Navigating media literacy in the AI era: Analyzing gaps in two classic media literacy books

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Article Info

Abstract

The migration of the public into online platforms, the full mediatization of everyday life, the transformation of individuals into media entities via social media, the emergence of new forms of bottom-up censorship, and the involvement of non-human actors (such as AI) as media communicators and producers, have profoundly reshaped contemporary society. For these reasons, this study aims to analyze these pivotal transformations and assess how effectively they are addressed by two seminal media literacy texts, which have dominated the 21st century with media literacy editions, one by author James Potter and the other by Stanley Baran. Utilizing a problematization methodology, the research identifies gaps in these texts' coverage of contemporary media phenomena and concepts. These two classic texts lack concepts that are very influential in today's online life, such as mob censorship, social media literacy, post-truth and the role of AI in online communications. Moreover, integrating artificial intelligence into media production necessitates a practical approach to media literacy. This paper advocates for a holistic approach to media literacy education that equips learners with the skills needed to navigate and critically engage with today's media landscape effectively.

Introduction

Previous studies in media literacy primarily focused on children. In the pre-Internet era, television was a central concern, with discussions ranging from its potential to incite violence, waste time, enhance eloquence, educate about society, and cultivate a "video child" phenomenon (Luke, 1990; Marsh, 2005; Sartori, 1997; Voort, 1986). With the advent of the Internet, attention has shifted to online activities, encompassing concerns such as time spent online, parental supervision, exposure to age-inappropriate content, purposes of internet usage, socialization, and media consumption patterns (Hasebrink & Hasebrink, 2013; Smahel et al., 2020). Moreover, issues like risks, cyberbullying (DeLara, 2016), digital rights of children (Hasebrink et al., 2008; Livingstone, 2016), and misinformation (Bowman & Cohen, 2019; Christ & De Abreu, 2020) have gained prominence.

Despite information and communication technologies now permeating every aspect of society (Livingstone, 2009) and fostering a participatory culture in digital media even among adults (Jenkins, 2009), media literacy remains predominantly child-centric. However, contemporary media influences extend beyond children. Today, media content is generated not only by professionals but by a global population exceeding 4.5 billion online users (Floridi, 2014). This era witnesses a shift in censorship dynamics – from traditional top-down control (Deutsch, 1968) to emerging forms of bottom-up censorship (Waisbord, 2023). Furthermore, media production involving artificial intelligence challenges the conventional structures of message dissemination, transforming the traditional government-media-public communication model into a horizontal distribution of information (Livingstone, 2015), even within digital platforms (van Dijck & de Waal, 2018).

The migration of the public online has shaped a generation of digital natives who grew up immersed in digital environments. This transition has also prompted politicians, marketers, journalists, and extremists alike to adapt their practices to the digital realm. These changes afford citizens unprecedented opportunities to engage with political and media spheres, although they also contend with competing narratives vying for attention and credibility (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2021). Public relations practitioners strategically navigate these digital landscapes (Batorski & Grzywińska, 2018; Roth-Cohen & Avidar, 2022), individuals managing personal brands (Gil, 2022), and state and non-state actors disseminating values and propaganda (Saliu, 2023, 2022a, 2022b, 2021).

In this diverse digital landscape, various themes – from medicine to identity, from war to personal relationships – play out online, reflecting a societal shift where media is not simply a tool but an environment where individuals live and interact (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014). The distinctiveness lies in the ability of myriad voices to address global audiences, marking a departure from traditional mass communication (Saliu, 2022b). Consequently, today, "we do not live with media but in media" (Deuze, 2023, p. 6).

These revolutionary transformations underscore that contemporary media diverges significantly from its historical precedents. Individuals on social media platforms now function as media entities themselves, contributing to a landscape where censorship operates horizontally and includes non-human actors such as artificial intelligence. This era has also ushered in a questioning of truth unprecedented in history, defining what some describe (d'Ancona, 2017; Fuller, 2018) as the post-truth era.

As a result, the aim of this paper is to evaluate the current media environment and compare it with insights found in contemporary media literacy textbooks. The main question of this paper is: what are the significant gaps in the two primary media literacy books concerning current developments in media? I employ the Foucauldian (1972, 1988) concept of problematization, which posits that issues arise from societal practices, to address this question. Subsequently, this paper will discuss the core concepts and contemporary issues that media literacy tackles, alongside the innovative ideas shaping present-day society, to critically assess these practices and the current state of the media ecosystem. Then, I will analyze the two primary media literacy books to determine if they adequately cover current trends and essential concepts that people need to be informed about. Finally, the paper will propose the integration of new concepts and phenomena into media literacy education.

Literature review

Media literacy and related concepts

Media and communication studies emerged early, consolidating as a new field of research (Lippman, 1922; Bernays, 1923; Lasswell, 1948; Katz et al., 1955, etc.). The concept of literacy evolved with media developments, starting from print media (such as newspapers and books) and traditional media (film, radio, television) to digital media like computers, tablets, the internet, and smartphones (Lee et al., 2015).

However, the concept of media literacy emerged later. At the National Conference on Media Literacy in 1992, a fundamental definition of media literacy emerged: the ability of citizens to access, analyze, and produce information with specific outcomes using a wide variety of forms (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993; Silverblatt et al., 2014). In essence, media literacy fosters critical thinking skills in selecting media, interpreting received information (Silverblatt et al., 2014), and analyzing messages through questions of *how* and *why*, as well as examining media form, content, authorship, and ownership (Hobbs, 2017; 2010). Media literacy aims to enhance skills, especially among young people, in accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and creating media content (Livingstone, 2004), shedding light on "how we use, and are potentially used by, media" (Lewis, 2021, p. 6). Therefore, media literacy, the ability to critically access, analyze, evaluate, create, and share media, is considered instrumental in mitigating the negative impacts of media communication on users (Luo et al., 2022; Polizzi, 2020). The most comprehensive definition includes action, making individuals communicative actors. According to this

definition, "media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication" (National Association for Media Literacy Education, 2024; Uhls & Robb, 2017).

With the advent of the internet, the concept of new media emerged, encompassing a broad range of media production, distribution, and use; it is digital, interactive, hypertextual, virtual, and networked (Luan et al., 2023; Lister et al., 2008). Subsequently, new media literacy emerged as a concept aimed at understanding the new media environment in Web 2.0, focusing on accessing, analyzing, evaluating, critiquing, and producing media content (Luan et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2013). However, new media literacy quickly faced competition from other concepts.

Digital literacy and digital competence

With the widespread adoption of the internet and the rise of social media, another concept, digital literacy, emerged. The concept was first introduced by Gilster in 1997 (Saliu & Bicaj, 2022), defining it as "digital literacy is the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers" (Gilster, 1997, p. 1). This variant of media literacy encompasses both functional and critical skills and knowledge concerning the internet and social media (Hobbs, 2010; Polizzi, 2023). Over time, the concept has expanded to include media consumer education, particularly focusing on misinformation and fake news (McDougall et al., 2019; Johnston, 2020). Buckingham (2015), in his exploration of digital literacy in education, notes the shift of media literacy online and emphasizes the importance of educators possessing knowledge of online media to teach students effectively. According to Buckingham (2015), this knowledge should primarily encompass web literacy, game literacy, and digital media writing. Other studies regard digital literacy as a cognitive skill (Mishra et al., 2017) or "the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, understand, evaluate, create, and communicate digital information, an ability that requires both cognitive and technical skills" (American Library Association, 2013).

Digital literacy was formally recognized as a competence by the European Commission in 2006, becoming an integral part of lifelong learning initiatives and national educational policies for students, teachers, and citizens in general (Perez-Escoda et al., 2019). Digital competence encompasses a wide range of knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential for using digital technology (Instefjord & Munthe, 2017). The term covers proficiency and skills necessary for effectively using computers, related applications, and software in educational practice (Maderick et al., 2016). Typically, these skills fall under the broader category of hardware and software use (Tomczyk, 2021). However, digital competencies pertain more to pedagogical aspects, focusing on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes teachers bring to classroom practice rather than the general public's media use. Recently, the general public has shifted toward using social media platforms.

Media Information Literacy (MIL)

When discussing media, our thoughts primarily turn to television, social media, etc., which predominantly deliver news, often fraught with issues or agendas. Objective information has always been a cornerstone of professional journalism, yet interests can distort reality, compromizing the reliability of news, particularly with social media, where individuals – not just journalists – generate and disseminate news (Saliu et al., 2024, 2023). This phenomenon gave rise to the concept of information literacy, or news literacy. The increased use of the internet and social media has transformed how political information is produced and consumed (Cope & Flanagan, 2013). Being news literate entails navigating skills in social media, distinguishing credible news from misinformation, personal stories, and entertainment (Garrett, 2017). News literacy involves acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to be a discerning and sceptical news consumer and understanding the relationship between journalists, news production, citizens, and democracy in evolving media landscapes (Vraga & Tully, 2021). Information literacy empowers citizens to access, evaluate, and effectively utilize political information (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2024).

Previously treated separately, media literacy and information literacy have increasingly converged due to shifts in the media environment, the growth of networked information, and the internet (Leaning, 2017). In 2017, UNESCO integrated these two concepts into Media and Information Literacy (MIL), defined as "an interrelated set of competencies that enable people to maximize the benefits and minimize the harms in the new information, digital, and communication environments" (Santos, 2024, p. 1). Similarly, in 2021, UNESCO stressed the importance of integrating MIL into curricula for educators and learners, not just for children, to equip citizens with critical thinking skills essential for democracy, especially amidst concerns over mediatization, social media, and pervasive misinformation (Lee, 2018).

Social media literacy

Social media, facilitating online communication, networking, and collaboration (Carr & Hayes, 2015; Russo et al., 2008), have significantly engaged individuals with each other and with media. These platforms allow users to create public profiles, connect with others, and explore different profiles (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2021). Engagement with social media involves understanding and knowledge about a topic or idea alongside emotions and identification with belonging (Johnston, 2018; Qu & Saffer, 2023). Social media's self-centric nature, focusing on the individual rather than society, distinguishes it from traditional media (Cho et al., 2019). Consequently, social media have become integral to many people's lives and exert a profound impact on society (Beckerle et al., 2021).

Social media have revolutionized media usage and societal impact, necessitating the development of social media literacy to manage the unprecedented levels of engagement seen in human society. Social media literacy refers to "the extent to which cognitive and affective

structures are present among users to ensure the risks of interactions with social media content are mitigated and the opportunities are maximized" (Schreurs & Vandenbosch, 2021, p. 321). Unlike media literacy, which analyzes the characteristics and specifics of each medium, social media literacy encompasses interactions between users and the medium, as well as among users themselves. In social media, messages are created and disseminated not only by the media but also by millions of individuals, fundamentally altering communication dynamics (Cho et al., 2024). Existing concepts of media education, however, often based on mass media functioning, differ from social media in various aspects (Cho et al., 2024), as the logic of traditional mass media evolves toward the logic of social media in contemporary times (Livingstone, 2015). Current concepts may inadequately address the detrimental effects of social media, particularly concerning misinformation (Wang et al., 2019; Cho et al., 2024). Emerging concepts stemming from media and communication research describe today's media environment but have yet to be fully integrated into media literacy texts.

New transformative concepts in media and communication

Deep mediatization

Recent media and communication research has generated a substantial body of literature that explores the evolving landscape of communication and media. Contemporary life is now heavily mediated, where everything from joy, sadness, beauty, and music to business dealings and even death is mediated through various forms (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014). Mediatization, broadly defined, "is a concept used to critically analyze the interrelation between changes in media and communications on one hand, and changes in culture and society on the other" (Couldry & Hepp, 2013, p. 197). With the advent of digital and social media, individuals contribute to data and algorithms. For instance, viewing a post on Facebook leads to subsequent posts tailored based on one's data, serving advertizing purposes. Thus, digitalization has fostered a new media environment that tailors to media consumer preferences, marking an advanced stage known as deep mediatization (Hepp, 2020). This stage signifies a profound integration where all aspects of our social world are intricately intertwined with digital media and their underlying infrastructures (Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

Fake news

Journalists have historically championed truth, but the advent of social media has empowered virtually anyone online to act as a journalist. Anyone can create a narrative supported by videos or photos and share it globally. This has led to a hyper-connected digital landscape with approximately 4.5 billion people online globally who share their hyperhistory (Floridi, 2014). However, not everyone online exercises responsibility, leading to the propagation of false stories. Fake news emerged prominently in 2016 as a social media phenomenon, although disinformation, misinformation,

and propaganda have long existed. What distinguishes this era is the proliferation of falsehoods disseminated not just by traditional media or political entities but by potentially millions of individuals and groups on social media platforms. "Fake news is intentionally and verifiably false, capable of misleading readers" (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 213). Financial and ideological motivations are the primary drivers behind the creation of fake news (Tandoc et al., 2017). Fake news is strategically used by politicians globally to discredit unfavorable news outlets (Tandoc et al., 2019), delegitimize dissenting opinions, and undermine political opponents (Farkas & Schou, 2018). Therefore, "fake news is not an unintended consequence of social media, but a central part of social media business models and a key source of revenue" (Trittin-Ulbrich et al., 2021, p. 8).

Post-truth

Another contemporary concept, post-truth, is closely intertwined with fake news. The term gained prominence in 2016, characterized as the "post-truth era" (d'Ancona, 2017), and was Oxford Dictionaries' Word of the Year. Post-truth is defined as "relating to circumstances in which people respond more to feelings and beliefs than to facts. In this era of post-truth politics, it's easy to cherry-pick data and to reach any conclusion you like" (Oxford Dictionary, 2017). Post-truth is often understood as a situation in which people are inclined to accept claims based on their beliefs and emotions rather than on facts (d'Ancona, 2017), a tendency that implies a disregard for objective reality and allows falsehoods to be quickly replaced with alternative half-truths (Peters, 2018). This phenomenon of alternative facts in the online realm overlaps significantly with the proliferation of fake news (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Post-truth is an important concept because it has to do with the truth and is related to everyday politics: when political lions play with fox strategies, even online (Fuller, 2018).

Mob censorship

In December 2023, Silvio Waisbord, a prominent scholar in media and communications, edited a special issue of Digital Journalism, focusing on mob censorship. He introduced the concept three years earlier (Waisbord, 2020), refining it in 2023. Mob censorship is orchestrated by online militants, occasionally with partisan, ideological, or governmental support, to harass, fabricate allegations against, and threaten journalists and news organizations using harmful rhetoric, legal measures, and physical violence. Such campaigns foster fear and self-censorship among journalists and silence critical voices by targeting them with attacks and insults on social media (Waisbord, 2023). This amplifies fear and self-censorship among journalists, effectively silencing dissenting voices. Throughout history, censorship has traditionally been imposed from the top (by governments) to the bottom (by the public). What is novel about modern censorship is its inversion: now, censorship is wielded from the bottom up by the public rather than governments.

Artificial Intelligence in media

Integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into media represents a revolutionary shift, enabling the automated production of thousands of news articles daily across numerous countries (Barrolleta & Sandoval-Martín, 2024; Munoriyarwa et al., 2023). AI technologies are extensively employed by major news organizations like the Associated Press, Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, and Bloomberg, transforming news gathering, production, and distribution processes (Pavlik, 2023; Tandoc et al., 2020). This technological advancement necessitates interdisciplinary studies that fuse journalism with fields such as applied linguistics and narratology to effectively manage the vast amount of AI-generated content and its implications for media consumption (Barrolleta & Sandoval-Martín, 2024; Zhang et al., 2023).

These concepts highlight the evolving dynamics within media and communication landscapes, shaped by technological innovations and societal shifts. They underscore the critical need for updated frameworks in media literacy and scholarly inquiry to navigate and understand these complex phenomena in contemporary media environments.

Methodology

This paper employs a problematizing review methodology, which often diverges from conventional structures. The aim of problematization review is to reconceptualize existing perspectives and re-evaluate understandings of phenomena to challenge and reimagine current ways of thinking (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020). Problematization is a central concept in Foucault's work, emphasizing scrutiny and the critical examination of societal phenomena, concepts, and theories (Weder, 2022; Foucault, 1988).

Alvesson and Sandberg (2011, 2020) introduced the problematization methodology, aiming to generate new research questions through a dialectical exploration of one's own perspective, alternative viewpoints, and specific literature domains, thereby challenging underlying assumptions (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). This approach "enables researchers to imagine how to rethink existing literature in ways that generate new and 'better' ways of thinking about specific phenomena" (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020, p. 1290). Problematization involves introducing ambiguity or identifying unresolved issues (Weder et al., 2019). Central to the problematizing review is reflexivity, where researchers critically engage with selected texts, interpreting them within a specific context while considering diverse perspectives and alternative sources (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020). Reflexivity enhances researchers' awareness of the complexities within communication or public relations contexts (Willis, 2019), revealing contradictions, dilemmas, and potentialities (Cunliffe, 2002).

The problematization review is primarily guided by the principles of "reflexivity, reading more broadly but selectively, not accumulating but problematizing" (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020, p. 1290). In problematization, it is crucial to challenge assumptions rather than unquestioningly accept established findings (Chatterjee & Davison, 2021, p. 228). Knowledge can be advanced by identifying gaps in the problematization of a social phenomenon, which is examined through theoretical frameworks and data analysis; in this context, data serve as "inspiration for critical dialogues between theoretical frameworks and empirical work" (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007, p. 1265). According to Alvesson and Sandberg (2011), "research texts indicate something about how researchers develop research questions from existing theory and, under all circumstances, highlight the logic behind their claim to make a contribution to the scientific field" (p. 25). Authors engaged in a problematizing review, develop their own perspectives on the existing literature within their domain, critique established research traditions, and propose alternative viewpoints that may better elucidate phenomena (Chatterjee & Davison, 2021).

The problematizing review methodology encourages researchers to "rethink existing literature in ways that generate new and 'better' ways of thinking about specific phenomena" (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020, p. 1290). It is a targeted way of identifying a phenomenon that requires a solution, such as in the financial literacy of citizens and in other literacy practices (Pettersson, 2022). While relatively novel, problematization is increasingly prevalent in management and organizational studies and has been effectively applied in various fields such as policy and politics (Bacchi, 2012), applied management, communication studies, public relations, and entrepreneurial communication (Goyanes, 2020; Gossel, 2022; Willis, 2019; Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020), as well as in studies examining the relationship between education and AI knowledge (Rahm, 2023).

In this paper, the lack of new media phenomena and concepts in the two most useful media literacy texts is problematized. Media and communication research has an abundant bibliographic and empirical corpus dealing with communication actors, the effect of the media, credibility, transformations as a result of information technology, journalism, public relations, advertizing and the effect of the message and the media, some of them which were mentioned above. Therefore, based on the dynamics and changes that have emerged as a result of the change in the media landscape, it is considered reasonable that: on the basis of the most current and most influential concepts for media consumers, to analyze the two books that have the most successive editions long term: James W. Potter's *Media literacy*. This book, published by Sage, reached its 10th edition in 2021 and has been in global use since the first edition in 2004, but also an earlier publication in 1998. It is the dominant reference for media literacy in this century.

The other book that also has a longer follow-up is Stanley Baran's *Introduction to mass communication. Media literacy and culture*, which, as of 2023, was in its 12th edition (published by McGraw-Hill). Unlike Potter's book, not all of Baran's editions have dealt with media literacy, because his earlier editions have focused on mass communication theories.

These two books have been analyzed by searching throughout their text if they deal with important concepts and with impact on the public and public users and which

concepts have been consolidated in recent years, such as fake news, post-truth, deep mediatization, mob censorship, AI in the field of media. Other publications were not considered because, according to platforms like Amazon, other media literacy books did not go beyond a second edition.

Potter's book is globally recognized as a leading resource in media literacy. Baran's work has also garnered significant attention, although earlier editions focused primarily on mass communication theories rather than media literacy. My analysis identifies whether these texts incorporate pivotal contemporary concepts that have gained prominence in recent years, such as fake news, post-truth, deep mediatization, social media literacy, mob censorship, and AI in media.

Results

Potter's *Media literacy*

Potter (2021) extensively covers various aspects of media literacy, beginning with different approaches and emphasizing the importance of understanding media effects, media development, and the economic perspectives of media industries. He delves into topics such as media ownership, which influences media objectivity and privacy concerns, and addresses issues like media violence and advertizing strategies. While Potter touches on fake news, providing practical tips for identification, his treatment of the subject remains basic, focusing on its history and criteria for identifying false information.

Potter discusses the concept of truth in media reporting but notably omits any mention of post-truth, which has emerged as a consequence of the proliferation of fake news. Despite addressing social media and its widespread use, he neglects to discuss social media literacy at all. Furthermore, Potter does not engage with the concept of censorship, a longstanding issue, nor does he acknowledge the emergence of mob censorship as a new form of online censorship. Additionally, Potter overlooks the concept of mediatization entirely, despite its consolidation in media studies for over a decade before the publication of his book. Given this omission, the concept of deep mediatization, which builds upon mediatization theories, is understandably absent from his work. Moreover, Potter fails to mention artificial intelligence, which plays an increasingly significant role in contemporary media landscapes.

Baran's *Introduction to mass communication*

Stanley Baran (2023) offers a comprehensive yet somewhat traditional module on mass communication. He explores media culture, media literacy, and various media forms such as newspapers, magazines, film, radio, television, mobile video, and the internet. Baran also discusses strategic communication, public relations, advertizing, and media effects. He addresses the concept of freedom of the press and expression, highlighting contemporary issues such as the implications of "excessive freedom" in blogging and online media.

Unlike Potter, Baran discusses mediatization but does not mention deep mediatization, which significantly impacts daily interactions on social media platforms. He does not reference post-truth despite mentioning sources that discuss the concept indirectly. Baran examines issues related to free press and censorship, including self-censorship concerning time and space constraints, but overlooks mob censorship or online crowd censorship. While he covers mediatization theories, Baran misses the opportunity to explore deep mediatization's substantial role in advertizing and other media domains.

Baran briefly touches upon social media literacy, acknowledging its importance for privacy protection and responsible internet use. Like Potter, Baran mentions artificial intelligence briefly, noting its ability to compose music but not exploring its broader implications in media and journalism.

In summary, while both Potter and Baran offer valuable insights into media literacy and communication, their works exhibit notable gaps in addressing emerging concepts such as deep mediatization, post-truth, mob censorship, and the profound impact of artificial intelligence on contemporary media environments. These omissions underscore the evolving nature of media studies and the ongoing need for updated frameworks and interdisciplinary approaches to understand and navigate the complexities of today's media landscape.

Discussion

Why are missing concepts so important to media literacy?

In the two books mentioned above, which have endured through multiple editions (one in its 12th edition in 2023, the other in its 10th edition in 2021), critical concepts that profoundly impact society are conspicuously absent. Notably absent is any discussion of social media literacy, despite social media now being the predominant arena for interpersonal communication, engaging approximately five billion people worldwide with their hyper-stories (Floridi, 2014). In this environment, the battle for attention takes precedence over the traditional notion of open media discourse. Both the form and content of information have undergone significant changes, reflecting a shift in communication within a vastly different media landscape where traditional values have also evolved (Saliu, 2024, 2023, 2018). However, most media literacy textbooks have remained unchanged.

Contrary to Baran's (2023) characterization of social media as a "virtual democracy" which reflects an outdated concept, Marichal (2012) suggests we are more accurately in a "Facebook democracy". This distinction is critical, as social media platforms have amplified the potential reach of fake news and, together with the rise of post-truth politics, present significant challenges to representative democracy (Chambers, 2021). Social media empowers populist demagogues by giving them a perceived majority voice, contrasting sharply with elite experts. As Umberto Eco aptly put it, "social media gives legions of idiots the same right to

speak as a Nobel Prize winner" (Eco, 2015).

Studies on social media cannot afford to be homogeneous or passive in their analysis of messages or communications; they must encompass diverse socio-cultural perspectives to understand online behaviors fully (Livingstone, 2015). This is underscored by research indicating that Western cultures remain more reliant on traditional media sources compared to countries in Latin America and other regions where online media consumption outstrips traditional media use (Newman et al., 2022). Thus, the inclusion of social media literacy in media literacy texts is imperative.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of mob censorship warrants attention in these texts. While Baran (2023) discusses censorship, he overlooks mob censorship—a transformational force in society today. Traditionally, censorship was imposed top-down by monarchs, dictators, or authoritarian governments. Today, however, mob censorship operates bottom-up, as partisan groups and extremists on social media arrogate to themselves the authority to harass, intimidate, and silence journalists and critics with whom they disagree (Waisbord, 2023, 2020). This form of censorship aims to induce self-censorship among journalists, compelling them to weigh the potential consequences of covering certain stories against personal safety concerns for themselves and their families, as well as for colleagues (Waisbord, 2023).

In this environment, demagogic populists and elite experts hold contrasting views of reality, contributing to the rise of post-truth politics—an issue conspicuously absent from the works of both Baran (2023) and Potter (2021). Post-truth politics is characterized by a preference for emotional appeals over factual accuracy, a trend exacerbated by social media's influence, where political strategies increasingly resemble the tactics of foxes playing among lions (Fuller, 2018). This trend not only undermines the credibility of elite experts but also threatens democracy itself (Waisbord, 2018).

Moreover, the absence of deep mediatization from these textbooks is noteworthy, considering its pervasive impact on daily life. Each time targeted advertisements appear repeatedly on social media or algorithms prioritize news items based on private conversations intercepted by smartphones, the effects of deep mediatization become apparent (Hepp, 2020).

The exclusion of artificial intelligence (AI) from these texts is somewhat understandable, given its recent emergence in media applications. AI is already reshaping media landscapes, with organizations deploying automated bots on social media platforms to generate content and interact with audiences (Oh & Ki, 2024). AI's role extends beyond content creation to include ideation, newsgathering, distribution, and monetization, albeit with significant ethical implications (Deuze & Beckett, 2022).

The educational implications are clear: Media literacy in the AI era must be practical, not merely theoretical. Workshops that demonstrate appropriate AI use in educational settings are crucial, promoting AI literacy among students (Sullivan et al., 2024), especially ChatGPT (Divino, 2024; Rudolph et al., 2023b; Sullivan et al., 2023). The introduction of ChatGPT for public use at the beginning of 2023 has created new challenges in education, particularly in higher education. Universities should not ignore these challenges if they wish to maintain public trust in educational institutions and have a genuine opportunity to achieve educational goals in the future (Popenici, 2023). This trust may be eroded if individuals are reluctant to rely on professionals who have not learned anything themselves but instead use AI, such as when people are hesitant to trust a bridge designed by an engineer who employed AI in its development (Popenici et al., 2023). Therefore, preparation for the labor market requires the integration of AI literacy and ethical decision-making skills, which balance technical expertise with critical thinking (Waring, 2024) in a highly dynamic world where various professions, including those in higher education, are at risk (Rudolph et al., 2023a).

A multimodal literacy pedagogical approach, integrating software applications and various social media platforms, is advocated to empower students as informed, confident, responsible, and active contributors in information consumption, creation, and distribution (O'Halloran et al., 2017).

In conclusion, the absence of critical concepts such as social media literacy, mob censorship, deep mediatization, post-truth, and artificial intelligence from prominent media literacy textbooks reflects a gap in understanding and preparing individuals to engage effectively in today's media environment. Addressing these omissions is crucial for fostering media literacy that is relevant, comprehensive, and responsive to the complexities of contemporary media landscapes.

Conclusion

Textbooks on media literacy and corresponding curricula in educational settings should be grounded in current research in media and communication. However, two prominent media literacy books, despite their recent reissues, reveal significant gaps that fail to capture the expansive dynamics of media and information technologies today.

These transformations have fundamentally altered online media, where content now caters to public preferences rather than maintaining high standards of media production. While traditional media literacy focuses on analyzing the characteristics and roles of each medium in relation to the public, social media introduces a complex interaction among users and between users and non-professionals who shape and disseminate messages. This interaction extends further with the involvement of non-human entities that amplify the dissemination of messages exponentially.

In contrast to the traditional top-down flow of information (government-media-public), today's media environment facilitates horizontal circulation where every individual functions as a media node, independently distributing text, photos, and audio-video content. The global connectivity of the public through social media platforms has created

a landscape where online natives and immigrants coexist, transforming all aspects of daily life into online interactions without the traditional filters of professionalism and ethical standards observed in traditional media. Consequently, this shift has compromized media message quality, eroded credibility, exacerbated extremism, and challenged truthfulness. Political actors strategically manipulate online platforms to silence dissent, mobilizing organized online armies (Waisbord, 2023) and leveraging non-human communicators to multiply their messages indefinitely. In this environment, emotional appeals often outweigh factual accuracy among audiences (Fuller, 2018; d'Ancona, 2017).

Therefore, it is imperative for media literacy textbooks to address today's media landscape comprehensively by incorporating concepts that capture these phenomena and societal transformations: deep mediatization, post-truth, social media literacy, mob censorship, and AI in media. These concepts are embedded daily in the lives of children, students, and adults, shaping their understanding and engagement with media. Textbooks must evolve beyond historical perspectives on traditional media to reflect the ongoing impact of these transformations on public discourse and societal norms. Media literacy, especially related to artificial intelligence, must transition from theoretical knowledge to practical training to equip individuals with the skills necessary to navigate and critically engage with evolving media environments effectively.

In essence, media literacy education should equip learners with current, practical insights relevant to their daily lives, ensuring they are prepared to navigate the complexities of contemporary media landscapes responsibly and ethically.

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