

The role of community media as a tool for eradicating media illiteracy for a more participative and democratic outlook among younger generations in India

Eram Qazi

Assistant Professor, Amity School Of communication
Amity University, Lucknow campus, India
Email - qazie2003@yahoo.com

Abstract: Media illiteracy is one of the factors why the democratic nations could not fully use the power of media to their benefits. As media exposures increase the younger generations are on the verge of psychological disruption due to information overload and of which most is unverified even fake. The excess involvement in social media is forcing many youngsters to create imaginary identities and also cutting them off from most personal social interactions with families and relatives. Since majority of youngsters are dependent on new media as an information source and are always in a hurry, they fail to verify information available on internet. Sometimes they fall prey to extremist thoughts which might get manipulative and compel them to perform unlawful deeds. Keeping a check on all media sources is not the solution. But the solution is eradication of media illiteracy on the grass root level. The paper explores how media literacy can be enhanced and also how effective is community media.

Key Words: Media illiteracy, exposures, unverified, imaginary identities, social interactions, Community media.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The scholars of media research are confident that media has the skills of being an important stakeholder in development messaging. While the level of influence that different types of media exerts could be different, this should not deter the media researchers from establishing better communication with the media illiterates at the bottom of developing societies. In order to ensure a balanced growth the policy on media literacy is like a necessary evil for developing nations as well as developed ones. Media literacy centers on the idea that representations of reality are often incomplete or inaccurate (Hobbs & Frost, 2003; Kellner & Share, 2005; Thoman & Jolls, 2004).

At the core of media literacy are the notions that all media messages and products are constructed using creative production techniques, that messages can be interpreted differently by different people, that media have embedded values and points of view, and that messages are generally created to gain profit and/or power (Thoman & Jolls, 2004). Furthermore, for the past two decades, scholars have generally embraced the idea that media literate individuals should be able to access, analyze, evaluate and create media content (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993). The hot topic of discussion amongst scholars and educators is “news media literacy,” in which media educators apply the broad goals and frameworks of media literacy to news content (Hobbs, 2010; Mihailidis, 2011). Although news content has long been used for examination in educational setups, scholars and educators are only beginning to formalize goals and applications for news media literacy (Ashley et al., 2013).

2. GLOBAL RECOGNITION:

A number of countries have managed to bring out many documents on media literacy. UNESCO has come up with a webpage on Media and Information Literacy on its “Communication and Information” section. (<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/mediadevelopment/media-literacy/mil-as-composite-concept/>). In March 2014 UNESCO released “Media and Information Literacy Policy and Strategy Guidelines” and over 15 countries have already made efforts to have a policy on MIL in pursuance of the initiatives taken by UNESCO.

3. CATEGORIZATION OF MEDIA LITERACY:

Literacy of 3 R's (refers to the foundations of a basic skills-oriented education program within schools: reading, writing and arithmetic)

- Advertisement Literacy
- Computer Literacy
- Digital Literacy
- Freedom of expression and freedom to information
- Information Literacy

- Right to Information Literacy
- Right to Education Literacy
- Internet Literacy
- Library Literacy
- Media Literacy
- News Literacy

The focus of this paper revolves around “News Literacy” and how it is affecting the mindsets of people in Indian subcontinent who are already facing issues like illiteracy, poverty, casteism, communal tension, terrorism and corruption. In explicating his cognitive theory of media literacy, Potter (2004) suggests that such a theory is necessary to help establish a rationale for evaluation techniques. “We desperately need research to provide findings about how people can improve their filtering of messages from the media as well as improve their experiences with the information they encounter”

4. Media and Information or MIL Policy for India:

India is basically a combination culture that now boasts of a large youth population that will make it one of the youngest nations of the world. It needs MIL policy and strategy immediately for fostering mutual understanding and sustainable development in the coming future. The need for MIL Policy for India should be based on several factors like its population, literacy, languages and the growth of media like television, radio and newspapers, libraries and the extensive diffusion of mobile communication.

It is necessary to address MIL, for both literate and illiterate population, as both have access to mobile phones (with Internet facility and broadcast media such as Radio and Television) MIL allows sharing of opinions and brings forth opportunities to create common platform for Open Educational Resources, and guarantees social inclusion as well. Thus all media and information literate persons may access, analyze, evaluate, use and communicate information in a variety of formats and contribute in their public and social life. It offers opportunities to foster competency, especially of those who never got a chance to undergo any formal training.

5. Media illiteracy encouraging India’s spinning epidemic of fake news propagation:

The free flow of malicious lies, the ineffectiveness of fact-checking, the rigidity of populist propaganda, racism and sexism and the appearance of the so-called post-truth era emerge to challenge a fundamental foundation of ethical journalism – that facts matter for democracy and that people want to be well-informed when called upon to make potentially important decisions. In the last months of 2016 people from media such as executives and leading journalists, policy-makers and academics have been trying to think hard to elucidate what has gone wrong.

The phenomenon of fake news prevails not only on television news channels in India but also on international social media platforms and this is giving sleepless nights to scholars of media in developed countries as well. Already, Facebook and other social media sites, algorithms sort the content one sees based on past preferences and benefits. This gives the option of seeing only limited kind of stories. As per Facebook insiders “We run the risk of creating parallel societies in which some people are not aware of the real issues facing the world, and this is only exacerbated by such editorial oversight.”

As we are progressing towards a more mechanized world this is not a responsibility that should be surrendered to machines only. As of now the process of news gathering has become a desk-bound process. There is less money spent on investigative journalism and investment in human resources and more on propaganda or lobbying.

It will be an uphill job for media to rebuild public trust in quality journalism in the coming years, and not just for academics and students of mass communication. The information crisis is one that touches on the prospects for democracy. The rise of propaganda, hate-speech and egotistical politics with an extremist edge threatens solidity and peace both within countries and abroad.

6. Case study: Arundhati Rai - case of media bullying and unsolicited reporting:

Arundhati Roy the Booker prize winner from India has always upheld a strong, anti-establishment view on Kashmir, which is against the moderate liberal, mainstream view of Kashmir being an essential part of India. Her first novel, *The God of Small Things*, was published to thrilling, instant global fame, and going on to win the Man Booker Prize in 1997. But it’s her resolute, strong, and plain political thoughts – both of the neoliberal Congress-led camp, as well as of the BJP-Modi-NDA-Sangh Parivar contingent, the supporters of Hindu Rashtra – that make her a enduring enemy of consecutive ruling regimes.

Ms Roy is a champion of liberation and human rights and had always held opinions in favor of free communities irrespective of any state, religion or national sentiment. Arundhati Roy has always upheld that India is an “occupying force” in Kashmir, and is exerting control through the barrel of the gun. An FIR alleging sedition was filed against Roy by a Kashmiri Pandit in 2010 for holding a meeting with the Hurriyat Conference leader Syed Ali Shah

Geelani, and mentioning that “Azadi” was the only way for Kashmir problem. Later, the Union home ministry did not pursue the charges, and the matter was dropped.

Roy has written a number of essays on the Kashmir issue, investigating with intense morality that destroyed existence of the ordinary Kashmiri caught between Pakistan-supported militancy and India’s military occupation. In a piece titled “The Dead Begin to Speak Up in India”, she wrote in 2011:

“Kashmir is in the process of being isolated, cut off from the outside world by two concentric rings of border patrols – in Delhi as well as Srinagar – as though it's already a free country with its own visa regime. Within its borders of course, it's open season for the government and the army. The art of controlling Kashmiri journalists and ordinary people with a deadly combination of bribes, threats, blackmail and a whole spectrum of unutterable cruelty has evolved into a twisted art form.”

Referring back to the thoughts of India’s first Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru Roy famously said that if sedition charges were to be filed against her for speaking her mind on freedom for Kashmiris, then a posthumous sedition charge should be filed against Jawaharlal Nehru as well.

Roy, is a controversial figure in India for her supporting politically sensitive causes. She has divided view by speaking out in sustenance of the Naxalite rebellion and for casting doubt on Pakistan's involvement in the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

Whatever Arundhati Roy said/written in the past, made her a repetitive target of virtual assassination, governmental bullying as well as scholarly attacks from the ones threatened by her frank analysis of the entrenched maladies ailing India. Indian as well as international media who many times even resorted to publishing fake stories against her are also hugely responsible for her negative publicity which made her a soft prey for communal bashing on social media platforms by celebrities. An Indian celebrity Paresh Rawal, (who is known for his closeness to Indian PM Modi) went ahead tweeting that “Instead of tying stone pelted on the army jeep tie Arundhati Roy!” and “Her birth certi in fact is a regret letter from maternity ward. “And all these comments were made even without crosschecking the authenticity of reports published in newspapers alleging her of making perfidious remark on Kashmir crisis. Days later Mr Rawal(after seeing the apologies run by the same newspapers who published stories on Arundhati) deleted his tweets.

A US website Fair Observer published an opinion piece on Arundhati Roy holding her responsible for comments which were not made by her. Days later they deleted it and ran an apology.

Screenshots of the published apology by the media organization responsible-



The website further mentioned "It has since come to our attention that the reported facts in the above-quoted article might not have come from a credible source and have been refuted by Arundhati Roy in a comment to The Wire. Therefore, we have taken this article down and apologize to Roy. We also apologize to our readers and anyone else we may have misled in the process," the apology read.

So, the bottom line is that Indian actor Paresh Rawal tweeted against Arundhati Roy after relying on a fake piece of news. Paresh Rawal later deleted the tweet.

Another similar fake news reporting incident-

The article was published by fake news site Postcard News. According to the article, Arundhati Roy told a Pakistani newspaper that 70 lakh Indian Army soldiers cannot beat the 'Azadi gang' in Kashmir.

Screenshot of the article-

This lady who calls herself a journalist and Human Rights Activist has been standing for terrorists since decades. Recently she has given an interview to Pakistan newspaper The Times of Islamabad, blasting the government of India for taking action against terrorists.

She said "India cannot achieve its objective in the occupied valley even if its army deployment raises from 7 lakh to 70 lakh, further adding that Kashmiris have remained committed with their anti-India sentiments from many years."

Several websites, such as satyavijayi.com, theindianvoice.com and virathindurashtra.com, took the story from The Times of Islamabad and ran it.

The Times of Islamabad is not a genuine newspaper but a Pakistani nationalist website. The story was filed by 'News Desk' (no byline) and did not produce a source as such.

This bottom-up outlook on fake news has mostly been absent from debates among academics, journalists, media and policymakers. Therefore from an audience viewpoint, the fake news problem is only in part about fictitious news reports, and imitates a deeper dissatisfaction with many civic sources of information, including news media and politicians as well as corporations.

7. Media Literacy: Usefulness in the contemporary world

Preceding theoretical and empirical research proposes that critical thinking and mindful processing of information are important mechanisms of news media literacy. Thereby people must be taught to be dynamic and mindful in their news media consumption rather than trusting on automatic processing behaviors. This means asking questions about news and other media content rather than accommodating messages at face value. This also means being an active consumer of information and making conscious consumption decisions rather than passively consuming whatever is most easily and readily available. Audience should learn to develop their own personal goals for consuming news and other media content, and they should be able to analyze whether those goals are being met by the content they consume. It's certainly important to know what's in the news, but it's just as important to know how and why certain issues and events become news in the first place. This requires structural knowledge about how the media system and the news industry work. It's easy to blame the news media for their faults and shortcomings, but it's more important that viewers know how to take responsibility for their news media consumption.

The challenge of the future years will be to refresh the public rationale of journalism and to bear media to reconnect with citizens more efficiently. This existential catastrophe requires, above all, for journalists to reproach to their craft with reporting that reaches out to their listeners and listens to what is being said and reports it in context. While it is certain that recent innovations and uses of communication technology have opened and broadened possibilities for expression and information, if civil society in India is not careful, freedom from state control will be replaced by an deceptive form of corporate control. The corporations are not directly accountable to citizens, i.e. neither are their performance frequently authenticated through democratic processes nor is even a trifling level of transparency feasible through legal instruments. With radical changes in economic policy and priorities in the early 1990s, overlying with the appearance of new technologies of informatics and media, a new utilitarian dynamics has begun to emerge, putting media under the civil eye. There is a need to set the demand of media policy on the public agenda. But more often, the notion of media policy is theorized as though it were limited to the government or/and other formal machinery of the state. It is not limited to that only but with the state's withdrawal from public policy involvement, media policy is being increasingly handled on the sideline of formal state concerns. Media industries have made this sector one of the most lucrative and important growth areas of global capitalism, and they do not hesitate to undertake the political activity necessary to promote their interests. There is an absolute volley of information and media messages that individuals face in the shape of printed news, films, soap operas, information in 24 hours TV channels, in the Internet, in the multiple radio channels, across the breadth of the country. The information is knowingly or unknowingly used in many ways. It is applied in deciding and setting main democratic issues, in practices related to governance. In some unfortunate times, information is condensed to moral panicking, sensationalization of news, riots and violence in the name of religion, caste and other differences.

8. Community media as a tool for diminishing ill effects of media illiteracy

If we compare community media to the classic media (newspaper, tv, radio) community media adds an aspect to building media literacy, the switch from consumer to producer. Thereby creating of media content takes place in a collective environment. This is how community media differs from the idea of the new media where a single person can create content to publish in the internet, social web etc. This collective experience of media creation and production leads in turn to creating bottom-up establishments with their philosophy, rules and edicts based on this

collective approach and response to media. With collective checks and balances in place, information dissemination can be checked and verified, while still originating from a range of grass roots and not statutory sources. On similar lines radio's latest manifestation has only helped to strengthen the relationship between it and a vast listener base it caters to. This new avatar is known as the community radio. An initiative of the development. An initiative of the government of India, community government of India, community radio aims at giving radio aims at giving "Voice to the voiceless". The fact that makes it unique is the fact that it is used to uplift the community by seeking their participation. Thus, it's an inclusive medium and not an exclusive one.

9. Case Study-Project - City Montessori School, Community Radio

Area-Lucknow and adjoining villages - focused on a based in an urban city like Lucknow, they are few villages located on the seam of the city. These are Makdoompur, Ashraf Nagar (Sapera Basti), Makdoompur, Ashraf Nagar (Sapera Basti), Lalaikhera, Malhaur, Khadgapur and Lonapur Lalaikhera, Malhaur, Khadgapur and Lonapur . All these villages are comparatively backward and lack in all these villages are comparatively backward and lack in most basic amenities.

10. OBJECTIVE-PROVIDING EDUCATION ON HEALTH ISSUES:

Founders of City Montessori School Lucknow, Dr. Founders of City Montessori School Lucknow, Dr. Jagdish Gandhi and Dr Gandhi and Dr Mrs Bharti were fortunate enough to be entrusted with this responsibility of social development in the entrusted with this responsibility of social development in the year 2005 by the Government of India. Though the task seemed year 2005 by the Government of India. Though the task seemed mammoth initially, the school, through its radio channel mammoth initially, the school, through its radio channel – CMS COMMUNITY RADIO COMMUNITY RADIO – has made positive and constructive has made positive and constructive strides in the past three years. Since the efforts made were in strides in the past three years. Since the efforts made were in all earnest and the purpose was guided by a sincere and vision, the earnest and the purpose was guided by a sincere and vision, the journey is beginning to yield positive results.

Recognitions -The efforts of CMS CRS were realized when the efforts of CMS CRS were realized when the Department of Science & Technology the Department of Science & Technology bestowed the CRS with the project bestowed the CRS with the project Planet Earth. Planet Earth.

The CRS is recognized as the CRS is recognized as the internship center for the certificate internship center for the certificate course in community radio initiated course in community radio initiated by IGNOU(Indra Gandhi National Open University),

On the invitation of Director General On the invitation of Director General UNESCO CMS CRS has submitted its UNESCO CMS CRS has submitted its candidature for the candidature for the UNESCO IPDC UNESCO IPDC prize for rural communication prize for rural communication 2009. 2009. The nomination has been recommended. The nomination has been recommended by the National Commission of UNESCO by the National Commission of UNESCO in India.

11.CONCLUSION:

The spread of fake news is directly related to low levels of media literacy more so in developing countries. As per a column written by Aisha Sultan in St.Louis Dispatch "Teaching children how to spot real news from fake news" (Dec. 4) about the Chicago area's "mild-mannered warrior in the front lines of the propaganda wars," as we continue to ponder fake news, was a perfect media literacy lesson. Also, the editorial "Sifting news from nonsense" (Dec. 6) is media literacy-worthy, calling for readers to prevent spreading fake news, "an equal-opportunity menace," and underscoring we're all capable of such transgressions.

If certain initiatives are taken at school level the students not only become thinking media consumers/audiences, they also learn responsible digital media production and wise thinking before generating or passing on content. Thus, community must support nonstop media literacy education during and after school, and be composed to educate the next generation of media consumers and creators. The focus should be on inquiring children "how they know," i.e., connecting answers/opinions to evidence. Increased opportunities for conversation, decision-making and reasoning help children improve vocabulary, as well as overall literacy, observation and thinking skills, and whet appetites for media literacy's possibilities. Fake news has always been with us, but the revolution to fix fake news will lead, all to support media literacy education.

REFERENCES:

1. Silverblatt, A. (2008). *Media literacy: Keys to interpreting media messages* (3rd ed.). Westport, Conn.: Praeger.

2. Tsfati, Y. (2003a). Does audience skepticism of the media matter in agenda setting? *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 47, 157–176.
3. Tsfati, Y. (2003b). Media skepticism and climate of opinion perception. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 15, 65–82.
4. Tsfati, Y., & Cappella, J. N. (2003). Do people watch what they do not trust? Exploring the association between news media skepticism and exposure. *Communication Research*, 30, 504–529
5. Tsfati, Y., & Cappella, J. N. (2005). Why do people watch news they do not trust? The need for cognition as a moderator in the association between news media skepticism and exposure. *Media Psychology*, 7, 251-271.
6. Vallerand, R. J., & O'Connor, B. P. (1989). Motivation in the elderly: A theoretical framework and some promising findings. *Canadian Psychology*, 30, 538-550.
7. Van Bauwel, S. (2008). Media literacy and audiovisual languages: A case study from Belgium. *Educational Media International*, 45(2), 119-130.
8. Vraga, E. K., Tully, M., & Rojas, H. (2009). Media literacy training reduces perception of bias. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 30(4), 68-81.
9. Wahl, S. T., & Quintanilla, K. (2005). Student civic engagement and media literacy. *Texas Speech Communication Journal* 301(1), 89-91.
10. Brown, J. A. (1998). Media literacy perspectives. *The Journal of Communication*, 48.1,44-57.
11. European Commission. (2007). *A European approach to media literacy in the digital environment*. URL http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/docs/com/en.pdf.
12. Gutiérrez Martín & A.G., Hottmann, A. (2006). *Media 13. Education across the Curriculum*. Kulturring in Berlin e.V. URL <http://www.mediaeducation.net/resource/pdf/downloadMEACbooklet.pdf>.
- Hobbs, R. (2007). *Approaches to Instruction and Teacher Education in Media Literacy*. URL <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/001611/161133e.pdf>.
9. Kubey, R. (1998).
13. Obstacles to the development of media education in the United States. *The Journal of Communication*, 48.1, 58-69. 10. Lim, S. S. & E. Nekmat. (2008).
14. Learning through 'prosuming': Insights from media literacy programmes in Asia. *Science Technology & Society*, 13.2, 259-278.
15. Livingstone S., Van Couvering, E. & Thumin, N. (2004). Adult media literacy. *A review of the research literature on behalf of Ofcom*, 1 - 86
16. Mihailidis, P. & Hiebert, R. E. (2005). 'Media Literacy in Journalism Education Curriculum', *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, 9.3, 162-166.

WEB REFERENCES:

- http://www.stltoday.com/opinion/mailbag/teach-media-literacy-to-students-to-stop-spread-of-fake/article_8603e80e-a883-5954-a683-7ba39159f564.html