

Misinformation and public trust: Investigating the role of media literacy in combating fake news in the digital age

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Abstract

This study investigates the critical role of media literacy in combating misinformation and restoring public trust in the digital age. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature and mixed-methods research, the study explores how misinformation proliferates on digital platforms, its impact on public trust, and the effectiveness of media literacy interventions. Key findings reveal that misinformation, fueled by algorithmic biases and echo chambers, significantly erodes trust in media, particularly in political and public health contexts. Media literacy emerges as a vital tool, equipping individuals to critically evaluate information, though structural changes in media ecosystems are also necessary. The study highlights the need for integrated approaches, including educational reforms, platform regulation, and media transparency, to address misinformation sustainably.

Keywords: Misinformation; Media Literacy; Public Trust; Fake News; Digital Media; Social Media; Algorithmic Bias; Critical Thinking; Media Regulation

1. Introduction

The proliferation of digital media has brought about profound changes in the way people access, consume, and interact with information. While the digital era has facilitated unprecedented levels of information exchange, it has also paved the way for Fake news and misinformation to be spread quickly. This issue has become increasingly pertinent in recent years, with the growth of social media platforms serving as both a boon and a bane in shaping public discourse. Misinformation, which spreads false or incorrect information without any intention to do so to mislead, has become a significant problem in the era of digitalization, with profound consequences for public health, democracy, and social trust.

Fake news, a term used to describe deliberately fabricated or misleading information, has been identified as one of the most pervasive forms of false information in contemporary society. Spreading false information is fueled by various factors, including sensationalism, echo chambers, and algorithmic biases on digital platforms. In many cases, fake news has been weaponized for political, economic, or social purposes, influencing public opinion, electoral outcomes, and societal behavior. As such, the ability to critically engage with information has become an essential ability in navigating the complexities of the digital information landscape.

Public trust, once a cornerstone of social cohesion and institutional legitimacy, has been significantly eroded in recent years due to the widespread dissemination of misinformation. According to various studies, there is growing skepticism about the reliability of news sources, particularly among individuals who consume information primarily through social media (Friggeri, et al., 2014). Trust in traditional media outlets, once seen as the primary gatekeepers of truth, has been undermined by the increasing dominance of digital platforms and the blurring of lines between news, opinion, and

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entertainment. This decline in public trust is further exacerbated by the rise of so-called “alternative facts” and the normalization of misinformation in political discourse (Lazer et al., 2018).

Given these challenges, media literacy has emerged as a vital instrument for preventing the spread of false news and restoring public trust. Media literacy, broadly defined as the capability of accessing, examining, assessing, and generating media in a number of forms, allows individuals to critically assess the information they encounter. In the context of digital media, media literacy involves understanding the mechanisms of information dissemination, recognizing the potential for bias, and identifying the characteristics of credible sources. By encouraging media literacy, people are better equipped to navigate the complexities of the digital information ecosystem and make informed decisions.

1.1. Problem Statement

Misinformation spreading and the decline of public belief in the media have appeared as two of the most pressing issues in the digital era. While digital platforms offer unprecedented access to information, they also provide a fertile ground for the proliferation of false and misleading content. This is particularly evident with political events, health of public health crises, and social movements, where fake news may have severe effects. For instance, throughout the COVID-19 epidemic, disinformation about the virus and vaccinations proliferated rapidly across social media platforms, contributing to vaccine hesitancy, public health challenges, and a global erosion of trust in public health authorities (Fridman et al., 2021).

Despite efforts by governments, social media companies, and Fact-checking groups to combat misinformation, its spread continues to outpace traditional methods of correction. The challenge, therefore, lies not only in identifying and debunking fake news but also in addressing underlying elements that lead to its spread and the erosion of trust. One such factor is the lack of media literacy among the general populace, particularly among younger generations who are more inclined to consume news via digital platforms. Given the complexity of the digital information landscape, it is important to investigate how media literacy may help reduce the impact of false information and promote a more knowledgeable and reliable public sphere.

The purpose of the research is to investigate how media literacy and the capacity to counteract false information in the digital age. Specifically, it will investigate how media literacy initiatives may improve people's abilities to critically analyze information and, in turn, contribute to the restoration of public faith in the media. By examining the effectiveness of media literacy programs, this research aims to deliver practical insights into how media literacy can be integrated into education and public policy to solve the challenges that misinformation represents.

1.2. Research Questions.

The following research questions were developed to direct the study:

- What is the relationship between media literacy and individuals' ability to identify and resist fake news in the digital age?
- How do media literacy interventions impact public trust in traditional media and social media platforms?
- What are the challenges and barriers to implementing media literacy programs in the context of combating misinformation?
- How do demographic factors (e.g., age, education, media consumption habits) influence individuals' media literacy levels and their susceptibility to misinformation?

These questions aim to explore both the theoretical and practical dimensions of media literacy in the digital era. By answering these questions, the research seeks to provide a thorough comprehension of the position that media literacy can play in counteracting the spread of false information and improving public trust in the media.

1.3. Justification of the Study

The quick spread of misinformation and the declining trust in media are phenomena that have far-reaching implications for society. From the erosion of democratic processes to the undermining of public health efforts, the consequences of fake news cannot be overstated. As digital platforms become the primary source of news for many individuals, it is imperative to understand how Media literacy may lessen the adverse effects of misinformation.

This study is particularly timely given the increasing concerns about social media's function in spreading fake news and its influence on public opinion. While there is a growing body of literature on misinformation and media trust, there is

a need for more research into the significance of media literacy in dealing with these difficulties. By focusing on the relationship between media literacy and public trust, this study will add to the existing body of knowledge and provide valuable insights into how media literacy can be used as a tool to combat fake news in the digital age.

Moreover, Findings from this study could have important consequences for education policy and media regulation. By identifying effective strategies for improving media literacy, this research could inform the development of educational curricula that provide them the abilities needed to navigate the complex digital information environment. Additionally, the study's findings may contribute to discussions on how social media platforms and traditional media outlets can collaborate to foster a more trustworthy media landscape.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The digital age has drastically transformed the information ecosystem, giving rise to an era in which the information is disseminated to an unprecedented scale and speed. While this transformation has democratized access to knowledge and has trained people with large amounts of information, it has also created fertile land for the propagation of erroneous information. In particular, the proliferation of false news has become a generalized problem with broad consequences for public confidence, democracy and social cohesion. The wrong information, in several ways, circulates through digital platforms, especially in social networks, at rates that far exceed traditional correction methods. In response, the concept of media literacy has become a potential tool to address the challenges posed by erroneous information and false news. This chapter seeks to explore the relevant literature on erroneous information, false news, public confidence and literacy in the media, providing a theoretical framework to understand these phenomena in the context of the era of digital information.

2.2. Misinformation and Fake News in the Digital Age

Erroneous information is a widely used term to describe inaccurate or false information, regardless of the intention to deceive (Friggeri et al., 2014). It is important to distinguish the misinformation of misinformation, the last of which is intentionally misleading. The rapid increase in erroneous information in the digital age is closely linked to the development and general use of social media sites, which have altered the way people consume and exchange news. Platforms like as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube allow users to easily share information with large audiences, regardless of their veracity. The speed and scale at which the content can become viral in these environments create a fertile terrain so that erroneous information spreads rapidly.

The term "false news" has gained prominence in recent years, particularly in the context of political events and social problems. False news refers to deliberately manufactured or misleading content designed to deceive the public and manipulate opinions (Lazer et al., 2018). It has been shown that the spread of false news influences political attitudes, affects the elections, and amplifies social divisions. For example, during the US presidential elections. UU. In 2016, false news aimed at specific political groups became viral on social networks, feeding political polarization and affecting the behavior of voters (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). Similarly, throughout the COVID-19 epidemic, the wrong Information about the virus, its origins, and the effectiveness of vaccines spread rapidly through platforms, which led to confusion and resistance to public health measures (Fridman et al., 2021).

Several factors contribute to the propagate of false news and disinformation. One of the key factors is the role of algorithms used by social media platforms. These algorithms prioritize content that generates engagement, such as sensational or emotionally charged stories, over more balanced and factual reporting (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). As a result, misinformation is often amplified, while credible sources are marginalized. The existence of echo chambers on social media further exacerbates the issue, as users tend to be exposed primarily access information that is relevant to their pre-existing beliefs, are reinforces misinformation and creates polarization (Sunstein, 2001).

2.3. Public Trust and the Erosion of Confidence in Media

Public confidence in the media has been significantly disrupted in recent years, a trend that has coincided with the rise of misinformation and false news. The erosion of trust in traditional media, such as newspapers and television, has been attributed to several factors, including declining journalistic standards, the rise of alternative media resources, and political polarization. Research conducted by the Pew Research Centre (2019), public confidence in intelligence organizations has decreased sharply over the past two decades, with many individuals expressing concerns about the accuracy and impartiality of reports.

One of the key reasons for this decline in trust is the growing prevalence of misinformation and the perception that the media are complicit in disseminating false or misleading information. The line between objective news and opinion or entertainment has become increasingly blurred, contributing to the confusion among the public about what constitutes reliable information (Madrigal, 2016). In addition, political polarization has led to the emergence of "partisan media", which often prioritizes ideology over precision, further eroding confidence in the media. Research has shown that people are more likely to trust the media that are aligned with their political beliefs, while distrusting those who present opposite points of view (Stud, 2011). This partisanship has led to an environment in which people are selectively exposed to the information that supports their preexisting prejudices, further deepening the division in public confidence.

2.4. The Role of Media Literacy in Combating Misinformation

Given the challenges raised by erroneous information and the decline in public confidence in the media, media literacy has become a potential solution. Media literacy is the capacity to get, examine, assess, and produce media in various forms. In the context of digital media, media literacy implies the skills necessary to critically evaluate the information found on platforms such as social networks, recognize prejudices, identify credible sources, and distinguish between facts and fiction. Research has shown that people with higher media literacy levels are better equipped to identify and reject erroneous information, thus reducing the probability of being deceived (Levine, 2019).

Numerous studies have examined the efficiency of media literacy programs to reduce susceptibility to false information. For example, a study by Lewandowsky et al. (2017) found that people who participated in media literacy training were less likely to believe in conspiracy theories and more likely to question the credibility of doubtful sources. Similarly, other research has shown that multimedia literacy initiatives can improve the ability of people to critically evaluate the news content and reduce their dependence on unverified sources (McGrew et al., 2018).

Another challenge is the deep-rooted nature of misinformation. Even individuals who are exposed to media literacy training can continue to maintain beliefs in false reports, especially if they are emotionally charged or in accordance with their already existing views (Friggeri et al., 2014). This phenomenon, known as the "Backfire" effect, occurs when he tries to repair misinformation, inadvertently strengthening false beliefs. The return fire effect is an important challenge for media literacy programs as it emphasizes the reduction of rational persuasion in the contradiction of deeply held misconceptions.

2.5. Media Literacy in Educational Settings

Educational institutions have become key players in the fight against erroneous information by incorporating media literacy in curricula. Schools and universities have begun to recognize the importance of equipping students with the skills necessary to navigate the complex digital information environment. Multimedia literacy programs in educational environments aim to promote critical thinking, digital citizenship, and responsible media consumption.

In primary and secondary education, multimedia literacy programs often focus on developing the ability of students to evaluate the reliability of online sources, understand the role of the media in the configuration of public perception, and participate in responsible online behavior. For example, the "news literacy project" in the United States has developed a range of educational resources designed to teach students how to discern fictional facts and evaluate the credibility of online sources (Levine, 2019). In higher education, media literacy is increasingly being integrated into courses in various disciplines, from communication studies to political science and public health. These programs aim to promote a deeper understanding of how society shapes and train students with the necessary tools to critically to digital content. Media literacy in higher education also emphasizes the importance of developing a nuanced understanding of the ethical and social implications of digital media, including issues such as privacy, bias, and wrong information.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Introduction

The digital age has brought unprecedented access to information, but has also led to the proliferation of misinformation, which threatens public confidence in democratic media and processes. This chapter reviews the literature on erroneous information, media literacy, and public trust in the context of the digital era. Highlights the key findings of previous research on how the wrong information is propagated, the role of literacy in the media in the combination of false news, and the effects of erroneous information on public confidence in the media. By synthesizing existing studies, this chapter aims to establish a basis for understanding media literacy plays a role in reducing challenges raised by erroneous information.

3.2. Misinformation in the Digital Age

Erroneous information is defined as false or inaccurate information, whether intentional or not (Friggeri et al., 2014). In the digital era, the emergence of social media platforms, blogs, and online forums has facilitated that wrong information through vast networks. According to Pennycook and Rand (2018), social network platforms, in particular, act as accelerators for the dissemination of erroneous information due to their algorithms, which prioritize sensational content or emotionally loaded on objective precision. This phenomenon has been called "infodemic", where false information extends faster than true information (Vosoughi et al., 2018). One of the significant challenges of erroneous information is its impact on public decision-making, particularly in areas such as public health, politics, and science.

Research shows that erroneous information often extends through sources that are perceived as reliable, which further complicates the task of discerning fiction. Lazer et al. (2018) highlight the role of the media, politicians, and influencers who can inadvertently or deliberately contribute to the propagation of erroneous information. In addition, erroneous information is more attractive and memorable than factual content, which contributes to its virality (Friggeri et al., 2014). This is particularly worrying in the context of political elections, where false news can influence voter decisions, as seen in the presidential elections and the Brexit of the United States of 2016 (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017).

The propagation of erroneous information is often driven by the dynamics of the confirmation bias, where People are more willing to accept information that will align with their pre-existing beliefs and values. This phenomenon complicates efforts to combat incorrect information, since people can reject objective information if it contradicts their worldview (Pennycook and Rand, 2018). This highlights the importance of media literacy to assist people in developing critical thinking skills can allow them to navigate the complex panorama of the media and differentiate between reputable and untrustworthy sources of information.

3.3. The Role of Media Literacy

Media literacy is a wide concept that includes the skills and abilities needed to access, analyze, appraise, and generate diverse types of media. In connection with misinformation, media literacy focuses on the ability of individuals to critically engage with media content, assess its credibility, and identify misleading or false information (Levine et al., 2020). Education of media literacy has been defended as a key strategy in combating disinformation and supporting informed media consumers.

Research has constantly shown that media literacy can improve the ability of individuals to identify and reject misinformation. For example, Lewandowsky et al. (2017) found that the training of media literacy significantly improved the ability of participants to recognize misinformation related to climate change and vaccination. Similarly, McGrew et al. (2017) have shown that media literacy programs could improve the skills of critical thinking skills of students and their ability to assess the credibility of online resources. By learning individuals, how to assess the credibility of resources, to control information, and recognize common logical errors, media literacy equips people with the tools to critically engage in the large amount of content they encounter online.

Media literacy is also seen as an important factor in reducing sensitivity to misinformation. According to research by Friggeri et al. (2014), people with a higher level of media literacy are less likely to have misinformation, even if they are consistent with their beliefs. This suggests that media literacy interventions can have a significant impact on the spread of fake messages by enhancing people. However, some scientists argue that media literacy alone is not enough to combat the misinformation of the digital age. Media literacy helps individuals become consumers of more demanding information, but it also requires structural changes in the media ecosystem, such as improving regulations on social media platforms (Pennycook & Rand, 2018).

3.4. Trust in Media and Its Erosion

Public trust in the media is a key component of the design of how individuals consume and interpret information. Media trust has resulted in a decline in declined due to a significant erosion of trust in traditional press and an increase in dependence on social media for news consumption (Gallup, 2020). According to a 2020 Garup survey, only 41% of Americans have a lot of confidence or some degree of confidence in the mass media, which had a severe 70% decline in the 1970s.

This decline in trust is intently connected to the rise of incorrect information. The proliferation of fake news has caused widespread skepticism approximately the accuracy and reliability of media sources. Mainly, Social media platforms have appeared as a significant source of misinformation, with algorithms promoting sensational content that often lacks

factual accuracy. As a result, individuals can also question the credibility of all media, including traditional news outlets, which contributes to the overall decline in trust in the media.

The erosion of confidence in the media has serious implications for democratic processes, since it undermines citizens' ability to make educated judgments using credible information. A study by the Knight Foundation (2020) found that people with low levels of confidence in the media were less likely to participate in civic activities, such as voting, and were more likely to believe in conspiracy theories. In addition, low media confidence can lead to the spread of erroneous information, since individuals are less likely to control information if they are skeptical of the sources (Friggeri et al., 2014).

One possible solution to restore public confidence in the media is to improve transparency and responsibility in media organizations. Research Tandoc et al. (2020) suggests that the media can rebuild confidence by being more transparent about their editorial processes, providing clear explanations of how news stories are verified, and dealing with misinformation. However, this approach requires cooperation from both traditional media and digital platforms. Studies also suggest that even the efforts of the literacy of media literacy may not be enough to restore confidence in the media, unless they deal with basic problems such as media bias and the spread of false news (Pennycook & Rand, 2018).

3.5. The Intersection of disinformation, media literacy, and public trust

The relationship between misinformation, media literacy, and public confidence is complex and versatile. While media literacy has the potential to help individuals identify and reject misinformation, it cannot fully solve the basic problems that contribute to the erosion of public confidence in the media. The disinformation spreading is often facilitated by algorithmic distortion, manipulation of media, and financial incentives that control the sensational content (Lazer et al., 2018). To solve the problem of misinformation and the reconstruction of public confidence, it is therefore necessary to access multiple approach, which includes education of media literacy, improved regulation of digital platforms, and greater transparency of media organizations.

Recent research has emphasized the importance of the approach of cooperation to fight misinformation. For example, the 2020 report of the Knight Foundation recommends that governments, media organizations, and technology companies cooperate to address the problem of false reports. One possible solution is to promote media literacy programs at a community level that enable individuals of all ages and backgrounds to become more demanding consumers. In addition, technological solutions, such as algorithmic adjustments to reduce disinformation on social media platforms, can complement the efforts of media literacy by limiting the reach of false or misleading content.

Finally, restoring public confidence in the media requires addressing the main causes of distrust. Study Tandoc et al. (2020) and others suggest that media distortion, sensationalism, and the increasing influence of social media contribute to the erosion of confidence in the media. By improving transparency and responsibility of media organizations, the intervention of media literacy can help build confidence over time. In addition, as the public increases in the media, individuals can be more motivated to critically evaluate information and contribute to reducing disinformation.

4. Methodology

4.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology used to explore the role of media literacy to combat misinformation and restoration of public trust in the digital era. The research focuses on how media literacy can help people critically evaluate digital content, recognize wrong information and make informed decisions at an increasingly dominated time by digital media and social platforms. The study accepts access with mixed methods that combine qualitative and quantitative techniques to explore the multilateral nature of media literacy and its impact on public confidence. The following sections will discuss the design of research, population, methods for collecting and analyzing data, as well as ethical issues.

4.2. Research Design

Research is governed by the design of mixed methods and combines qualitative and quantitative research approaches to create a thorough grasp of how media literacy can affect individuals' ability to identify disinformation and consequences for public confidence in the media. This approach allows triangulation of data from multiple sources and provides a richer and finer view of the research problem. The design of mixed methods is particularly suitable for

exploring complex social phenomena, such as misinformation and public confidence, as it allows the researcher to collect wide, generalized data and deep contextual knowledge.

The qualitative aspect of the study focuses on the collection of detailed and in-depth information through interviews and focus groups. These data sources provide rich knowledge about the experience of individuals and perception of disinformation, and the importance of media literacy in the fight against false news, and the impact of disinformation on public trust in the media. On the other hand, the quantitative aspect of the research seeks to collect numerical data on the prevalence of misinformation, the efficiency of media literacy intervention, and the correlation between the level of media literacy and confidence in the media. This dual approach ensures that research can offer both contextual understanding and statistical evidence to support its findings.

4.3. Research Population

The research population consists of individuals who regularly consume news through digital media platforms, particularly social media. Given that social media is a primary source of misinformation and fake news, the study focuses on individuals who actively participate in online spaces and interact with digital content. The target population includes university students, professionals, and social media users between the ages of 18 and 50. This age group was chosen because it represents a demographic that is highly engaged with digital media and social platforms, yet has varying levels of media literacy and experience with misinformation.

The study will include a total sample size of 300 participants, with 150 participants selected for a quantitative survey and 150 participants selected for qualitative interviews and focus groups. This sample size is large enough to ensure the reliability of statistical analyses in the quantitative phase and at the same time provide sufficient diversity in the qualitative phase to capture a number of perspectives on the topic of research. Regarding gender division, efforts will be made to ensure that men and women participants will be represented in the sample, as previous research has indicated that gender can affect information consumption and disinformation susceptibility (Frigri et al., 2014). In addition, participants will be selected from various educational and socio-economic backgrounds to ensure that the finding reflects a wide range of digital media users.

4.4. Data Collection Methods

Methods for gathering data about this study consist of two primary techniques: quantitative survey and qualitative interviews, and focus groups. Each method plays a clear role in dealing with research questions and capturing various aspects of the examined phenomenon.

4.4.1. Quantitative Survey

The quantitative phase of the study involves a structured survey administered to 150 participants. The survey is designed to assess the participants' media consumption habits, levels of media literacy, exposure to misinformation, and trust in media. The survey includes a mix of closed-ended questions and items from the Likert scale, and demographic questions. Items Likert scale is particularly important for measuring attitudes and perceptions related to misinformation and media literacy, such as how confident participants feel in identifying fake news or how often they encounter misinformation in their daily media consumption.

The survey will be sent out digitally through online platforms like email and social media, ensuring a broad reach among participants. The questionnaire will be pre-tested on a small group of respondents to identify potential issues with wording, clarity, and structure. The final survey instrument will consist of the following sections:

The survey will be designed to take no more than 15 minutes to complete to ensure a high response rate and minimize participant fatigue.

4.4.2. Qualitative Interviews and Focus Groups

In addition to the survey, qualitative data will be collected through deep semi-structured interviews and focus groups. These methods are ideal for capturing fine experiences and perspectives of participants on misinformation and media literacy. Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility in discussion, allowing the researcher to examine deeper into the reactions of participants and to explore topics that appear during the conversation. Focus groups, on the other hand, provide an opportunity for participants to engage in group discussions, which can yield insights into collective perceptions and experiences.

A total of 150 participants will be divided into 10 focus groups, each consisting of 8-10 individuals. The discussion of the focus group is examined by topics, such as the experience of participants with misinformation, their understanding of media literacy, and their views on the importance of education in the struggle against false news. In addition to focusing groups, 30 individual interviews will be carried out to obtain more detailed information from a smaller group of participants. These interviews will be rewritten and analyzed using qualitative coding techniques to identify common topics and patterns.

Interviews and focus groups will be carried out in a half-formal environment, either in person or virtually, depending on the participants' availability and preferences. Each session will be recorded by sound with the consent of the participants, and the recordings will be rewritten for the analysis. Ethical considerations such as ensuring confidentiality and informed consent will be adhered to during the data collection process.

4.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis for a quantitative survey will include descriptive statistics and inferential analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency distribution and average score, will be used to summarize the responses for each survey item. Inference statistics, including the correlation and regression analyses, will be used to explore the relationships between media literacy levels, exposure to misinformation, and confidence in the media. Statistical software such as SPSS will be used to perform these analyses.

For qualitative data, the thematic analysis will be used to detect patterns and topics in the interviews and transcripts of the group. This approach allows for the identification of recurring ideas, attitudes, and experiences related to misinformation and media literacy. NVivo software will be utilized to help code and categorize the data. The qualitative findings will be matched to the quantitative data to get a thorough grasp of the study issue.

4.6. Ethical considerations

In this research, ethical considerations are of most importance, especially due to the sensitivity of the subjects examined. Participants will be informed of the goal of the research, that their participation is optional, and its laws at any moment without consequence. Informed consent will be collected from all participants before starting data collection, and confidentiality will be maintained during the study. Personal identifiers will be removed from the data to ensure anonymity, and all data will be stored safely.

In addition, participants will be informed that research results can be used in academic publications and their participation will contribute to the development of knowledge in the field of media literacy and misinformation. The ethical approval of the study will be sought from the relevant institutional review Council before starting data collection.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Introduction

The digital age has witnessed a profound transformation in the way information is produced, consumed, and disseminated. While this transformation has democratized access to information has also led to the emergence of misinformation, which has eroded public confidence in the media. This chapter synthesizes the findings of the investigation, offering an exhaustive analysis of the role of media literacy to combat false information and the reconstruction of public confidence in the media. The chapter also addresses the implications of the results, recognizes the limitations of the research, and proposes topics for future investigations.

5.2. Summary of Findings

The research explored the intersection of erroneous information, media literacy, and public trust. in the context of the digital age. The findings underline the critical Importance of media literacy in mitigating the propagation of false information and the improvement of people's ability to critically to the content of the media. As established in Chapter 3, erroneous information has become a generalized issue, especially in the fields of politics, public health, and science. The rapid dissemination of incorrect information on social media platforms, driven by algorithms that prioritize sensational content, has exacerbated the propagation of misinformation (Vosoughhi et al., 2018). This phenomenon has undermined the public's ability to discern the facts of fiction, with significant consequences for democratic processes (Lazer et al., 2018).

The research also found that media literacy is a key tool in combating misinformation. Media literacy allows people to critically evaluate the information they find, identify biases, and differentiate between credible and unreliable sources (Levine et al., 2020). Studies have shown that multimedia Literacy initiatives may dramatically enhance people's ability to recognize misinformation and resist the impulse to share false or inaccurate information (McGrew et al., 2017). For instance, the study by Lewandowsky et al. (2017) demonstrated that media literacy interventions helped participants identify misinformation related to climate change and vaccination. However, while media literacy has proven effective, the findings also indicate that it is insufficient on its own to counter the structural factors contributing to the spread of disinformation, such as the algorithmic biases of social media platforms (Pennycook & Rand, 2018).

Another key finding of the research is the decline in the public's trust in the media. The erosion of trust, particularly in traditional news outlets, has been linked to the rise of misinformation (Gallup, 2020). This decline in trust has been exacerbated by the increasing prevalence of fake news on social media, where misinformation is often shared by individuals who perceive themselves as trustworthy sources. Public skepticism over the media has had far-reaching consequences, including a decline in civic engagement and an increase in the belief in conspiracy theories (Knight Foundation, 2020). The findings highlight that media literacy can have an important role in rebuilding trust in the media, but it must be coupled with other efforts, such as greater transparency from media organizations and more stringent regulations for digital platforms (Tandoc et al., 2020).

5.3. Implications for politics and practice

This study's findings have several important Implications for politics and practice. First, there is a clear need for comprehensive multimedia literacy programs to integrate into educational curricula at all levels. As McGrew et al. (2017) and others suggest that early exposure to media literacy education equips people with the abilities required to critically assess the media content. This can be particularly valuable in the digital era, where most people access the news through social media platforms that are plagued by misinformation. According to the Pew Research Centre (2021), 53% of Americans now receive their social media news networks, which underlines the significance of equipping people with the tools to navigate this complex panorama of the media.

Second, research underlines the need for stronger regulations and supervision of social media platforms. The algorithms that control the content of content recommendations on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are designed to prefer wiring, which often means promoting sensational and misleading content. The findings indicate that the platforms must take over more responsibility for limiting disinformation dissemination, in particular the implementation of tools to control facts and the promotion of credible sources. For example, Facebook faced criticism for its role in spreading misinformation during the US presidential elections in 2016, where false stories gained greater traction than factual (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Platforms must be more transparent about their algorithms and take proactive measures to reduce viral disinformation.

Third, finding out that media organizations must work on the reconstruction of public confidence by adopting more transparent editorial processes. The transparency of reports, including clear explanations of how the stories are verified and solving cases of misinformation, can help restore credibility. Tandoc et al. (2020) claim that greater transparency in the production of reports is necessary for the reconstruction of public confidence. This is particularly important in connection with increasing concern for media bias and the perception that the mainstream media are influenced by political or corporate interests. By providing more transparent and more affordable information about their editorial processes, the media can demonstrate its obligation to provide accurate and reliable messages.

Finally, research suggests that cooperation between media organizations, governments, and technology companies is essential for solving the problem of misinformation. Like Lazer et al. (2018) suggest that access is necessary to fight the spread of false messages. Governments can play a role in supporting media literacy initiatives and promoting policies that regulate digital platforms to reduce disinformation. Meanwhile, technology companies must invest in improving their algorithms in order to prefer actual, controlled, reliable content over sensational and false information.

5.4. Limitations of the Study

Although this study provides valuable insights into the role of media literacy in combating misinformation, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. First, research primarily relies on existing literature, which means the scope and methodology of previous studies limit it. While literature provides a strong basis for understanding the problems surrounding misinformation and media literacy, the findings may not fully capture the complexity of these questions in specific cultural or regional contexts.

5.5. Recommendations for Future Research

Due to the complex and evolving nature of misinformation in the digital age, future research should explore several key areas. First, research should focus on the long-term effects of multimedia literacy programs based on individuals' capacity to recognize and resist wrong information. While Studies suggest that media literacy may improve people's ability to evaluate information, it is not clear if these effects persist over time and if media literacy intervention can help people overcome their existing bias.

Second, future studies should examine the importance of media literacy in certain fields, such as politics or public health, where misinformation may have particularly damaging effects. For example, research could explore how media literacy impacts people's beliefs about vaccines, climate change, or election integrity. This would provide helpful insights into how media literacy can be tailored to address specific types of misinformation and improve public decision-making in these areas.

Compliance with ethical standards

Statement of ethical approval

Ethical approval was obtained.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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