

# Media education and countering disinformation: A qualitative study of Egyptian youth

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Submission date: August 2025

Accepted date: November 2025

Published in: December 2025

**Recommended citation:** TAYIE, S. S. (2025). "Media education and countering disinformation: A qualitative study of Egyptian youth". *Anàlisi: Quaderns de Comunicació i Cultura*, 73, 87-103. <<https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/analisi.3893>>

## Abstract

Media education is essential for cultivating critical and analytical thinking, enabling individuals to evaluate and engage responsibly with media content. This study examines the role of media education in countering extremist ideologies and misinformation, focusing on how it fosters media awareness and literacy among university students. Using a qualitative approach, the research employed in-depth interviews with twelve purposively selected media professionals, educators and experts, alongside focus-group discussions with students from Cairo University, Misr International University and the American University in Cairo. Findings show strong expert consensus on the importance of equipping youth with media literacy skills. Students primarily engage with digital rather than traditional media but exhibit limited understanding of media education concepts. The study concludes by recommending strategies to strengthen media literacy initiatives and integrate media education within educational systems to enhance critical awareness and resilience against misinformation.

**Keywords:** media education; media literacy; youth; disinformation; digital media

**Resum.** *Educació mediàtica i combat a la desinformació: un estudi qualitatiu entre els joves egipcis*

L'educació mediàtica és fonamental per desenvolupar el pensament crític i analític, enfortir la capacitat d'avaluar i interpretar els continguts mediàtics i promoure l'autoregulació necessària per interactuar de manera responsable amb els missatges. Aquest estudi analitza el seu paper en la prevenció d'ideologies extremistes i la desinformació, amb èmfasi en la seva contribució al foment de l'alfabetització mediàtica entre estudiants universitaris. A través d'una metodologia qualitativa, es van fer entrevistes en profunditat a dotze profes-

sionals dels mitjans, educadors i experts, a més de grups de discussió amb estudiants de tres universitats egípcies: Universitat del Caire (pública), Universitat Misr Internacional (privada) i Universitat Americana del Caire (internacional). Els resultats mostren consens sobre la necessitat de dotar els joves de competències mediàtiques. També revelen que els estudiants prioritzen els mitjans digitals sobre els tradicionals i posseeixen un coneixement limitat de l'educació mediàtica. Es conclou amb recomanacions per enfortir l'alfabetització mediàtica i integrar-la en els sistemes educatius.

**Paraules clau:** educació mediàtica; alfabetització mediàtica; joves; desinformació; mitjans digitals

**Resumen.** *Educación mediática y combate a la desinformación: un estudio cualitativo entre los jóvenes egipcios*

La educación mediática es fundamental para desarrollar el pensamiento crítico y analítico, fortalecer la capacidad de evaluar e interpretar los contenidos mediáticos y promover la autorregulación necesaria para interactuar de manera responsable con los mensajes. Este estudio analiza su papel en la prevención de ideologías extremistas y la desinformación, con énfasis en su contribución al fomento de la alfabetización mediática entre estudiantes universitarios. A través de una metodología cualitativa, se realizaron entrevistas en profundidad a doce profesionales de los medios, educadores y expertos, además de grupos de discusión con estudiantes de tres universidades egipcias: Universidad del Cairo (pública), Universidad Misr Internacional (privada) y Universidad Americana del Cairo (internacional). Los resultados muestran consenso sobre la necesidad de dotar a los jóvenes de competencias mediáticas. También revelan que los estudiantes priorizan los medios digitales sobre los tradicionales y poseen un conocimiento limitado de la educación mediática. Se concluye con recomendaciones para fortalecer la alfabetización mediática e integrarla en los sistemas educativos.

**Palabras clave:** educación mediática; alfabetización mediática; jóvenes; desinformación; medios digitales

## 1. Introduction

In today's digitally saturated environment, individuals are constantly exposed to media messages that shape perceptions, behaviors and values. Advances in communication technologies have transformed media from a linear system into an interactive, multidirectional process in which audiences act as active "prosumers", simultaneously consuming and producing content (Tayie, 2012). This shift holds particular significance in Arab societies, where globalized media often introduce values that may conflict with local traditions and ethical frameworks.

The rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation, especially via social media, has made media and information literacy a national priority. Policymakers, educators and civil society increasingly recognize the need to equip citizens – particularly youth – with critical skills to evaluate and interpret media messages. Media literacy is now viewed as a civic necessity that enables individuals to resist manipulation and participate meaningfully in democratic discourse (Carlsson et al., 2008; Hobbs, 2016).

Media content today not only informs but also persuades and manipulates, challenging moral and educational systems. In response, media education has emerged as a strategic means to foster critical awareness and analytical skills. It safeguards individuals, especially youth, from harmful influences while cultivating reflective thinking essential for informed citizenship (Buckingham, 2010, 2020; Martens, 2010).

This study examines the role of media education in countering extremist ideologies and false information among university students. It explores how developing critical media skills can transform students into discerning consumers and responsible digital participants. Media education further promotes ethical judgment and self-regulation, helping individuals distinguish interpretation from objective analysis (Hobbs & Jensen, 2013).

Governments and international bodies increasingly acknowledge the value of media education. The British Minister of Culture, for instance, equated the importance of media literacy importance with that of mathematics and science, underscoring its role in fostering active citizenship and societal resilience against disinformation and ideological extremism (McNulty, 2004).

## 2. Statement of the research question

The relationship between media literacy education and the fight against misinformation, disinformation and hate speech has become increasingly critical. As societies face growing social and communicative challenges, citizens must be equipped to address them effectively. The current digital media ecosystem often contributes to these problems, particularly through the spread of misleading information. Media education therefore plays a key role in countering fake news and hate speech, while also promoting broader societal change and encouraging policy actions that regulate harmful media practices (Tayie et al., 2012).

This study aims to identify how media education can reduce intellectual extremism among youth by fostering analytical and critical thinking towards media messages. Given the escalating issues linked to excessive and unhealthy digital media use, media education is a vital tool for transforming negative public attitudes and addressing social problems. The central question guiding this study is: What role can media literacy education play in combating misinformation, disinformation and hate speech?

### 2.1. *Significance of the study*

In today's fast-paced digital world, it has become increasingly difficult for governments and educational institutions to monitor or regulate the vast volume of messages circulating across media platforms and social networking sites. Given this situation, there is a pressing need for educational frameworks and curricula that can function as informational gatekeepers, not through

external censorship but by fostering the critical awareness and analytical skills of the audience, especially among young people, who represent the next generation.

This study is significant for several reasons:

1. Media as an influential force: Media platforms today serve as powerful tools for disseminating content that often carries specific agendas or ideologies. These messages can potentially misguide or negatively influence young people's beliefs, cultural identities, and knowledge base. Therefore, it is essential to equip youth with media literacy skills to help them critically engage with such content.
2. Urgent need for protection: With the rapid advances of communication technologies and the overwhelming presence of media platforms in the information society, there is an urgent need to protect children, adolescents and youth from the potentially harmful effects of media exposure, including misinformation and manipulation.
3. Media education as a bridge: Media education offers a vital means of fostering effective and conscious communication between youth, media platforms and media content. It encourages a more thoughtful and informed interaction with media messages.
4. Developing media literacy: Much as formal education teaches individuals to read and write, media education teaches young people how to observe, interpret and listen critically and cautiously, enabling them to become more discerning media consumers.
5. Fostering critical thinking and creativity: Media education plays a crucial role in developing critical thinking skills and creativity, helping young people to better understand themselves, recognize their individuality, and explore their inner potential.
6. Empowering decision-making: By developing media literacy, young people gain the skills and confidence necessary to make informed decisions that affect their present lives and future paths, allowing them to act more thoughtfully within their communities and societies.
7. Combating misinformation and hate speech: Finally, media education is an essential tool in the fight against disinformation, fake news and hate speech. It empowers youth to question, evaluate and verify information, thereby promoting more informed and tolerant societies.

## *2.2. Objectives of the study*

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To assess the level of awareness among Egyptian youth regarding the concept and principles of media education.
2. To explore the role of media education in addressing and mitigating the spread of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech.

3. To examine the extent to which exposure to media education influences behavioral change among youth in relation to misinformation and hate speech.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of media education as a tool for confronting extremist ideologies among university students.

### 2.3. Literature review

A growing body of research highlights the importance of media education in equipping youth with critical thinking skills to navigate the complex digital landscape. This review synthesizes recent studies, particularly from Arab contexts, grouped thematically.

- *Media education and value formation:* Garcia et al. (2024) found that media education fosters positive values, civic responsibility and democratic awareness among youth. Similarly, Abdul Jalil (2023) reported that social media use influences students' religious perceptions in the UAE, underscoring the need for strategic media education to promote critical engagement with online religious content.
- *Media literacy and digital risk:* El Mokadem (2023) identified media literacy as vital for combating misinformation and manipulated media. Garcia et al. (2024) linked media awareness to more ethical online participation and recommended university-level training. Studies focusing on Egyptian youth have also noted the prevalence of digital risks – including cyberbullying, rumors, false news, and other harms – and advocated for stronger media awareness and preventative measures to protect young people in digital spaces (El Mokadem, 2023).
- *Pedagogical approaches:* Al-Omari and Al-Khalidi (2021) observed moderate media skills among Jordanian pre-service teachers, recommending a national media education plan. A study examining interactive video production in media literacy education with university students found that creating and engaging with media productions significantly improved students' understanding of media literacy concepts and critical engagement, compared with traditional lecture-only approaches. Students valued the active learning, personal engagement, and media production experience, which enhanced their skills more than passive listening (Zhou & Derakhshan, 2024).
- *Development of critical thinking:* Gezmen and Eken (2020) demonstrated that students receiving media education exhibited greater critical analysis skills. Halpern (2024) confirmed similar outcomes but noted moderate literacy levels overall, signaling the need for curriculum enhancement.
- *Social impact:* Umm Al-Ratem and Awaj (2018) examined the role of media education in addressing symbolic violence against women, promoting youth empowerment as “prosumers” (Tayie et al., 2012).

Scharrer and Ramasubramanian (2015) found positive effects on attitudes to diversity, while Jaberian (2023) linked digital literacy to higher online engagement and social capital.

- *Cultural context*: Belkasi (2017) and Daif (2018) stressed the need for active, culturally aware media engagement rather than avoidance, calling for education that fosters autonomy and critical reflection in diverse media environments.

Collectively, these studies affirm the central role of media education in cultivating analytical thinking, ethical engagement and democratic participation. Most research focuses on youth, and relies on qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups, highlighting media education as a key instrument for digital resilience and social responsibility.

#### 2.4. Theoretical framework

This study draws on James Potter's Media Literacy Theory (2004, 2010, 2022), which frames media literacy as a core skill in today's media-saturated world. Rather than a peripheral skill, it is essential for navigating complex information environments, engaging constructively and fostering equitable and democratic societies.

Potter views audiences as active participants in meaning-making and identity formation, rejecting traditional models that depict media influence as one-way and deterministic. Instead, he presents a reciprocal relationship between media and audiences, in which individuals interpret content through their cultural, social and cognitive contexts, co-constructing meaning rather than passively absorbing it.

Media literacy, according to Potter, comprises several interrelated skills:

1. *Critical engagement*: Analyzing, deconstructing and evaluating media credibility and persuasive strategies.
2. *Logical evaluation*: Distinguishing fact from opinion, and identifying bias and intent.
3. *Active participation*: Creating and sharing original or social media content.
4. *Civic engagement*: Using the different media channels for dialogue, democratic participation and reflection on societal narratives.
5. *Cultural awareness*: Understanding how media reflect or challenge social values and norms (Carlsson & Culver, 2013).

Collectively, these elements position media literacy as a transformative tool that empowers individuals to critique and contribute to the media ecosystem. It promotes informed citizenship and participatory democracy, casting audiences as co-creators of meaning and agents of social change.

### *2.5. The research questions*

This study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are the media usage habits of Egyptian youth?
2. What is the level of awareness among youth regarding media education?
3. How do young people perceive the role of media education in combating misinformation, disinformation and hate speech?
4. What are the types and patterns of media education practices adopted by university youth to counter fake news and hate speech?
5. What is the impact of media education on the selective exposure of youth to information sources?
6. What strategies do youth propose to counter misinformation in the media?

## **3. Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research design, which is particularly suited for exploring perceptions, experiences and in-depth insights into complex social phenomena such as media education and youth engagement. The research relies on two primary qualitative methods: in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

### *3.1. In-depth interviews*

A purposive sample of 12 key informants, including media professionals, educators and academic experts, was selected to provide informed perspectives on the role of media education in combating misinformation, disinformation and hate speech. These participants were chosen for their specialized knowledge and practical experience in the fields of media and education. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via telephone calls, depending on participant availability and logistical considerations. All interviews took place during February and March 2025, and were audio-recorded with the informed consent of the participants. The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim for qualitative analysis.

### *3.2. Focus-group discussions*

To capture the perspectives of university youth, the study conducted 14 focus group discussions with participants aged 18 to 22 years. Each focus group consisted of 8 to 12 participants, drawn purposively from three distinct types of institutions to ensure diversity in experiences and attitudes:

- A public university (Cairo University).
- A private university (Misr International University).
- An international university (The American University in Cairo).

The discussions were conducted either on campus or online via Zoom, depending on the group's preference and accessibility. Each session lasted approximately 45 minutes, and the seating arrangements were adapted (circular or rectangular) to ensure participant comfort and effective communication. A trained moderator facilitated the discussions using a semi-structured guide, encouraging open dialogue while ensuring the conversation remained focused on the study's central themes. This approach aligns with established practices in qualitative inquiry, in which the moderator plays a key role in guiding group dynamics and eliciting a range of views (Tayie, 2017: 204).

### *3.3. Data collection and analysis*

All sessions were audio-recorded with participant consent, then transcribed for thematic analysis. The transcripts were carefully reviewed to identify recurring themes, patterns and significant insights related to media consumption habits, awareness of media education, and strategies used by youth to address digital misinformation and hate speech. A coding framework was developed to support a systematic analysis of the data, ensuring consistency and analytical rigor. This qualitative approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of both expert and youth perspectives on the influence and application of media education in contemporary Egyptian society.

## **4. Findings**

The findings of this study are presented in two parts: first, the findings of the in-depth interviews with expert informants, followed by the findings of the focus group discussions with youth participants.

### *4.1. Findings of in-depth interviews*

Findings from in-depth interviews provide valuable insights into the role of media in shaping beliefs and perceptions, as well as the necessity for media education in addressing the challenges associated with digital media. The responses from the experts highlight several key themes and concerns. Here are the main findings of the interviews:

- *Media influence on behavior, values and lifestyles:* Experts agree that exposure to media content has a significant impact on shaping beliefs, perceptions and even lifestyle choices. This suggests that media play a crucial role in socialization and cultural formation. It's important to stress the need for a balanced media environment, in which diverse perspectives are represented. Educational programs could focus on encouraging individuals to consume media critically, especially content that influences their values and perceptions.



- *Importance of media literacy*: Experts emphasize the importance of integrating media literacy education into educational systems, both in schools and universities, and even in family settings. Most interviewees feel that there should be a national strategy to integrate media literacy education into the curriculum. This could include, according to the interviewees, practical workshops for students and parents on how to analyze, evaluate and interpret media messages. Collaboration with local media outlets and tech companies might help in developing targeted educational content.
- *The role of the family role in media education*: Many interviewees stressed that families should also play an active role in media education, particularly regarding children's use of digital media. Developing awareness programs that target parents is essential. These programs should focus on understanding the potential risks of digital media (such as exposure to harmful content or cyberbullying) and ways to guide children towards safe, productive media usage.
- *Concerns about misinformation and hate speech*: Nearly all experts agree that misinformation, disinformation and hate speech are prevalent in digital media. Media outlets and digital platforms need to invest in training journalists and content creators on how to identify and counteract misinformation. Governments and organizations should support policies that combat hate speech and false information while also ensuring freedom of expression. Bullying, infringing on the freedom of others, or other issues and challenges were among the important issues on digital media.
- *The role of Western media*: Many experts feel that Western media often portrays Arabs and Muslims in a negative light, influenced by political agendas. It was suggested that a nuanced approach to media education should include discussions about media bias, geopolitical influences, and how global narratives shape perceptions. Promoting diverse media voices and offering alternative viewpoints could help in counteracting this bias.
- *The need for digital media literacy to protect identity and privacy*: Experts agreed on the need for digital media literacy, especially for young people, to help preserve personal identity, security and privacy in the digital age. It was also suggested that media literacy programs should specifically address the risks of digital media, such as data privacy breaches, online identity theft and cyberbullying. Teaching people how to protect their digital footprints and privacy is essential in today's media landscape.
- *The role of media organizations*: Some experts (mainly educationalist) suggested that media organizations themselves should play a role in promoting media literacy, critical thinking and combating misinformation. Media outlets should be proactive in disseminating educational content that encourages critical engagement with the different

kinds of media. This could be through public service campaigns, partnerships with educational institutions or social media initiatives focused on promoting media literacy and combating fake news.

- *Media education also includes production*: One expert said, “Media education is not limited to the aspect of receiving only but goes beyond that to conscious and purposeful participation in the production of media content; and media literacy includes critical thinking that enables one to build independent judgments about media content.” Another expert said, “Media education influences our orientation, our opinions, our outlook on different things in life, and our perception of different environments, through knowledge aspects.” For most of the experts interviewed, media education is related to the following issues: ‘How is news content made?’, ‘What is the difference between news content and other types of advertising content?’, ‘What is advertising?’, ‘What is an article?’, ‘What distinguishes a news story from an opinion piece?’, ‘Who owns social media and the overall business model?’. Youth and people in general must acquire the skill to be able to understand the above issues.
- *Suggestions for future action*: The following suggestions were mentioned by the experts interviewed:
  - *Curriculum development*: Collaboration is needed with educators, media professionals and policy makers to design a media literacy curriculum that includes practical lessons on critical thinking, identifying biases and understanding the ethical implications of media content.
  - *Public awareness campaigns*: National awareness campaigns that educate the public about the risks of misinformation, hate speech and media manipulation must be organized. These campaigns should also emphasize the importance of responsible media consumption, particularly in the digital space.
  - *Parent education programs*: There should be programs aimed at educating parents about the digital landscape, including how to monitor and guide their children’s media consumption. This could also include tips on creating a healthy media environment at home.
  - *Incorporating critical media engagement*: Media outlets should actively engage their audience by promoting media literacy in their content. This could be done by offering articles, videos and even interactive content that helps the public critically engage with the information they consume.
  - *Government and policy role*: Governments should support initiatives that promote digital literacy and regulate digital platforms to reduce the spread of misinformation. They should also encourage collaboration between tech companies, media organizations and educational.

To conclude, results of the in-depth interview reveal a growing consensus about the critical need for media literacy education to address the challenges posed by the digital media landscape. Experts are united in their call for integrating media literacy into education systems, empowering families and addressing the negative impacts of misinformation and hate speech. Looking to the future, a comprehensive strategy involving multiple stakeholders – governments, educational institutions, media organizations and families – is necessary to equip individuals with the skills needed to navigate the complexities of the digital age safely and responsibly.

#### *4.2. Findings of focus-group discussions*

Findings of the focus-group discussions were categorized into four main sections: students' patterns of media use; awareness about media education among university students; awareness about misleading information and combating it; and finally, students' suggestions to counter misinformation.

##### *4.2.1. Patterns of media use*

Findings related to patterns of media use have shown the following:

- *Heavy reliance on digital media:* Egyptian youth depend mainly on digital platforms for information, reflecting global trends that these have replaced traditional media. Cairo University students use digital media moderately for family contact, whereas private and international university students use it predominantly for entertainment, revealing socio-economic differences. Traditional media were seldom used; only a few Cairo University females mentioned watching TV series. Convenience and easy access were the main reasons for heavy digital media use.
- *Mobile device dominance:* Students have full access to digital media, with mobile phones being the most used device. Nearly all own smartphones – mainly iPhones – demonstrating the centrality of mobile technology in youth culture. Some private and international university students use multiple numbers for privacy, while Cairo University students, especially women, use one number mainly for family contact. Most subscriptions are funded by parents. Facebook (98%) and WhatsApp are the most popular platforms, with TikTok also widely used. Gender differences were observed, as media use patterns varied by interest and purpose.
- *Gender-based preferences:* Clear gender differences emerged in media use. Girls were more conservative, using media for communication and serious purposes, while boys focused on entertainment and gaming. Girls preferred comedy and entertainment videos on TikTok and YouTube, whereas boys favored games on WhatsApp, TikTok and Instagram.
- *Lack of parental supervision:* Most students (96%) reported no parental involvement in their media use, indicating largely unregulated digital

habits. This raises concerns about unchecked exposure to misinformation and harmful content. Students from private and international universities rarely discussed media with their families, while some Cairo University girls reported doing so, reflecting more traditional, conservative family influence and a socio-economic divide in media oversight.

- *Outdoor activities and media use:* Students engaged in sports or other activities used digital media less than inactive peers. Most students spent significant time in virtual spaces chatting and consuming online content, with friends' recommendations being their main source of digital media choices.

From the above findings we may conclude that the patterns of media use are affected by certain variables which include gender and socio-economic background.

#### 4.2.2. Awareness about media education

Findings relating to awareness about media education include the following:

- *Lack of awareness about media literacy education:* Many students lack awareness about the concept of media education, misinformation and disinformation, which is troubling. Even though some students had been introduced to media literacy in academic contexts, the majority did not grasp its importance or relevance. This highlights the gap in formal education systems regarding digital literacy and critical thinking skills in media consumption.
- *Need for comprehensive media education:* Findings show that most students lack awareness of media literacy and its role in critically assessing digital content. Only those who studied media-related subjects understood its importance. Many were unaware of technology's potential harms or the influence of media on behavior.

These results highlight an urgent need to integrate comprehensive media literacy education into curricula to build critical thinking and combat misinformation.

#### 4.2.3. Awareness about misleading information and dealing with it

When asked about their understanding of misinformation and disinformation, it became clear that most students had limited knowledge of these concepts. Despite this, several respondents expressed greater trust in digital media than in traditional sources, viewing digital platforms as their primary source of information. This reliance on digital media poses a significant risk, as many students admitted difficulty in distinguishing between truthful and misleading content. The discussions highlighted that this confusion stems largely from the overwhelming volume of information available on social net-

working sites. The constant stream of content makes it easier for facts to be distorted or falsified through technology, making the verification of truth more challenging. Only a small number of students reported confidence in their ability to differentiate between real and fake news. These students attributed their skill to:

- Following reliable information sources;
- Aligning information with personal beliefs, cultural norms and religious values; and
- Repeated exposure to the same information from multiple sources.

This finding is supported by Al-Kholi (2023), who noted that many individuals tend to prioritize the content of the information over its source, and that the speed of news transmission often influences perceptions of credibility. On the other hand, students who had taken courses or had prior knowledge in media education were generally more cautious. They reported actively questioning the content they consume on digital platforms. When asked how they verify information, they mentioned:

- Consulting other digital media sources; and
- Discussing it with family members and friends.

In addition, students' perceptions of other nationalities revealed certain biases. Spanish, Greek and Italian people were viewed positively, while the USA and Israel were seen in a negative light. Students attributed this to the ongoing Israeli aggression in Gaza, referencing the abuse of Palestinian human rights in both Gaza and the West Bank. They also criticized the United States' support for Israel, labeling it as backing for the "inhuman aggression and killing of innocent women and children".

#### *4.2.4. Suggestions of students to counter misinformation*

Students emphasized the need for institutional action to curb misinformation, including government enforcement against hate speech and false content. They also highlighted the importance of raising public awareness, particularly among youth, through media education delivered via digital platforms and television using engaging visual tools. Despite limited prior exposure, most agreed that media literacy is vital for developing critical thinking and analytical skills necessary to identify and resist disinformation.

## **5. Conclusion and discussion**

This study outlines the media consumption habits and concerns of Egyptian youth. The digital age provides convenience but also presents challenges such as misinformation and low media literacy. To address this, education systems must incorporate digital literacy and critical thinking into their curricula.

Parents, educators and media organizations should work together to promote responsible media literacy among youth in Egypt.

The findings from the in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions highlight the pressing need for comprehensive media education to address the challenges of the digital media landscape. Experts and students alike agree that media plays a significant role in shaping beliefs, behaviors and perceptions, particularly in the context of digital platforms where misinformation, disinformation and hate speech are pervasive. The importance of integrating media literacy education into educational curricula, both in schools and universities, is strongly emphasized, with a focus on developing critical thinking skills and promoting responsible media consumption.

Families play a crucial role in media education by helping parents understand the risks of digital media and how to guide their children's usage. Parents should encourage open discussions about digital media and should actively engage with their children to balance their virtual and real-world experiences. They can provide alternatives for free time based on their children's interests and guide them in using digital media to develop their talents. Additionally, parents should promote digital literacy to help children navigate the challenges of the digital age.

Moreover, university students often lack awareness of media education, typically only learning its concepts through their curriculum. This highlights the need for public awareness campaigns and broader media literacy programs targeting young people.

The discussions emphasize the need to address digital privacy concerns, ensuring youth have the knowledge to protect their identity and security online. Findings suggest a collaborative approach involving educational institutions, media organizations, families and policymakers to enhance media literacy and promote responsible digital citizenship. Experts recommend introducing a media education course as a university requirement for various disciplines. Additionally, media professionals and influencers should be accountable for misleading information, and media organizations should establish ethics and codes of conduct. Strengthening connections between news organizations and universities is also advised.

Media education is not only a defense project that aims to protect, but also an empowerment project that aims to prepare members of the public to understand and analyze media messages and contents that surround them. It is also about creating an audience who can be producers as well as consumers. Media education skills have become essential skills for individuals of all ages. International organizations, especially UNESCO, have recognized the importance of media education to prepare young people to live in a world of power, image, sound and word (Grizzle, 2016). This indicates that the media as an institution in the society is an influential authority on values, beliefs, attitudes and practices in various aspects, economically, socially and culturally. As a result, the need for media education has become increasingly urgent, as it plays a vital role in developing conscious, responsible and engaged citizens who actively

contribute to national identity. Media education equips individuals with essential skills – such as critical, creative and scientific thinking – that enable them to form independent judgments about media content and its production (Šuminas & Jastramskis, 2020: 232-236). While combating disinformation and hate speech is challenging, especially on social media, raising awareness and encouraging source verification can help limit their spread. Media organizations also have a role to play.

## 6. Future research

Considering the above results, several directions for future research can be suggested to deepen our understanding of media education and its impact. These may include the following:

1. Longitudinal studies on media literacy and behavior change.
2. Impact of parental involvement in media education.
3. Exploring the role of social media platforms in spreading disinformation.
4. Media education across socioeconomic backgrounds.
5. Exploring the effectiveness of media literacy campaigns. Experts suggested national awareness campaigns to promote media literacy. Research could evaluate the effectiveness of such campaigns.
6. Gender differences in media consumption and critical engagement. The present study highlighted gender-based differences in media use patterns; future studies could investigate how these gendered patterns impact media literacy needs and how educational programs can be designed to engage both genders in critical media consumption and combat misinformation.
7. Digital privacy and security awareness. Given the increasing concerns about digital privacy, especially among youth, research could focus on the role of media literacy programs in enhancing awareness about digital security and privacy risks. This could include exploring how students understand and apply concepts of data privacy, identity theft and cyberbullying, and whether they are equipped with the skills to protect themselves online.
8. Assessing the impact of media literacy on attitudes toward media bias.

By addressing these areas, future research can contribute to the development of more effective media literacy strategies, help policymakers and educators refine their approaches, and ultimately promote a more media-savvy, critical, and responsible public in the digital age.



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