Opportunities and Challenges: Tracing the Evolution of India's First State-led Curriculum-based Media Literacy Intervention

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Abstract : In today's digitised world, the extent of an individual's social involvement is largely determined by their interaction over the internet. The Internet has emerged as a primary source of information consumption and a reliable medium for receiving updates on everyday activities. Owing to this change in the information consumption pattern, the internet has also emerged as a hotbed of misinformation. Experts are of the view that media literacy has emerged as one of the most effective strategies for addressing the issue of misinformation. This paper aims to study the evolution of the Kerala government's media literacy policy, its implementation strategy, challenges and opportunities. The objective of this paper is to create a conceptual framework containing details of the implementation strategy based on the Kerala model. Extensive secondary research of literature, newspaper articles, and other online sources was carried out to locate the timeline of this policy. This was followed by semi-structured interview discussions with government officials from Kerala to trace the origin and evolution of this policy. Preliminary findings based on the collected data suggest that this policy is a case of policy by chance, as the officer who headed this policy during the state level implementation was the one who has already piloted a media literacy program in a district called Kannur as the district collector. Through this paper, an attempt is made to trace the history of the media literacy policy starting from the Kannur intervention in 2018, which was started to address the issue of vaccine hesitancy around measles rubella(MR) vaccination. If not for the vaccine hesitancy, this program would not have been rolled out in Kannur. Interviews with government officials suggest that when authorities decided to take up this initiative in 2020, a huge amount of misinformation emerging during the COVID-19 pandemic was the trigger. There was misinformation regarding government orders, healthcare facilities, vaccination, and lockdown regulations, which affected everyone, unlike the case of Kannur, where it was only a certain age group of kids. As a solution to this problem, the state government decided to create a media literacy curriculum to be taught in all government schools of the state starting from standard 8 till graduation. This was a tricky task, as a new course had to be immediately introduced in the school curriculum amid all the disruptions in the education system caused by the pandemic. It was revealed during the interview that in the case of the state-wide implementation, every step involved multiple checks and balances, unlike the earlier program where stakeholders were roped-in as and when the need emerged. On the pedagogy, while the training during the pilot could be managed through PowerPoint presentation, designing a state-wide curriculum involved multiple iterations and expert approvals. The reason for this is COVID-19 related misinformation has lost its significance. In the next phase of the research, an attempt will be made to compare other aspects of the pilot implementation with the state-wide implementation.

Keywords : media literacy, digital media literacy, curriculum based media literacy intervention, misinformation

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