Media Literacy and Forces of Change: Perspectives from the Arab World

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Abstract:

This study focuses on gaining an understanding of how media literacy is conceptualized and operationalized in Arab countries, as a non-western perspective of the concept and practice of media literacy.

Media literacy, as an essential concept relevant to dealing with the mass media, was developed in Western countries at a time when legacy media prevailed. Hence, gaining an understanding of how the concept is currently perceived locally in different Arab countries including Egypt, as well as how it is practiced, is an important endeavor. The study aims to glean whether media literacy has developed and whether its conceptualization and practice have caught up with the mandates of the technological advances, and the requirements of sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Through semi-structured, in-depth interviews (IDIs), the study aims to unravel the meaning of media literacy from the perspective of Egyptian media professionals, who currently work in the media and communication field. Additionally, a content analysis is conducted on media literacy Facebook pages that originated in Arab countries, and developed with an intentional focus on media literacy. The insights from media professionals, coupled with the analysis of the latent meanings of media literacy on Facebook will provide an understanding of how media literacy is perceived and whether it responds to the two forces of change: technological advancements and the sustainable development goals.

التربيه الإعلامية وقوى التغيير: وجهات نظر من العالم العربي

الملخص:

تركز هذه الدراسة على اكتساب فهم لكيفية تصور التربيه الإعلامية وتفعيلها في الدول العربية، باعتبارها منظورًا غير غربي لمفهوم محو الأمية الإعلامية وممارسة الثقافة الإعلامية.

لقد تطورت التربية الإعلامية، كمفهوم أساسي ذي صلة بالتعامل مع وسائل الإعلام، في الدول الغربية وفي وقت سادت فيه وسائل الإعلام التقليدية. وبالتالي، فإن اكتساب فهم لكيفية إدراك المفهوم الحاليَّ محليًا في مختلف الدول العربية بما في ذلك مصر، وكذلك كيفية ممارسته، يعد مسعى مهمًا. تهدف الدراسة إلى معرفة ما إذا كانت التربية الإعلامية قد تطورت وما إذا كان مفهومها وممارستها قد لحقا بمتطلبات التقدم التكنولوجي ومتطلبات الاستدامة وأهداف التنمية المستدامة.

من خلال المقابلات شبه المنظمة والمتعمقة، تهدف الدراسة إلى كشف معنى التربيه الإعلامية من منظور المهنيين الإعلاميين المصريين، الذين يعملون حاليًا في مجال الإعلام والاتصال. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يتم إجراء تحليل للمحتوى على صفحات الفيسبوك الخاصة بمحو الأمية الإعلامية والتي نشأت في الدول العربية، وتم تطويرها مع التركيز المتعمد على محو الأمية الإعلامية. إن الرؤى من المتخصصين في مجال الإعلام، إلى جانب تحليل المعاني الكامنة لمحو الأمية الإعلامية على الفيسبوك، سوف توفر فهمًا لكيفية إدراك محو الأمية الإعلامية وما إذا كانت تستجيب لقوتين للتغيير: التقدم التكنولوجي وأهداف التنمية المستدامة.

Introduction

The study focuses on understanding how media literacy is conceptualized and practiced in a number of Arab countries, as a non-western perspective of the concept and its practice. It focuses on analyzing a sample of social networking sites (SNS) that are dedicated to promoting and disseminating media and information literacy in different Arab countries, and interviewing a sample of media professionals working in the communication field in Egypt. Through semi-structured, in-depth interviews (IDIs), the study aims to unravel the meaning of media literacy from the perspective of Egyptian media professionals working in the communication field and whether this corresponds to the skills required due to the new technological advancements, and the actions required due to the emergence of major sustainability issues and the SDGs. The findings of the interviews, coupled with the content analysis of media literacy Facebook pages in Arab countries, will reveal how the concept and practice of media literacy are perceived, especially in relation to these two issues, by a sample of Arab communicators.

Hence, this study contributes to our understanding of the perception of media literacy in Arab countries and the efforts exerted to enhance awareness of this concept and its application. This includes the perspectives of Arab media literacy scholars through the literature, the viewpoints of Egyptian media professionals through IDIs, and the content of Facebook pages dedicated to media literacy originating from Arab countries.

Importance of the Study:

Media literacy can be described as a field of study that propagates the idea of creating an enabled audience – an audience knowledgeable about the world, the media, and able to distinguish between real and fake reported news, incidents and stories. Critical thinking, source verification, and other skills are becoming more and more essential to enable an audience; as technology advances and media develops. The skills needed by an enabled audience today are more diverse and quite different from the skills that were needed for an audience to become enabled decades ago.

Moreover, as the world plunges into major environmental and sustainability challenges, the need for actions to conserve the environment, address climate change and global warming, among other actions required to achieve the sustainable development goals are increasingly being called for. Media literacy concepts and ideas should be able to delve into these calls for action and play the important role of alerting the audience, raising their awareness and prompting their actions towards global challenges.

Therefore, media literacy is not only essential, but should continuously develop as a concept and practice to remain functional in today's fast paced world and the ever-changing media scene. Most Arab countries have welcomed the idea of media literacy and started adopting its practices many years ago. The importance of this study is its focus on unraveling where do Arab media literacy efforts stand in terms of the current challenges pertaining to the emergent technologically mediated communication scene and sustainability challenges.

Taking a two-pronged approach to get a holistic perspective: analyzing the content of media literacy Facebook pages in Arab countries, and conducting in depth interviews with media professionals in Egypt, the findings of this study will reveal what are the current concepts and practices of media literacy from an Arab perspective.

Objectives of the study:

This study aims at exploring how media literacy in Arab countries is responding to the forces of technological and sustainability challenges, from the perspective of a group of Arab communicators.

The study objectives are:

• To gain insight into how media literacy is perceived as a concept and as a practice by communicators in Arab countries

• Determine how media literacy in Arab countries addresses the challenges of new media technologies

• Determine how media literacy in Arab countries addresses sustainability challenges

• Understand the perception of media literacy education from the viewpoint of media professionals in Arab countries.

Research Questions:

This research is guided by the research question: How is media literacy perceived and propagated by Arab communication professionals? The research question is broken down into the following sub-research questions:

• What are the main topics, themes and ideas perceived as intrinsic to media literacy by Arab communication professionals?

• How do media professionals perceive media literacy education?

• What are the messages propagated through media literacy Facebook pages in Arab countries?

• Do these messages address technological challenges like fake news, for example?

• Do these messages address sustainability challenges like climate change, for example?

Research Methodology and Design:
In order to reach the study objectives, a qualitative approach is adopted and two purposive samples are selected. Purposive sampling is used when an in depth understanding of a phenomenon is sought (Patton, 2014). The study comprises two research components: semi-structured, in-depth interviews (IDIs) with a sample of media professionals in Egypt, and a qualitative content analysis of media literacy Facebook pages in Arab countries.

Research Design:
This primary research study seeks to explore the concept of media literacy in Arab countries from the perspective of Arab media professionals. The main premise is to reach an understanding of how media literacy is perceived through those working in the field of media and / or media literacy in Arab countries. Coupled with the review of studies and literature about media literacy in Arab countries, a holistic view of the media literacy field will be depicted.

The study is designed to answer the research question: How is media literacy perceived and propagated by Arab communication professionals? A qualitative approach was adopted, comprising in-depth interviews and qualitative content analysis. The semi-structured, in-depth interviews were utilized to glean the perspective of the media professionals, and the content analysis was used to analyze the content of the accessible media literacy Facebook pages.

The two research components probe into whether the technological and sustainability changes occurring in the world have affected the field of media literacy in Arab countries. The totality of data collected in the two research components reflect an Arab perspective of media literacy. To reach this goal, a sampling strategy that suits this purpose is employed.

Sampling strategy:
Two purposive samples were selected to achieve the goals of this study. The first sample comprises media professionals working in the communication field in Egypt, and the second is a sample of accessible Facebook pages originating from Arab countries, purposively selected from the range of pages focusing on media literacy.

Sample selection criteria: The criteria for inclusion in the two samples of this study are defined in relation to the purpose of the study. The sample selection criteria for media professionals are media professionals, who are

currently working in the media and communication field, and have been working in the field for at least seven years.

The main criteria for selection of the sample of Facebook pages are that the Facebook page originates from an Arab country, its content focuses mainly on media literacy or information literacy, and uses the English or Arabic language. Other criteria include a reasonable number of followers (not less than 500), and has recent and current posts. Six pages from six different Arab countries were selected.

Sample characteristics: A purposive sample is selected to conduct 40 IDIs with media professionals, 20 males and 20 females. All participants included in the sample work in the communication field in Egypt, mainly Cairo. The positions included editors in chief, editors, journalists, reporters and content writers.

The sample of Facebook pages comprised ones originating from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morrocco, Palestine, and Yemen. The earliest launch date among these pages is 2014 in Lebanon and the latest launch in Yemen in 2021. The number of followers ranges from 588 to 3500 followers.

Research Instruments & Data Collection: Semi-structured, in-depth interview guides were developed by the researcher for the study. Individual in-depth interview lasted from 40 to 60 mins each. Data was transcribed during and after the IDIs, and data analysis was done manually.

Sampling and Coding: FB pages

To conduct the qualitative content analysis, the sampling frame included all posts since the launch of the pages till end of October, 2023 to achieve saturation. Since the different pages had different launch dates, there were different time frames for each page. However, this resulted in very limited oversampling since the intensity of posts in each page is inconsistent over the years. Moreover, since the purpose of the analysis is not comparative, even if oversampling occurs, it does not distort or bias the results. Search terms used to reach the sample included the following in English and Arabic:

- media literacy, media education, information literacy, media and information literacy
- media literacy / information literacy in Arab countries / world,
- media literacy / information literacy in / (name of each Arab country)

The search yielded a total of 33 FB pages, of which some were not operational, some were private, some were for members of certain media courses, and some were disregarded as they included irrelevant content to the name of the page and to media literacy. Thus, the final sample comprised six pages that met the sample selection criteria, which are: that the page is easily

identifiable as a media literacy page, active and had at least 500 followers, demonstrated frequent posts over the duration of its operation, and uses the Arabic or English language. Five of these pages used Arabic and only one used English.

Unit of Analysis: Each post posted by the administrators of the FB page is the unit of analysis. The decision not to include the comments posted by the audience as a unit of analysis is due to two reasons. The first is that the purpose of the study is to analyze the perspective of the communicators, which is reflected mainly in the content of posts by administrators. The second is that the comments posted by the audience were scarce and would not have allowed for a meaningful analysis.

Theoretical Framework: Inoculation Theory

This study uses the inoculation theory as a theoretical framework. The researcher views this theory as providing guiding principles to the practice of media literacy and how it can help the audience understand and deal with media messages.

Analogous to medicine, the inoculation theory of communication posits that people can be provided with information in a proactive manner to enable them to detect the misinformation and resist it (McGuire, 1964). This information inoculation works the same way an immunization against a virus would, but works on the attitudes and beliefs of the individuals (Banas & Rains, 2010; Compton, 2013). The steps that should be taken to inoculate the audience and enhance their ability to deal with conflicting media messages are: familiarizing the audience with the threat of misinformation, then providing them with examples of the threat or misinformation they may encounter (Schubatzky & Haagen-Schützenhöfer, 2023). This results in equipping the audience with ways to detect misinformation due to practice.

Refutational pretreatment and supportive pretreatment are methods to enhance the ability of the audience to resist persuasion with misinformation. Refutational pretreatment is an inoculation method that entails providing two-sided messages reflecting the two sides of an argument, so resistance to misinformation would be formed from understanding all sides of the topic. Supportive pretreatment works through providing plenty of correct and accurate information about a topic to bolster the individual's resistance to misinformation (McGuire, 1964; Compton, 2013).

The theory postulates that intelligence does not protect an individual from susceptibility to persuasion, neither does any kind of education. The only way to resist persuasion with misinformation is through training – training

developed specifically to strengthen the individual's ability to resist persuasion (McGuire, 1964).

Given the technological advances in the communication field and the emergence of social media, the question of whether the inoculation theory has an effect on countering false information on social and online media is pertinent. To detect whether the inoculation theory works in a social and online media environment, seven studies were conducted on a total 30,000 participants in the US. The findings demonstrate that watching short inoculation videos enhances the ability of the participants to detect misinformation disseminated online and the manipulative techniques used to develop misinformation. The studies have some limitations, however, which include the duration of the inoculation effect as the findings were drawn within 24 hours from watching the inoculation videos (Roozenbeek et al, 2022).

Other studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of media literacy interventions in inoculating the audience against misinformation. A study conducted on US and Indian audience revealed that media literacy interventions can increase the ability of the audience to detect inaccurate news content (Guess et al., 2020). Another study provided empirical evidence of the effect of inoculation interventions through social media. The study demonstrated the effectiveness of applying the inoculation theory in curbing the perceived accuracy of misinformation related to COVID-19 through randomized control trials (Ma et al, 2023).

Review of literature:

Definitions of Media literacy:

Early definitions of media literacy generally underscore accessibility to media, the ability to evaluate and assess the information received through media, and the ability to express one's point of view through creating and producing media content (Erstad and Gilje, 2008). In particular, one of the most widely quoted definitions in the literature provides what can be described as a bird's eye view of media literacy, defining media literacy as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a variety of forms (Aufderheide, 1993). More recently, the definition has expanded to include a number of practices and approaches to media literacy like the ability to use the new media, the ability to teach with technology, the ability to produce through multimedia composition, and the ability to teach about information literacy, media literacy, social responsibility and internet safety (Hobbs, 2014).

Research studies reveal that media literacy has multiple definitions, purposes and aims (Livingstone, 2003; Potter, 2010; Potter, 2022). The skills-based definitions relate to the skills needed to be acquired for an individual to become media literate. However, as media converges and technologies advance, media literacy takes on a whole new different meaning (Livingstone, 2003). The meaning can also change according to local contexts, when taking social, cultural, economic and other local factors into consideration (Chainan, 2022). Even in the same context, the media does not work in isolation of other entities in society (Nagaraj & Kundu, 2013). Thus, the meaning of media literacy and all relevant concepts and terms are quite versatile, dependent on other factors in society, and sensitive to different local contexts.

Media literacy and technological advancements:

The concepts related to media and information literacy emerged in an era of traditional communication where the process of communication involved senders and receivers on either side of the communication process. The evolution of communication technologies and the advent of the convergence culture of media and communication necessitated a reclassification and updated understanding of ideas and concepts related to media and information literacy.

It is postulated that the ideas relevant to media literacy have been developed ever since. Most notable is the emergence of media-related new phenomena like disinformation, misinformation, fake new, and AI generated content like deep fake videos and images, voice cloning, and text-generation programs, among others that demand the attention of media literacy scholars and practitioners.

Disinformation and Fake news: Research studies confirmed that audiences need to enhance their cognitive abilities to properly navigate the information presented by the media in the disinformation age (Kumar & Husain, 2019). Hence, the idea that media literacy enhances the ability of the audience to identify fake news is a prevalent expectation. In an effort to address the question whether media literacy can help counter fake news, an empirical study revealed that information literacy is the only kind of literacy that enhances the likelihood of the audience's ability to detect fake news; not media, news, or digital literacies (Jones-Jang et al, 2021). Meanwhile, results from a study conducted in Ghana demonstrated that media and information literacy enhance the ability of individuals to discern and evaluate the messages received, and decreased the sharing of fake news (Dame Adjin-Tettey, 2022).

European countries consider disinformation a real problem that needs to be addressed. A literature and legislative review conducted to evaluate the importance accorded to media literacy by the European Union to tackle misinformation confirmed the importance and need for extensive focus on media literacy as an essential measure to address and combat disinformation in the European Union. The study resulted in the consolidation of a model to combat disinformation which includes solutions like including media literacy education in both the formal and informal education activities, as well as fighting and correcting improper professional practices in cooperation with the media (Sádaba and Salaverría, 2023). Another research study conducted in Europe focuses on international initiatives in digital literacy, with a specific focus on six European countries (Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, and United Kingdom). The study seeks to describe the European initiatives, share good practices and promote pertinent ideas. The findings of the study pointed to the necessity of defining digital literacy in national curricula and showed that digital literacy is an intention in European countries in order to address the challenges posed by digital media (Couto et al, 2018).

Media Literacy and the SDGs:

Studies on the role that media literacy can play in sustainable development is quite scarce, and is more pronounced in research originating from less developed countries. A study from India underscores the role that media literacy can play in women empowerment. It expresses how the roles that women play underlie many of the desired development goals like promoting literacy, addressing the increasing population numbers, etc. However, the media is not close to women in India and are not effectively addressing women to assume their role in development and alerting them that they are a powerful force that can drive social change (Tamuli & Mishra, 2022).

A study in Indonesia was conducted on Indonesian women working in oil palm plantations to assess the importance of possessing information and communication technology (ICT) skills. The findings showed that these skills enabled the women to participate in the process of development, and revealed that media literacy, particularly the ability to use the smartphone are critical in women's inclusion and effective participation in the process of sustainable development in the village (Mazdalifah et al, 2024).

Media Literacy and Media Education: Global Perspectives

The importance of media literacy and media education is pronounced globally to serve a variety of purposes. A number of studies are mentioned in this section to provide a cursory indication of the range of purposes served through media literacy and media education.

A study conducted in Spain, proposes a critical assessment of the challenges that teachers are facing in media education. This is based on the momentum posed by teachers and researchers about the need to develop a critical and creative media learning system (Marta-Lazo, & Pérez, 2012).

In Asia, a study of media education in five Asian countries (China, India, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea) revealed that the curricula lack media information and instructional practices, media research and education; despite the fact that media related practices constitute a continuously developing part in curricula (Dhiman, 2021).

In Pakistan, results of a survey study conducted to assess the situation of media and information literacy education in universities in Pakistan show that MIL courses are offered and available in both public and private universities, but the competencies of the teachers need to be enhanced for effectiveness. Faculty members surveyed recommend that policies are set, curriculum is prepared, and teachers get trained in order to make improvements in MIL education in Higher Education institutions in Pakistan. The study further recommends a collaborative approach among stakeholders to promote and improve MIL in Pakistan (Jamil et al, 2022).

Meanwhile, a study that investigated the content of public-school curricula in Pakistan revealed that the MIL content is insufficient and ineffective, and that policymakers and educators should collaborate to develop policies and curricula that propagate MIL and integrate it in Pakistani public schools (Naseer, Bibi & Aziz, 2023).

Media Literacy Perspectives from Arab countries:

Media literacy takes on a range of different meanings in the literature of Arab scholars. A discussion of definitions and descriptions reveals the multiplicity of the functions that are attributed to media literacy, and hence, the faith that the media can still contribute to a better future in Arab countries. However, it can be clearly noted that Arab countries are generally lagging behind in terms of the attention, resources, and prioritizing accorded to media literacy and the relevant education programs, despite early scholarly attention to the issues necessitating media literacy and the emphasis on its importance (Saleh, 2007; Al Fadil, 2007).

Other scholars contend that media literacy is not dealt with as a priority in Arab countries, and that it comes at the tail end of a long list of media related priorities despite of its importance, when viewed from a context specific perspective. Ibrahim Saleh (2007, 2011) considers media literacy not only a means to promoting civic engagement, but to preserving the Arab identity, enhancing civil society, and contributing to social change and development.

He extends the aim and purpose of media literacy to include the necessity of challenging some of the prevalent taboo issues that impede healthy development and mutual understanding, such as providing a safe space to discuss reproductive health issues and break the persistent taboos linked with the term. Another example is that media literacy can play a role to disentangle the ambiguities related to vague terms used by media to describe political unrest, women, Islam, ancient history, and religion in order to help people cope with stereotypes, preconceptions and general lack of understanding (Saleh, 2007).

Another perspective considers not only coping, but combating stereotypes and promoting intercultural understanding as the main objective of media literacy activities. Focusing on critical thinking as a necessary media literacy skill and alerting to its current absence from general education in Arab countries. This is coupled with a call for research into issues of mutual interest between Arab youth and youth in other countries to improve understanding and strengthen critical thinking skills to counteract the media's propagandistic inclinations (Abu-Fadil, 2007).

In an effort to assess how media literacy education can empower children in several countries in the Middle East, Samy Tayei studies the actual use of new media by Egyptian children from two governorates in Egypt. Focusing on children living in two governorates, one urban and one rural (Cairo and Fayoum), the findings revealed the heavy use of Egyptian children ages (14-15) and (16-18) of new media and the internet. Usage is mainly for entertainment, and it mainly sets the agenda for children in terms of identifying topics to talk about with peers and friends. An interesting finding is that new media was rarely used for educational purposes. The findings also revealed that children of the younger age groups create and produce media content on the internet more actively than older age groups (in both governorates). Children's use of the new media is described as an "addiction" and is considered as potentially conducive to media education (Tayie and HirsjÄrvi, 2010).

Another perspective views media literacy education as a means to enable students to form their own independent opinion and point of view on media content, to understand social justice, and link educational curricula with reality and life. This perspective includes environmental conservation as an important focus of media literacy (Ashdeifat and Khawasneh, 2012).

Media Literacy Initiatives in Arab countries:

Many Arab countries have taken initial steps in formulating media literacy initiatives, including Morocco, Qatar, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Saudi

Arabia, Iraq and Egypt. Media literacy efforts in Arab countries remain to be sporadic initiatives, carried out by entities that are not exclusively focused on media literacy. Therefore, these initiatives are mostly seasonal, time bound, and for short durations. Most initiatives in Arab countries are developed within the formal system of education. However, in practice, they are not intrinsically embedded in the system as main courses or unique curricula dedicated to media literacy. Therefore, these initiatives can be described as a parallel add on to the formal system, not as an intrinsic part of it.

While this "adding on" of media literacy content may reflect the felt necessity for media literacy by a number of media consumers, practitioners, communicators, scholars and even policy makers, this needs to be matched with appropriate attention and planning for effective inclusion of media literacy curricula in the formal educational system. The exception to this is the media education curricula that are included in schools (K-12) in Jordan and Palestine that are apparently embedded within the schooling system, but seem to be leaning more to a civics education orientation, rather than a media literacy orientation.

With the increasing momentum of the forces of change globally and locally, it is called upon media literacy education and application more than ever to match these developments, and equip the various audiences with the ability to navigate effectively among the various media and content options available.

Media Literacy Education in Arab Countries:

A study investigating the use of media by Arab youth revealed that despite being avid users of digital technologies, they use it mainly for entertainment. Moreover, the findings showed the modest critical media literacy abilities and low levels of detection of online media threats among Arab youth. These findings demonstrate the necessity of developing, implementing and promoting media literacy education in Arab countries (Melki, 2015).

Lebanon is one of the Arab countries that had a leading role in promoting media literacy education at university as well as the level of civil society. At university level, the first media literacy course was offered in Fall 2009, while media literacy modules were offered by civil society organizations since 2008. Some civil society organizations targeted youth, rural communities, minorities and the under-privileged members of the Lebanese society, while others focused on professionals, journalists, and small business owners (Melki, 2013).

Media literacy education initiatives are implemented in schools in **Palestine** (Bittar and Asali, 2009) and **Jordan.** In both cases, factors that influence media education include lack of resources, deficiency in understanding media

and information literacy, non-systematic application of media literacy activities, and the need to integrate ML as an intrinsic part of the curriculum (Ashdeifat and Khawashneh, 2012).

In Palestine, the goals of media education in primary (K-9) schools for students and teachers include a clear civic education component, as the media education topics are part of the syllabus included in civic education and national education books. The goals of media education include fostering nationalism, using media in school to improve creativity, making ethical decisions regarding issues relevant to the school community based on messages disseminated through school media, assist in understanding curricula, and creating communication channels between schools (teachers and administrators) and homes (families), among others. Critical thinking and understanding the source of the mass media message are included as significant elements in media education (Bittar and Asali, 2009).

In Jordan, a study conducted to assess the status of media literacy education for grade 10 students in a private school concluded that media education can be improved, and offered several recommendations for improvement. These include improved planning and understanding of media education, building a model to be implemented in a number of schools to assess impact, and that school curricula should include ML activities in a systematic manner (AsMehdeifat and Khawasneh, 2012).

A study about digital literacy in Jordan confirmed that while digital media literacy in Jordan is still new, it is improving and increasingly advancing, due to the commitment of the government to improve community awareness and digital media capabilities. The study recommends that more studies to explore how digital literacy can be effective in particular contexts are needed (Halka & Mohamed, 2020).

In **Saudi Arabia**, a proposed framework to include media literacy in Saudi education was presented in the First International Conference for Media Education held in 2007. The framework suggests media education in the form of information and communication technologies (ICT) and considers media literacy as a supplement to support the main curriculum of the basic sciences. The framework closely links media literacy with civics education. It emphasizes teaching students the main competencies and skills of ML such as critical thinking, effective communication, visual literacy, information literacy, networking interaction skills, self-direction skills, and ethical and social usage of ICTs (Al Saleh, 2007).

In Egypt, an experimental study conducted on 3rd grade primary students showed that using media literacy activities in school improved students'

learning skills like professional and procedural skills, as well as cooperation and coexistence skills. Improvements on the level of sub-skills like respect for differing opinion, ability to distinguish between similarities and differences, negotiation and good inquiry, among others (Singer, 2019).

Another study was conducted to determine new media literacy among youth in Egypt. The study measured their analytical skills, as well as their skills in communication, creativity, production, participation, evaluation, comprehension and distribution skills while consuming online media. The study noted the scarcity of new media literacy studies in the Arab world, while focusing mostly on types of media literacy. The study recommended that future studies address the broader perspective of new media literacy due to the heavy usage of youth of this type of media. Based on the findings, the study developed a new theoretical framework and model for assessing the level of new media literacy that proposes a new media literacy education plan (Amer, 2023)

Another study examined the relation between the role of social media influencers and the play in consumers' online buying decisions, given the consumers' advertising literacy (Atef, 2020; cited in Amer, 2023)

Challenges of media literacy in Arab countries:

The field of media and information literacy is faced with pressures on very basic levels. Internal pressures include social issues, like unemployment, problems with the education and health systems, among others. The media scene is plagued with many problems including mistrust from the public, the wide gap between the media's agenda and the public's agenda (Saleh, 2007, 2011). Other challenges relate to the skills that are needed to be taught or acquired for media literacy like critical thinking in an environment that has long favored rote learning (Al Fadil, 2007). Having voice, forming an independent opinion and expressing one's own point of view can also be considered a challenge for many students and even teachers who are conditioned to conform to expert opinion. Another major challenge is the increased delay in appreciating the urgency and importance of media literacy education, which is clearly reflected in its absence from curricula whether in schools or universities.

Media literacy and Information literacy: A main feature of the media literacy landscape in Arab countries is the intricate link between media and information literacy. This linkage is described in Fez international forum/document as a **"**far-reaching vision that today's digital age and convergence of communication technologies necessitate the combination of media literacy and information literacy in order to achieve sustainable human

development, build participatory civic societies, and contribute to the consolidation of sustainable world peace, freedom, democracy, good governance and the fostering of constructive intercultural knowledge, dialogue and mutual understanding" (UNESCO, 2011, p.3).

The emphasis on this linkage is quite meaningful and it can be suggested that information literacy is a pre-requisite to media literacy since access to information can rightfully be considered as the first step to engage in any kind of interaction with the media. This is especially true when applying this idea to the basic definition of media literacy that identifies/emphasizes access as the first step to media literacy.

Access to information has long been a problem in Arab countries. The information base available and easily accessible in the Arab world is predominantly Western and when local or national information databases are available, the general inclination is to treat them as highly confidential data banks by gatekeepers (Hamed, 2003). This intricate link between media literacy and information literacy, therefore, poses questions as to whether countries of MENA and Arab countries are ready or can even hope to achieve the desired level of media literacy necessitated by media's domination in the current era. Building on this, it is quite difficult to envision successful media literacy programming and planning in MENA and Arab countries without a parallel surge in accessibility of information and knowledge in Arab countries.

Findings of the study:

This study relied on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with media professionals in Egypt which revealed how media literacy is perceived among them and what they consider as important topics for media literacy to address. Moreover, the analysis of the FB pages that are operated by media literacy professionals in some Arab countries contributed to our understanding, not only of how media literacy is currently being propagated using digital media, but also what are the main themes, ideas, and topics of media literacy being propagated through these pages, hence shedding light on perspectives of media literacy in these countries. This constitutes an additional level of understanding of the common themes, topics and ideas among them, as well as any differences, if any.

Media Literacy FB pages:

To analyze the content of the media literacy FB pages that originated in Arab countries selected in the sample, a coding frame was developed. The coding frame comprised themes and sub-themes that were initially developed using deductive logic, and were later adjusted after reviewing the content of the FB

pages using inductive logic. The final main themes and sub-themes in the coding frame are:

1) The meaning of media literacy: including the sub-themes,

a) Message Analysis, b) Message Evaluation, c) Media Literacy skills

2) Technological innovations: including the sub-themes:

a) Fake news, b) Mis/ Disinformation, c) Artificial Intelligence, d) Deep Fake

3) Sustainable Development Goals: including the sub-themes

a) Any of the 17 SDGs, b) any topic related to the environment

The meaning of media literacy: Participants in the IDIs attributed to the meaning of media literacy what can be described as collective outcomes that reflect on the community or society at large. Examples are bolstering the Arab identity, fighting taboos, contributing to social change and development, and promoting cultural understanding. Several pages focused on teaching the different ways for message validation and evaluation to discern the accuracy of the message and validate the information it includes.

A number of pages promoted the concept of citizen journalism, framing it as a way to facilitate immediate responses to newsworthy events, and a way to include voices that may not otherwise be heard. The pages encouraged its followers to pursue it and create blogs, and verify information thoroughly before sharing it, so as not to spread misinformation.

All pages confirmed the importance of media literacy, stressing that it is a type of education, which is based on collective discourse, and focuses on positive values and strengthening them, as well as modifying or changing negative values. The importance of media education is also stressed as necessary for developing basic thinking and critical thinking skills to be able to deal with the media, advertisements, rumors, and fabrications received from the media daily, and to be able to understand and interpret the media message, its motives, and the goals of its producers.

Other pages mentioned that media education encourages the educational reform movement and encourages dialogue in the classroom, which in turn encourages dialogue outside it. Media education has a tangible impact in creating the desired change in school educational visions, concepts and applications. However, few schools are interested in providing media education services at the school level despite its paramount importance

Technological innovations: All pages reiterated that media and information literacy has become a necessary way of life that must infiltrate society, especially after the tremendous technological development and technological revolution, which has produced a generation addicted to their smart phones, and misusing them.

The integration of modern technologies in learning was among the many positive aspects of media education mentioned in most pages. Almost all pages mentioned issues like digital citizenship, smartphones and their harms, fake news, artificial intelligence, information pollution, message contamination, and disinformation as technological issues that need attention. Some pages elaborated on the effects of negative media misinformation and news falsification stating that it begins with individual negativity and turns into collective negativity, and make the matter of leading minds much easier than leading positive groups. Therefore, it can direct and shape cultures through pursuit of the viewer or follower, and even luring minds towards specific cultures and pre-determined interests, which serves the ultimate goal of media misinformation. A recurrent message is to be aware that psychological manipulation, rumors, disinformation and fake news are often used to influence public opinion and distort real facts. It also stirs up hatred which can spread very quickly, alerting their followers that freedom of expression can turn into hate speech and that they should learn how and when to draw the line between the two types of communication. Media literacy equips people with the means to fight this and address it in a positive way.

Several tips were provided to address misinformation. While acknowledging that it may take multiple efforts to fight misleading social media pages, but it is also seen as the responsibility of everyone. Some of the ways are: to actively participate on social media and disseminate correct and reliable information, and to report misleading pages or false information when they appear for necessary investigations. Another way is to make sure to always verify the sources before believing any information or news, to make sure of its source and the validity of the information. Another way is to use reliable sources and reliable news sites before making any decisions or publishing information. Another tip is also provided to protect ourselves from misinformation is a basic principle: Think before you participate!

Sustainable Development Goals: The benefits of digital media and digital media literacy are underscored by most pages, calling for nurturing and supporting public and open sources on the Internet. Achieving a more equitable world was also called for through promoting open-source solutions, and a global effort to encourage the creation of, and investing in, the creation of digital public goods: open-source software, open data, open AI models, open standards, and content. This is considered as most important for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Another perspective on sustainability was described as the sustainability of the local community media in order to ensure media pluralism and freedom of

expression, and is also considered an element of healthy democratic societies. Local community media is considered an alternative to public and commercial media, as well as social media, which is characterized by its responsibility to, as well as its participation in, local communities. Community media focuses on issues that concern local opinion, and contributes to providing a platform to facilitate public discussions and dialogue.

Media Professionals:

Perceptions of media literacy:

Many of the interviewees viewed media literacy as a set of skills that are related to working in the field of media and communication. The audience, and anyone who do not work in the field do not need media literacy. Reason being that media people are the ones who, by being media literate, will relay the right information, media content and news to the audience.

Another expressed viewpoint is that there are different kinds of media literacy. One related to the media to be used, one related to the media profession itself, and one related to the audience's knowledge. Members of society do not need to have the level of media literacy that media profession should have.   The literacy related to the medium, as in how to use it effectively and how to operate it. Many believed that media literacy is part of the society's culture, which means that the content of the media should be accepted by the culture and by society.

Media Literacy, themes, topics, and ideas

Interviewees expressed their understanding that Media literacy is a way to deal with the media, and while many of them believed that media literacy is related only to media professionals, the same interviewees expressed the public's need to know how to navigate the media and understand what they described as "the messages between the lines" and understand them and the motives behind them.

Fake news and misinformation: Participants mentioned artificial intelligence, fake news, and disinformation as technological problems that need attention. Some of the respondents described fake news and "contaminated information" that can harm people and society. Trust and diversity of news and information sources were mentioned by most respondents as the best way to check news and information disseminated through the media. Most respondents mentioned that media literacy helps the audience recognize fake news and misinformation through knowing which sources to trust and through using different and diverse sources to get the information we need. However, most respondents expressed their viewpoint

that any new technology is good for media and for media literacy. It is the responsibility of people to protect themselves from their negative aspects.

Media literacy education:

Interviewees expressed two viewpoints regarding media education. One is that media literacy should be taught to children as young as 6 years in schools and even before this age by the family at home. Another viewpoint is that children should not be taught media literacy in school, it is a hard topic and should be part of a training program for students at university level. Some respondents expressed their opinion that it is difficult to teach media literacy in schools, but critical thinking can be added to the curriculum in all levels. This will enable people to be media literate. Others suggested that teaching media literacy not as a subject, but as a training program that simplifies media literacy concepts and teaches people how to deal with mass and digital media. Almost all respondents considered teachers, not communicators, as better able to teach media literacy, which was an unexpected finding.

Citizen journalism

Citizen journalism was mentioned as an important role that can enhance the people's ability to address misinformation and protect the people from falling victims to it. They expressed that as more and more people become citizen journalists, more light on the correct information will be shed and misinformation will disintegrate.

Sustainable Development Goals:

Most respondents view media literacy as distinct from environmental issues. They view media literacy as being mainly about media and communication, not other topics like the environment or the SDGs. All respondents knew about the SDGs, although not in detail, but referred to the fact that it is a government plan that should be completed by 2030. A small number of respondents reported that they engaged in environment related communication, most respondents reported that they are not familiar enough with environmental issues to write about them. Two respondents mentioned that they did environmental communication work relevant to losing agricultural land and conserving water. All respondents confirmed that they would like to cover or report more on environmental issues if they learn more about it.

Conclusion:

The study set out to determine what are Arab perspectives on media literacy and whether the field of media literacy in Arab countries respond to the forces of change in the modern world. The findings of the study are based on a content analysis of Facebook pages created by media literacy professionals in

Arab countries, and semi-structured, in-depth interviews with media professionals working in the communication field in Egypt.

The Facebook pages dedicated to media and information literacy originated in six Arab countries (Yemen, Morrocco, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon). Content analysis of the media literacy Facebook pages was utilized to reveal the latent meaning accorded to media literacy and the topics that are mainly covered and propagated through these pages. The analysis includes indicators of audience participation like comments, shares, discussions and expression of opinion but were found to be minimal, although the pages had a good number of followers.

Media professionals answered in-depth interview questions which reflects their knowledge of media literacy and their perspective on its role and functions in society. The findings gleaned the main areas that these pages cover, the most important and essential media literacy topics from their perspective, etc. The findings of the two research components revealed how the concept and practice of media literacy are perceived by a sample of Arab communicators and how they respond to the current challenges of technology and sustainability.

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