



Navigating the Digital Maze: Analyzing Media Literacy Challenges Among Youth in Lucknow City

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Abstract:

As the digital landscape continues to evolve rapidly, the need for digital media literacy among youth has become increasingly critical. This research paper aims to explore and analyze the media literacy challenges encountered by young individuals and assess their ability to critically navigate the digital information landscape. Employing a quantitative methodology, data collection was conducted through a comprehensive survey method among a diverse sample of youth. The study investigates various dimensions of media literacy, including information credibility assessment, digital media consumption habits, social media influence, and the impact of misinformation on decision-making.

The survey targets a sample of youth across similar age groups and socio-economic backgrounds, with a focus on assessing their ability to critically evaluate digital content, discern misinformation,

and make informed decisions in the online environment. By analyzing the survey data, this research seeks to uncover patterns and trends in youth's digital media consumption habits, their attitudes towards online information, and their knowledge of digital media literacy concepts.

Furthermore, this study investigates the role of educational institutions, parents, and media platforms in shaping the digital media literacy of young individuals. By identifying the key stakeholders and their impact, the research aims to provide insights into effective interventions and educational strategies that can empower youth to navigate the challenges posed by the digital media landscape.

Keywords: Challenges, Digital Era, Digital Media Literacy, Social-Media, Youth

Introduction

Digital media has become an inseparable part of the everyday life of young people. From social media platforms and online news portals to streaming services and instant communication tools,



youth today spend a large part of their day online. This digital engagement brings opportunities for learning, entertainment and self-expression, but it also creates challenges such as misinformation, online risks and the difficulty of evaluating the reliability of information. For students in cities like Lucknow, where access to the internet is widespread, being able to use digital media effectively and responsibly has become a necessary life skill.

The concept of media literacy provides a framework to understand these skills. Media literacy is often described as the ability to access, understand, evaluate and create messages across different forms of media. Livingstone (2004) explains it as the set of skills required to interpret media content critically and to participate effectively in the media environment. Similarly, UNESCO (2013) emphasizes that media literacy is not only about consuming information but also about analyzing and evaluating it in a critical and ethical way. These perspectives highlight that being literate in media is not just about using technology but about developing judgment, awareness and critical thinking in the digital world.

This research aims to analyze how youth in Lucknow are navigating the digital environment, what challenges they face in terms of literacy and how these challenges can be addressed. The study underlines that while access to digital platforms is universal, the ability to critically understand and use them remains uneven. Strengthening media literacy education, therefore, is vital to help youth become responsible and informed digital citizens.

Review of Literature

Previous scholarship emphasizes the growing significance of media literacy in contemporary society. Sachdeva and Tripathi (2019), in their study Critical Education for the 21st Century, stressed the necessity of authenticating the origin and content of media messages to strengthen media literacy in a digital world flooded with information. They highlighted that without such skills, individuals remain vulnerable to misinformation and propaganda.

Similarly, Nandedkar and Kumar (2019) examined the level of media literacy among Indian youth and concluded that media literacy forms the foundation for young people to process, evaluate, and respond effectively to media messages. They argued that the absence of critical media education exposes youth to manipulation, misleading narratives, and superficial understandings of crucial social issues.

Ashley, Maksl, and Craft (2013) contributed to this discourse by developing a news media literacy scale, reinforcing the role of systematic evaluation in distinguishing facts from opinions and propaganda. Their framework highlights the need for structured pedagogical tools to equip young audiences with evaluative skills.

Sarwatay (2021) discusses the evolving landscape of digital citizenship among young people in India. She highlights the importance of developing a culture of digital citizenship that goes beyond basic skills to include critical thinking, ethical behaviour and active participation in the digital world. The study underscores the need for a culture-centered approach to media literacy, considering the local contexts and experiences of youth in India. This approach is particularly



relevant for cities like Lucknow, where cultural nuances play a significant role in shaping digital engagement.

Bhutada and Kumar (2025) examine the digital readiness of rural youth in India based on the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 and 2024. They found that while smartphone access is widespread, significant gaps remain in digital skills among rural youth. This digital divide poses challenges for youth in accessing educational resources, employment opportunities and participating in the digital economy. The authors emphasize the need for targeted interventions to enhance digital literacy and bridge the existing gaps.

Despite these contributions, existing research has not sufficiently examined the specific challenges youth face in acquiring media literacy skills. Moreover, very few studies have concentrated on regional contexts like Lucknow, where urban youth encounter unique media ecosystems. This gap justifies the present study's focus on identifying and analyzing the media literacy challenges of youth in Lucknow city.

Objectives

1. To examine the understanding of media literacy among youth of Lucknow.
2. To analyze the challenges of media literacy faced by youth.
3. To determine the medium(s) through which youth acquire information about media literacy.

Theoretical Framework

To understand the digital media literacy challenges of young people in Lucknow, we need to look at different angles. Digital media literacy is not just about having internet or using apps. It is about knowing how to think carefully about what we see online, how to judge if it is true or false, and how to use it responsibly. This study uses ideas from different theories to explain these challenges: Media Literacy Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Critical Pedagogy, Digital Divide Theory, and Cognitive Information Processing Model.

Media Literacy Theory says that being literate in media means more than just watching or reading, it means being able to analyze and question it. For example, young people in Lucknow watch a lot of YouTube videos, Instagram reels, and get messages on WhatsApp. The question is: do they stop and think about whether the message is reliable or if it has some hidden purpose? This theory helps us see whether youth can detect fake news, propaganda, or advertising tricks.

Uses and Gratifications Theory looks at why people use media. It says that people choose platforms for their own needs like fun, learning, socializing, or escaping stress. For the youth in Lucknow, this may mean chatting with friends on Instagram, watching funny reels, or checking news updates online. But the reason they go online also shapes their risks. For example, if they only want entertainment, they might not check if what they see is true. This theory helps us understand the personal reasons behind their online choices.

Critical Pedagogy brings in the idea of empowerment through education. It says that education should not just teach "how to use" media but should also make people question who made the content, why it was made, and whose interests it serves. In Lucknow, where digital platforms are



full of political messages, advertisements, and even hate speech, it becomes important for young people to think critically. This theory suggests that schools and colleges should not just train students in technical use of apps but should encourage them to discuss, reflect, and become active thinkers about what they consume online.

Digital Divide Theory explains the problem of unequal access. Even though many young people in Lucknow have smartphones, not all of them have the same quality of access. Some may not afford high-speed internet, some may share devices, and girls in some families may not be allowed to use phones freely. Even when access is there, the divide continues in terms of skills. Some youth may use digital tools for learning or job opportunities, while others may only use them for entertainment. This theory reminds us that not everyone starts at the same level when it comes to digital literacy.

Cognitive Information Processing Model explains how people handle too much information online. Since there is so much content, young people often don't fact-check everything. Instead, they trust shortcuts like "this video has many likes so it must be true" or "my friend forwarded this so it must be correct." These shortcuts save time but also make them more likely to believe fake or misleading news. This model shows why misinformation spreads so fast and why young people need training in fact checking and critical thinking.

By bringing all these theories together, we can see the full picture. The digital divide explains the gaps in access, uses and gratifications explain why youth choose certain platforms, media literacy and critical pedagogy explain the importance of critical skills, and the cognitive model explains why information overload is hard to handle. Together, they help us see that digital media literacy challenges are not just about technology but also about education, psychology, and society.

This framework shows that having a phone or internet is not enough. To be truly literate in digital media, youth in Lucknow need critical thinking, equal opportunities, and the ability to handle large amounts of information wisely. This study uses these theories to understand the situation better and to suggest ways to help young people become more aware, responsible, and empowered in their digital lives.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive research design which is appropriate for identifying and analyzing challenges without manipulating variables. A survey method was employed to gather primary data from respondents.

Population & Sample: The target population consisted of youth residing in Lucknow. A purposive sampling method was used to select 116 respondents to ensure representation of diverse educational and socio-economic backgrounds.

Tool of Data Collection: A structured questionnaire containing 11 close-ended and multiple-choice questions was administered to respondents. Questions were designed to assess awareness of media literacy, frequency of media consumption, ability to identify misinformation and challenges in evaluating media content.

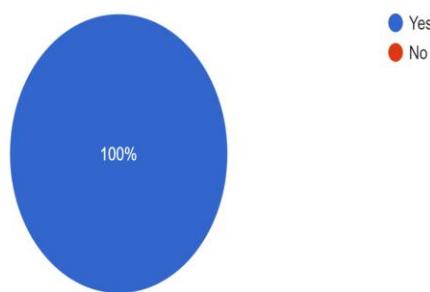


Data Analysis: Collected data were tabulated and analyzed quantitatively to derive percentages and interpret trends. The analysis highlights patterns in respondents' understanding, preferred mediums, and barriers to media literacy.

Findings and Discussion

1. Do you use digital media platforms?

116 responses

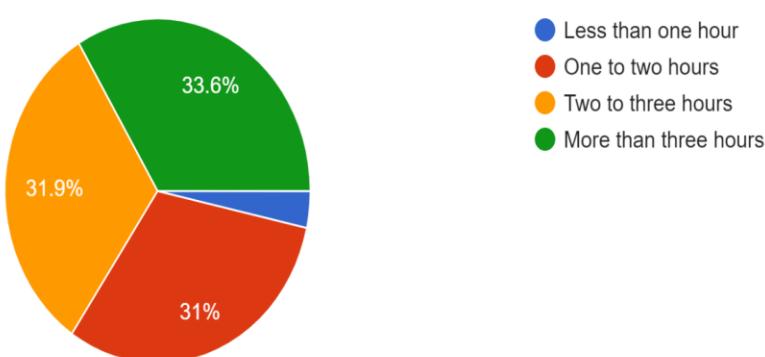


All 116 respondents (100%) reported using digital media platforms while none indicated otherwise. This shows the universal penetration of digital media among youth in Lucknow.

The universality of digital media use indicates that media literacy is no longer a specialized skill for certain groups but a fundamental necessity for all. Since every respondent engages with these platforms, risks such as exposure to misinformation, online manipulation and privacy threats are shared by the entire youth demographic. This suggests that interventions aimed at improving digital literacy will have a broad impact. Additionally, the absence of non-users means that exclusion from digital spaces is not the issue; rather, the challenge lies in navigating these spaces wisely and critically. From a policy perspective, this highlights the urgency of integrating digital literacy into school and college curricula, ensuring that students are not just passive consumers of media but active, critical evaluators of the content they encounter.

2. How much time do you spend on using any digital media platform in a day? (social media, streaming services, online news, etc.).

116 responses



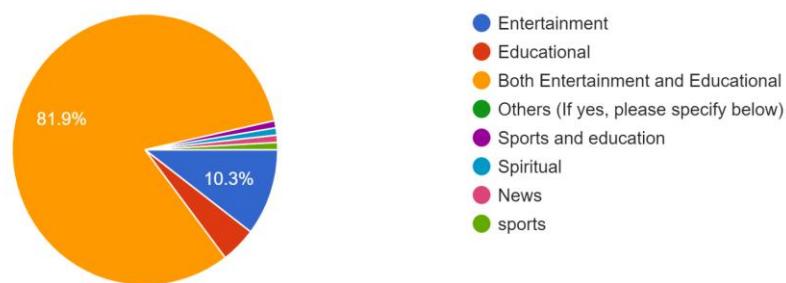


The data shows that 33.6% of respondents spend more than three hours daily on digital media, 31.9% spend two to three hours, and 31% spend one to two hours. Only 3.5% spend less than an hour each day. This distribution indicates that the vast majority (96.5%) devote at least one hour daily to online platforms. The concentration in the mid- to high-range of usage suggests that digital media plays a significant role in the daily schedules of most respondents. Heavy use, with one-third spending more than three hours daily, reflects both the dependence of youth on digital platforms and the centrality of such platforms in their learning, socializing, and entertainment practices.

High levels of daily engagement with digital platforms point to a deep digital immersion among youth. While this presents opportunities for academic enrichment, exposure to diverse perspectives and access to information, it also heightens risks of distraction, overconsumption and misinformation. The fact that one-third spend more than three hours daily could reflect growing dependency, which may affect offline activities such as reading, physical exercise or face-to-face interactions. For educators and policymakers, this indicates a need to address not only the quality of content consumed but also the balance between online and offline life. Time spent online must be coupled with adequate training on media literacy, so that prolonged exposure translates into constructive outcomes rather than passive consumption or exposure to harmful influences.

3. What type of content do you browse more often on digital media platforms?

116 responses



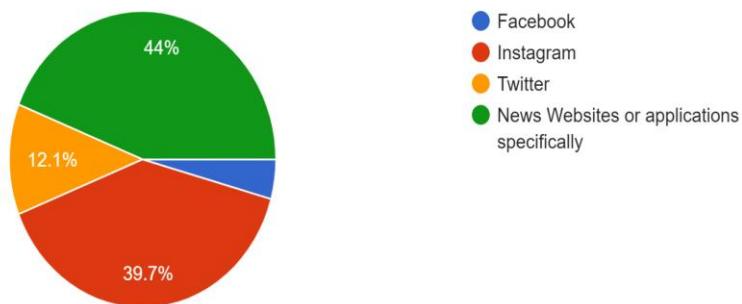
The majority of respondents (81.9%) reported browsing both entertainment and educational content. A smaller proportion, 10.3%, focused exclusively on entertainment, while only 4% focused solely on educational content. The remaining 3.8% consumed other categories, such as sports, news, spirituality, or miscellaneous content. This pattern reflects that most youth prefer a balanced mix of entertainment and education, with entertainment occupying a larger role in content engagement compared to purely educational purposes. The dominance of mixed browsing suggests that students blend leisure and learning when navigating digital platforms. While this dual approach reflects the versatility of digital media, it also indicates the difficulty of separating recreational content from academic content. The low percentage focusing exclusively on educational material may suggest that educational content alone is insufficiently engaging or that students find entertainment a necessary complement.



From a media literacy standpoint, this mix underscores the need for critical filtering skills, ensuring that students can distinguish credible educational resources from entertainment-driven or misleading materials. Encouraging the creation of more engaging educational content could also reduce the imbalance and make learning-oriented browsing more attractive to youth.

4. What is your preferred source of news and information online?

116 responses

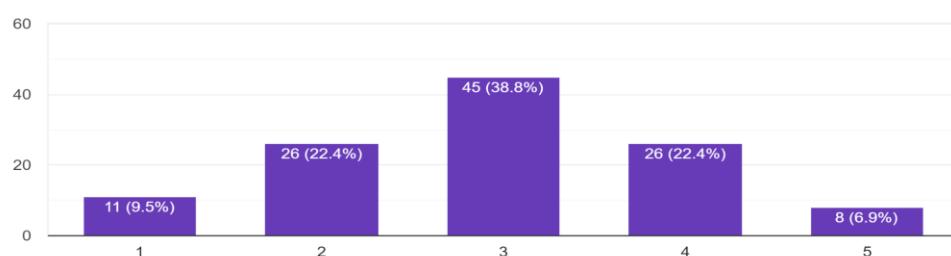


The responses show that 44% prefer news websites or apps, while Instagram is a close second at 39.7%. Twitter is chosen by 12.1% and Facebook by only 4.2%. This distribution reflects the coexistence of traditional digital news sources with newer, socially driven platforms. While news apps maintain a slight lead, Instagram's high percentage demonstrates how strongly social media influences youth's consumption of current affairs.

The findings underscore a generational shift in the consumption of news, where traditional news websites compete directly with social media platforms. Instagram's strong presence as a news source reflects the role of visually driven and easily shareable content in shaping youth perspectives. However, this reliance raises concerns because social media algorithms often promote sensational or unverified information. Media literacy programs must therefore equip students with skills to verify content, question sources and balance information from professional outlets with what circulates on social platforms. The low reliance on Facebook may also indicate generational preferences, as youth increasingly gravitate toward newer platforms.

5. How confident do you feel in your ability to critically evaluate the credibility of online information?

116 responses

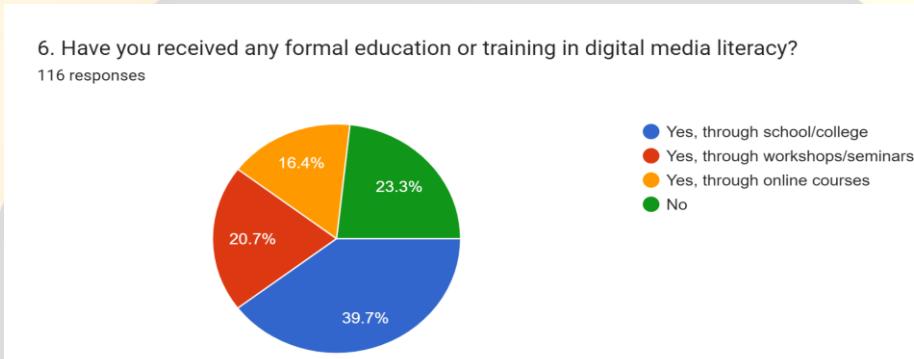


The confidence levels among respondents vary significantly. Only 6.9% rated themselves at the highest level of confidence (5), while 22.4% rated 4 and 38.8% rated 3, reflecting moderate



confidence. Meanwhile, 22.4% rated 2 and 9.5% rated the lowest level (1). This shows that the largest proportion occupy a middle ground, neither fully confident nor completely unconfident, in evaluating credibility.

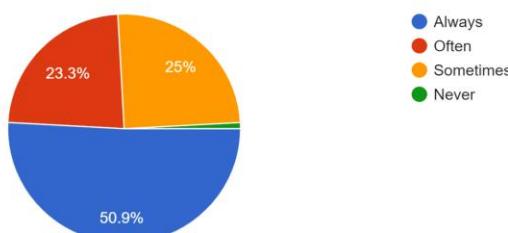
The predominance of moderate confidence highlights a gap between awareness and ability. While students recognize the need to evaluate information critically, many do not feel fully prepared to do so. The relatively low percentage of high-confidence respondents indicates that digital immersion does not automatically translate into strong media literacy. Without systematic education, students remain vulnerable to misinformation despite being aware of its existence. This underlines the importance of structured interventions, such as workshops and curricula designed to build evaluative skills and empower youth to distinguish between credible and unreliable sources.



The data indicates that 39.7% of respondents received training through schools/colleges, 20.7% through workshops/seminars and 16.4% through online courses. However, 23.3% reported having no training at all. This variation reveals a fragmented landscape of media literacy education, with no uniform standard of exposure.

The presence of nearly one-fourth of respondents without any training highlights a significant gap in institutional outreach. Although schools and colleges play the most significant role, their coverage remains incomplete. Workshops and online courses provide supplementary avenues, but these are less accessible or less prioritized. This shows that media literacy education in Lucknow is still inconsistent and mostly depends on what each school or college decides, rather than being a regular part of the system. To address this gap, policy reforms must focus on making digital literacy a mandatory and standardized part of curricula, ensuring that all students, regardless of institution, receive structured guidance.

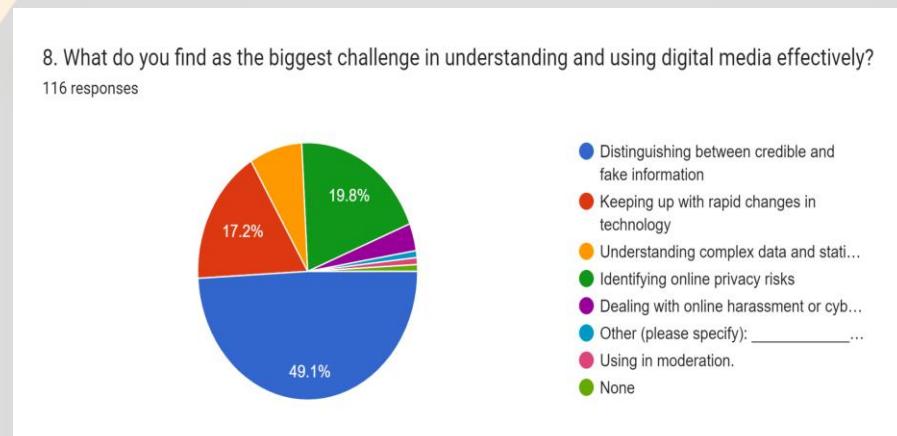
7. How often do you fact-check information before sharing it on social media?
116 responses





The data shows that 50.9% of respondents always fact-check information before sharing, 23.3% often fact-check, 25% sometimes fact-check and only 0.8% never verify information before sharing. The majority therefore demonstrate some level of caution, with half of the participants adopting the strongest verification practice. However, nearly half of respondents fall into categories of partial or inconsistent fact-checking.

These results reflect a mixed picture of responsible digital behaviour. While it is encouraging that more than half of youth habitually check facts, the remaining share demonstrates gaps in consistent verification. Even occasional lapses can contribute to the spread of misinformation, especially on fast-moving platforms where content is shared without much deliberation. The presence of even a small percentage (0.8%) who never fact-check, indicates an ongoing risk of misinformation circulating unchecked. Media literacy education must emphasize the importance of habitual verification, training youth to integrate critical thinking into their everyday digital practices.



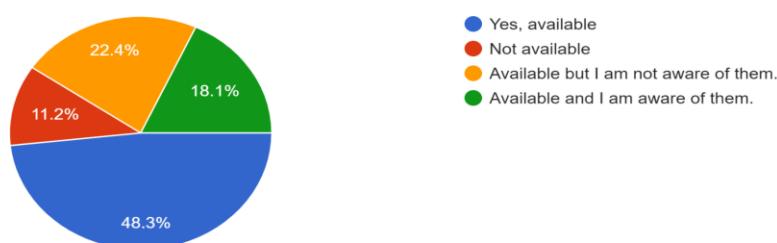
Nearly half of the respondents (49.1%) identified distinguishing between credible and fake information as their biggest challenge. Other issues included identifying online privacy risks (19.8%), keeping up with rapid changes in technology (17.2%), and understanding complex data or statistics (8.4%). Smaller proportions reported challenges such as dealing with online harassment or cyberbullying (3.3%), other issues (1.8%), or none at all (0.4%). This distribution clearly positions misinformation as the most pressing issue faced by youth.

The dominance of misinformation as the primary concern highlights how youth are aware of but still struggle with evaluating credibility in online environments. This finding is particularly significant because it confirms that despite digital fluency, young people lack adequate critical tools for discerning reliability. The presence of privacy and technological adaptation concerns reflects the complexity of the digital environment, where challenges extend beyond fake news to encompass issues of safety and adaptability. However, the relatively low reporting of cyberbullying suggests either underreporting or reduced salience compared to misinformation. This underlines the urgent need for systematic training in evaluating sources and recognizing digital manipulation techniques.



9. Are there adequate resources and tools available to help youth distinguish between trustworthy and unreliable sources of information?

116 responses

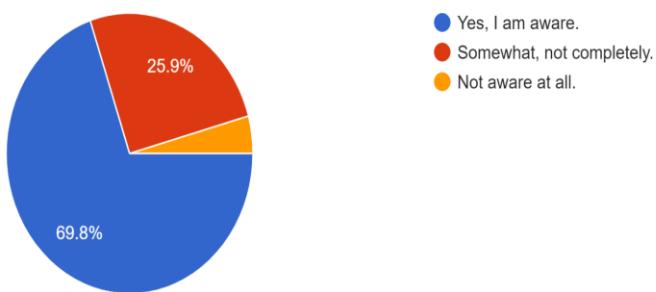


Responses reveal that 48.3% believe resources are available, 22.4% say resources exist but they are unaware of them, 18.1% acknowledge availability and awareness, while 11.2% believe such resources do not exist. The data suggests a paradox that is although resources and tools exist, a large portion of youth either lack awareness of them or do not use them effectively.

This finding highlights a disconnection between availability and accessibility. Even when resources such as fact-checking websites, browser plug-ins and media literacy guides are available, they may remain underutilized due to lack of awareness. This gap shows that creating tools alone is insufficient; outreach, visibility and training are equally critical. The presence of nearly a quarter of respondents who admit unawareness points to the failure of institutions and digital platforms to adequately publicize these tools. For policy and education stakeholders, the key task lies in bridging the knowledge gap and ensuring that resources become integral to digital engagement.

10. Are you aware of the potential consequences of sharing personal information online without verifying its accuracy?

116 responses



The majority of respondents (69.8%) reported full awareness of risks associated with sharing personal information online, 25.9% were somewhat aware and 4.3% reported being unaware. This indicates that while awareness is generally strong, around one-third of youth remain only partially or completely unaware of privacy risks.

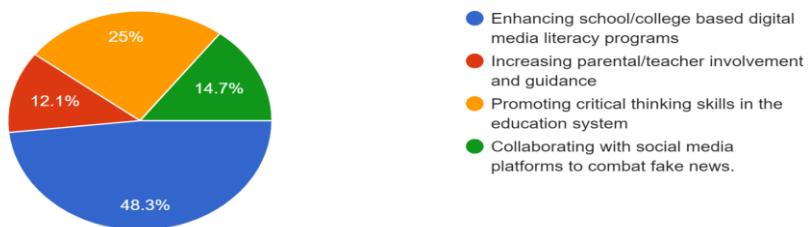
The strong levels of awareness reflect the impact of ongoing discourse around online privacy, digital safety campaigns and lived experiences of online risks. However, the 30% who remain vulnerable pose a significant concern. Partial awareness may lead to risky behaviours such as



oversharing or failing to use privacy settings effectively. This gap points to the need for targeted privacy education making abstract concepts like “data misuse” more concrete and relatable through examples such as phishing scams, identity theft or financial fraud. Strengthening awareness in this area is critical to building resilience against online exploitation.

11. In your opinion, which of the following should be a priority for addressing media literacy challenges among youth?

116 responses



Respondents overwhelmingly favoured enhancing school/college-based media literacy programs (48.3%). Other priorities included promoting critical thinking within the education system (25%), collaboration with social media platforms to combat misinformation (14.6%), and greater parental/teacher involvement (12.1%). This shows that youth place the greatest responsibility on educational institutions in addressing digital literacy challenges.

The emphasis on schools and colleges highlights how strongly youth associate structured education with their ability to navigate digital spaces responsibly. Their recognition of critical thinking as a secondary but important factor suggests that youth understand the long-term value of intellectual independence in combating misinformation. The lower priority assigned to parental or teacher involvement reflects a generational gap, where youth may perceive older generations as less digitally competent. Collaboration with social media platforms is seen as useful but not as critical as institutional reforms. These preferences signal that sustainable solutions lie in integrating media literacy directly into curricula, while complementing this with broader systemic reforms.

The data strongly points to the necessity of institutional intervention, with respondents themselves emphasizing the role of schools and colleges in fostering media literacy. By combining structured educational programs, critical thinking development, awareness of privacy risks and effective use of digital tools, young people can be better prepared to navigate the complexities of the digital environment. Ultimately, this study underlines the importance of moving beyond access to technology toward cultivating informed, critical, and responsible digital citizens.

Conclusion

The study shows that digital media has become an essential part of youth life in Lucknow, with all respondents actively using various platforms for both entertainment and education, increasingly relying on social media for news. Despite universal engagement, the ability to critically navigate online content remains uneven, with moderate confidence in evaluating information, inconsistent fact-checking practices and nearly a quarter lacking formal media



literacy training. The main challenge is distinguishing credible from fake information compounded by limited awareness of privacy risks and fact-checking resources. Youth recognize that solutions lie in structured institutional reforms with many prioritizing school and college-based media literacy programs and the strengthening of critical thinking skills. Overall, while access to digital media is widespread, true empowerment requires equipping youth with the skills to critically analyze and responsibly engage with content, ensuring they become informed, responsible and active digital citizens.

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