phil.	10	9	5	1	3	28
	Ph.D. or higher	0	1	1	0	0	2
Total		104	132	204	62	52	554

In general, the media literacy skills of participants were categorized into five categories, labeled as poor, satisfactory, good, very good and excellent levels. The maximum score of the media literacy assessment scale was 21 x 5= 105. As per the devised grading criteria, all the participants scoring <90 % on the media literacy scale were categorized as having excellent media literacy skills; all those who scored <71 – 89 % were categorized as very good; the participants with a score of <51-70 % were rated as good; participants with a score of <41-50 % were labeled as satisfactory and all those who scored 40 % or less were categorized as having poor media literacy skills. The findings revealed that only 52(9.4%) participants possessed excellent media literacy skills, whereas 62(11.2%) were having Very Good

media literacy skills, Good 204(36.8%), and 132(23.8%) exhibited satisfactory level of media literacy competencies and 104 (18.8%) scored Poor grades on the scale. The results showed overall good level of media literacy skills among the survey participants; but average skills level was observed in responses to the survey items that were related to the analysis of media contents and general knowledge about media laws and working of media industry in the society.

The findings establish the importance of developing media literacy skills among the youths and suggest the need for programs in this regard. Supporting the same results experts have emphasized the role of implementing media literacy intervention schemes and training programs to provide guidance to youths to develop their media literacy (Anderson et al., 2003; Chakroff & Nathanson, 2008; Guess, Lerner, Lyons, Montgomery, & Nyhan, 2020; Raich, Portell, & Peláez-Fernández, 2010). The results also show that demographic factors like age, gender, and income had no significant impact on the media literacy skills of participants but only education levels showed significant impact on the media literacy competencies of the survey partakers.

Results of media literacy assessment survey indicate that that the educated youth in Pakistan are sufficiently well media-savvy but there is a need to improve their digital and media literacy competencies and functioning of media outlets in the society. Findings of this study also suggest that there is no significant difference of media literacy skills among the respondents based on their gender. The chi-square test of the data showed that all the items of the research instrument exhibited a

good fit. Thus, confirms that this media literacy assessment tool is a procedurally suitable tool to measure the media literacy competencies of the respondents. Forthcoming research efforts must incorporate more items related to the assessment of creative abilities by tasking the respondents with creating media contents. In view of the media literacy results by gender, the findings did not show any significant differences among male respondents and female respondents. These findings are to some extent consistent with the outcomes of the previously conducted surveys which reported no statistically significant differences among the respondents on the basis of their gender (Mohadjer, Krenzke, & Van de Kerckhove, 2013). Results also show that the respondents with lower levels of education i.e., matric or below, also scored lower literacy skill levels.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Developing media literacy skills of youth in Pakistan is an inevitable and essential response to the ever-changing media scenarios of the world. To have more and more prosperous learners, sensible citizens, and dynamic workers, and meticulous consumers, developing the media literacy competencies of youth is a necessity so that they can flourish in the contemporary media-rich society of Pakistan. Basic objective of imparting media literacy skills among youth is to augment their awareness of the various types of media messages, help them to recognize media bias and propaganda, develop their critical thinking abilities, to make them sensible consumers and creators of media contents(Hobbs et al., 2017; Hoechsmann & Wilson, 2019; Manuel, Tornero, & Becerra, 2019; Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013; Prats &

Matilla, 2019; Ptaszek & Lysik, 2019; Silverblatt, Ferry, & Finan, 2015; Tulodziecki, 2019). Experts propose that media education should be considered the basic right of every inhabitant of every state, to enhance their freedom of thought an expression and to augment democracy (Hobbs et al., 2017; Hoechsmann & Wilson, 2019; Manuel et al., 2019; Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013; Prats & Matilla, 2019; Ptaszek & Lysik, 2019; Silverblatt et al., 2015; Tulodziecki, 2019).

Keeping the results of this study in view and in congruity with the research findings around the globe (Bulger & Davison, 2018; Cappello et al., 2011; Domine, 2011; S Livingstone, Wijnen, Papaioannou, Costa, & del Mar Grandio, 2014; Mihailidis, 2012; Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013; National Association for Media Literacy Education, 2021; Potter, 2019; Sauerteig et al., 2019; Silverblatt et al., 2015; Tulodziecki & Grafe, 2019; UNESCO, 2021), following suggestions are opined to improve the media literacy competencies of youth in Pakistan:

    a. The idea and the significance of media literacy must be popularized in Pakistani society and all the stakeholders should invest time and finances for this cause.

    b. The subject of media literacy should be incorporated in the existing national school curriculum of Pakistan.

    c. Media literacy awareness campaigns should be started to make youth more media literate in Pakistan. Academicians can play a starring role in this regard.

    d. Authorities at the federal government level should make it a policy issue and make necessary policies to make the situation better.

e.   More media literacy research should be conducted at national level in Pakistan.

f.   Media literacy action groups / NGOs like National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) and the Centre for Media Literacy should be established in Pakistan.

g.   Media literacy is not possible without the active participation of media personalities and media owners. They have the right communication tools, familiar faces and youth fan following to better the overall state of media literacy in the country.

h.   The role of provincial governments to improve media literacy in Pakistan is very important as education has become their responsibility after the 18th amendment.

To conclude, all the stakeholders of Pakistani society, including researchers from all the domains of academia, general public, parents, consumers protection activists and policy makers; should earnestly work to enhance the media literacy competencies of youth and critically think about how media organizations work, how the issues of the world are being framed by the media and how the media messages are being consumed by the masses. There is a need to popularize the idea of media literacy in Pakistan and factors like the involvement of governmental bodies, participation of civil society, role of the media industry and academia are very important to augment its future prospects. For a developing country like Pakistan, its importance cannot be emphasized enough for the personal wellbeing, digital wellbeing,

social activism and the professional growth of its youth in the 21st century.

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