

Critical Digital Literacy – An analytical study of news consumers abilities in Delhi/NCR

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Abstract - As digital media has changed the information consumption pattern of audience across the globe, the digital literacy of audience is often questioned about? Digital literacy has an ability to critically evaluate and map online information has become increasingly crucial. The study explores the patterns of digital news consumption of audience in Delhi-National Capital Region (NCR) and the perceived credibility of online news source, it also explores the resistance in spreading suspected misinformation. The paper findings unearth the complex relationship between news consumption habits, the perceived credibility of digital news and the impact of misinformation on trust. The implications of these findings are discussed in the context of digital literacy and the future of trustworthy journalism in the age of digital media.

Keywords - *Digital Media Literacy, Digital Media, Misinformation, Digital News Consumption, Fake News.*

INTRODUCTION

People are now either digitally included or excluded due to the continuous growth of digital technology and services. People who lack digital literacy are more likely to find it difficult to manage the different facets of their lives, which makes them more likely to struggle to engage with, survive, and adapt to, the digital world. (Reddy et al., 2023)

The environment around information access has drastically changed due to the development of communication devices and Internet-based information. In actuality, people's reliance on internet information has grown since the year 2000. (Silvhiany&Huzaifah, 2021). Critical digital literacy has become increasingly important in the digital age, as social media and the internet have taken the place of traditional news and information sources. The ability of news consumers to critically assess, evaluate, and understand digital content in order to discern between reliable and fraudulent information is known as critical digital literacy. With so much information available, most of it potentially skewed, manipulated, or even made up, this ability is becoming more and more important as content creation has become more accessible to the general public.

The Reuters Institute's Digital News Report, which reveals that a sizable segment of the public has difficulty differentiating legitimate sources from false ones, emphasizes the importance of critical digital literacy even further (Newman et al., 2021). Low critical digital literacy has serious repercussions, including the possibility of widespread disinformation and its effects on democracy and social cohesion as digital platforms moderate public debate more and more.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The needs of the consumers to navigate, critically examine, and use the information found on the internet have been significant in the fast-moving digital world. Critical digital literacy moved to center stage in the current digital environment characterized by complex arrays of choice and challenge. On the other hand, developing such skills is all the more important when considering fake news, misinformation, and biased content. In this setting, research has increased over the last four years to understand and improve the consumer capability, outlining big gaps and proposing strategies for improvement in digital literacy.

Recent studies reveal that, despite high levels of internet use, the majority of consumers do not possess basic critical skills necessary for interacting objectively with digital information. For instance, a study in 2020 showed that only 26% of United State adults were able to identify a factual statement from a series of factual and opinion statements presented on the internet (Mitchell et al., 2020). This kind of shortage of critical digital literacy then produces serious problems, as people are far more likely to fall under misinformation that could shape decisions about health, finance, politics, and more.

It also emerges from research that critical digital literacy is distributed very problematically across different demographic groups. For example, one 2021 study pointed out that the younger generation, generally more tech-savvy, does often fumble over questions of credibility pertaining to online sources. This means that being a digital native does not mean a person will be critically literate.

A report by the European Commission dated 2022 revealed that despite older persons using the internet less compared to their younger counterparts in general, they were more vulnerable to online fraud and disinformation due to low digital literacy. The COVID-19 pandemic further put the question of critical digital literacy on the table. With more consumers resorting to online sources for health information, a 2021 study indicated that health-related misinformation grew with dangerous consequences, increasing by leaps and bounds. It was also a time when a number of digital literacy initiatives were targeted toward countering this information; however, effectiveness differed considerably in terms of the target audience and execution strategies.

In summary, the past four years of research have shed light on the critical role of digital literacy in today's information ecosystem. While progress has been made in understanding the challenges and disparities in consumer abilities, there remains a pressing need for more comprehensive and targeted interventions to enhance critical digital literacy across all demographics.

METHODOLOGY

The research employs a mix-methods research design, using quantitative and qualitative approaches. An online survey for more than 50 participants ensuring a diverse representation in terms of age, gender and educational background. The sampling techniques employed is convenience samplings. A subset of 20 participants from the group survey was also interviewed.

OBJECTIVE

- 1: To analyse the pattern of digital news consumption of audience in Delhi/NCR.
- 2: To study the ability of audience to identify fake news/misinformation.
- 3: To examine audience' ability to verify information.
- 4: To study the resistance in sharing suspected information.
- 5: To investigate the credibility factor and its impact on trust.

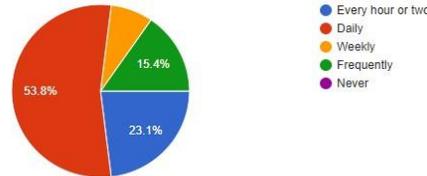
RESULTS & ANALYSIS

To analyze the pattern of digital news consumption of audience in Delhi/NCR.

The survey found out that significant portion of the respondents (76.9%) consume news every two/three hour or daily, suggesting that they are heavily dependent on digital media for staying updated.

How often you consume news online or on digital media?

52 responses



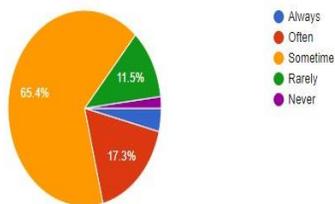
To study the ability of audience to identify fake news/misinformation

The survey suggested a complex relationship between digital media users and digital literacy. The study reveals that audience know that are consuming news that is not hundred percent verified as 42.3 percent of respondent disagreed with the statement that every news on digital media is verified. Further, 65.4 percent reported encountering news that they suspect to be misinformation, with the majority selecting "Sometime" and "Often." While few respondents (5 out of 52) indicated that they rarely or never suspect misinformation. The result reflects that misinformation is a common experience that online consumers are experiencing.

Ability to distinguish between real and fake news: The paper reveals that just 13.5 percent of respondents have confidence to discern real and fake news. While majority of respondents indicated they could only "Sometimes" (21) or "Often" (19) distinguish between real and fake news.

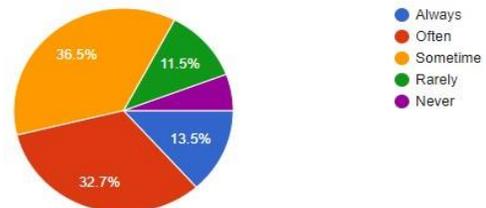
How often do you come across news that you suspect to be misinformation?

52 responses



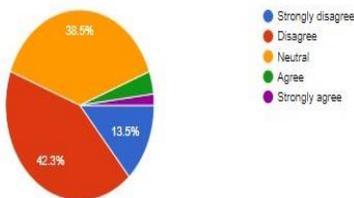
Can you easily distinguish between real news and fake news?

52 responses



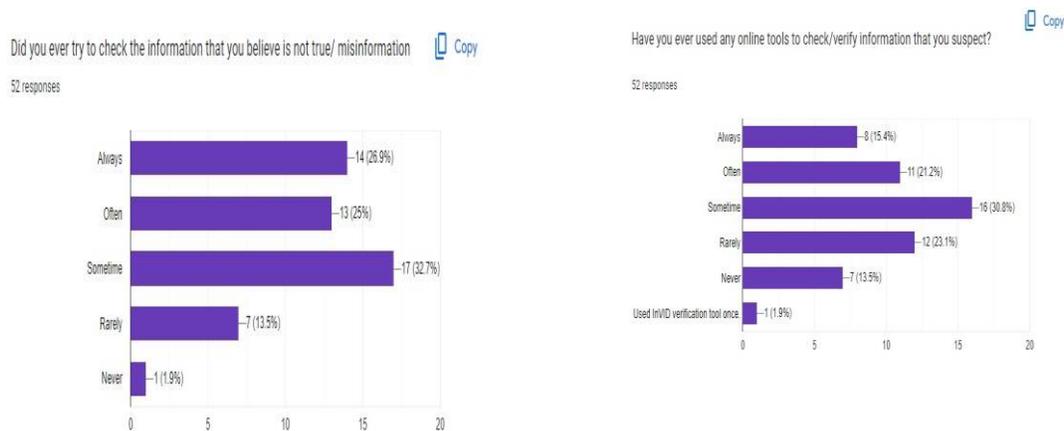
Do you believe that every news on digital media is verified?

52 responses



To examine audience’ ability to verify information

The survey provided brief detailing about the audience's abilities and attitude toward using online tools to verify information and their effort to check suspected misinformation. Just 26.9 percent said that they always try to verify the information they believe is not true or misinformation or can be a fake news too. *The result reflects urgent need of measure to be employed to get people more knowledge of digital literacy.* Few respondents showed proactive approach using online tools and regularly fact-checking many exhibited occasional and minimal approach. The survey revealed that tough growing number of people are using tools for verification (15.4%), a significant portion of respondents (36.6%) said that they ‘never’ or very ‘rare’ used tools to verify information, suggesting a need for increased awareness and digital literacy tools to cross check the suspected information. *This indicates a need for further promoting the use of verification tools and educating the public on the importance of consistently checking information, especially in the age of misinformation. There is an opportunity to raise awareness and improve digital literacy to ensure more individuals can identify and address false or misleading content effectively.*



To study the resistance in sharing suspected information

The survey revealed that while a majority of participants exhibit strong resistance to sharing suspected misinformation. There remains a thin portion who share content with less caution. The could be concluded that need for improving digital literacy and promoting responsible information sharing practices to minimize the spread of misinformation. **Sharing News Without Verifying Authenticity:** A sizable portion of respondents 25% admitted to sharing news articles "Sometime" without verifying their authenticity. This reflects a tendency to occasionally overlook verification, possibly due to convenience or a lack of time. While, significant 34.6% reported they "Never" share news without verification, *indicating a conscientious approach to information sharing.* A smaller group (4 out of 52) mentioned they "Often" or "Always" share news without verifying, demonstrating a lack of resistance to potentially spreading misinformation.

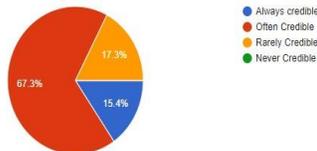


To investigate the credibility factor of digital media

The survey indicates that while most respondents find digital news to be credible, misinformation significantly affects trust in online media. A strong majority acknowledge misinformation as a serious issue, with many actively flagging or reporting misleading content. A majority of respondents (33 out of 52) either "Agree" or "Strongly agree" that online media are reliable sources for current events. *This directs to a prevailing belief that digital platforms provide useful and accurate information.* **Impact of Misinformation on Trust:** A large proportion of respondents (39 out of 52) reported that encountering misinformation online "Often" or "Always" affects their trust in digital news sources. *This underscores the significant role that misinformation plays in eroding trust.* A vast majority (43 out of 52) "Agree" or "Strongly agree" that misinformation is a serious issue in digital media. This reflects a widespread acknowledgment of the threat that misinformation poses to the credibility of news on online platforms. **Reporting Fake or Misleading News:** A notable number of respondents (33 out of 52) said they "Often," "Always," or "Sometime" report or flag news they suspect to be fake or misleading. This indicates a strong engagement in countering misinformation when encountered. While a smaller segment (9 out of 52) indicated they "Never" report fake news, *pointing to a more passive approach to dealing with misinformation.*

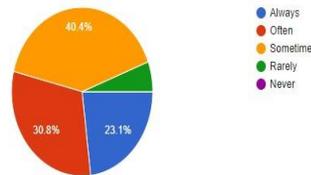
How credible do you find news articles shared on online media?

52 responses



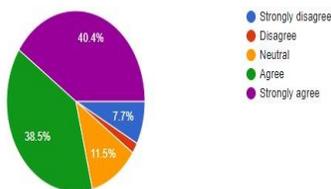
Does encountering misinformation online affect your trust in digital news sources?

52 responses



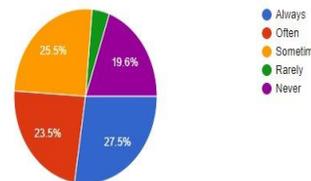
I believe misinformation is a serious problem in digital news media

52 responses



Do you report or flag news articles that you suspect to be fake or misleading?

51 responses



FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study will contribute to a better understanding of the critical digital literacy skills necessary for identifying fake news and misinformation. It will provide insights into the effectiveness of current educational approaches and offer recommendations for improving digital literacy education. Ultimately, the study aims to empower news consumers to navigate the digital information landscape more effectively and make informed decisions based on credible information. On the basis of conclusion, it has been observed that digital literacy has become one of the most important element in today's life.

Organizations, and government must come forward to conduct training sessions and must employ methods to spread programmes of digital literacy so that people must remain digital literate and must refrain from falling in pits of misinformation and fake news.

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