

Media Literacy and Fake News Identification Skills among Junior High School Students

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ABSTRACT

The increasing spread of misinformation in digital media highlights the importance of strengthening the students' media literacy and their ability to identify fake news. This study was conducted to determine the level of media literacy on fake news identification among Grade 9 students in District II schools, Division of Cagayan de Oro City during the School Year 2025-2026. Specifically, this aimed to find out the respondents' level of media literacy, examine the level of media literacy and their assessment of fake news identification. The study consisted of one hundred eighty (180) Grade 9 students selected using a stratified sampling technique. It employed a descriptive-correlational research method, and data were collected using a researcher-made questionnaire. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation and Pearson's Correlation (r) were used in analyzing and interpreting the data. Findings revealed that the respondents' level of media literacy was high in creating media content. Further, their assessment of fake news identification was high on cross-checking information. In addition, there was no significant relationship between the level of media literacy and their assessment of fake news identification, except in evaluating and analyzing. It is concluded that the respondents are using clear, factual and unbiased language when producing media content. It is recommended that teachers provide activities that develop students' ability to evaluate content and identify unreliable media.

Keywords: media literacy, fake news identification skills

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The rapid growth of digital technologies and social media has transformed how Filipinos, especially the youth, access information in their daily lives. Online platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube now serve as primary sources of news and updates for many students, but these same platforms are also common channels for misinformation and fake news. Many kids do not know if what they see online is true or not. So they easily believe things that are not real. Students use phones and the internet every day. They read and watch many things, but they do not know how to check if it is right or wrong. Some will read something and share it right away without thinking first. They still need help to use the internet in a good way. Teachers also find it hard to make lessons that teach kids how to think carefully.

Wrong news is really bad. It does not just tell lies it can also make people choose things that're not good for them. Wrong news can affect people's health, the way they vote in elections and other important things. Kids may believe ideas and make bad choices because of it. In the Philippines a lot of people use media every day. 8 Out of 10 people use social media. That is about 68 million people. They use media to get

news learn new things and talk to their friends. This means that most students get their information from media.

Grade 9 students use gadgets a lot. Wrong news spreads fast on social media. When people like, comment or share news it goes to many other people. Many people share news without checking first if it is true. So it becomes hard to stop news from spreading. This is a problem because kids are still learning how to know what is real and what is not. Even younger kids use the internet now. Grade 9 students are older. They still find it hard to tell the difference between wrong news and real news. Schools have lessons, about how to tell what is real and what is not. Many students still get confused and do not know which news is true.

This study is grounded in literature emphasizing that media literacy is the prerequisite for fake news detection. When students don't know how to check what they see online, they end up believing things that aren't true. That messes with how they think. Their schoolwork gets harder, and honestly, anyone can fool them. Most young teens are still figuring out how to think critically, so it's really important to understand how their skills help them decide if news is real or fake.

That's why this work looks at how well Grade 9 students can spot fake news. It digs into what they actually know, what they can do, and how they go about checking the things they find online. We want to see what they're good at, and where they need more help. Everything we learn should help teachers and school leaders plan better lessons. With the right lessons, students can learn to think for themselves and stay away from misinformation.

Literature and Related Studies

This section reviews books, articles, journals, and other studies tied to the current research. It includes media literacy in terms of accessing media content, analyzing media critically, evaluating media messages, and creating media content. Further, fake news identification based on recognizing credible sources, critical analysis of content, awareness of media technology, and cross-checking information are also considered.

Media Literacy

These days, students really need to know how to handle media. It's not just browsing or Googling stuff, you have to know how to spot good info, actually understand it, figure out if it's legit, and sometimes share or create things yourself. All of that ties into thinking for yourself and not just taking whatever you see online at face value. Honestly, that's just as important as knowing how to use your phone, a computer, or the internet. When students grab onto these skills, they get a lot more out of technology, and honestly, they learn better, too.

Experts say students who know their way around media don't just buy into whatever's in front of them. They ask questions, sort things out, and sometimes they start coming up with their own ideas or projects. Technology backs them up here. There's research saying classes with videos, photos, and other digital tools are not only easier to understand but way more engaging. Still, teachers matter a lot in this. Some are still figuring out how to use tech in their teaching, and that can make it harder for students to pick up all the skills they need.

Really, just looking something up or reading it online doesn't cut it anymore. Students have to be able to tell what's true and what's just noise. Sure, most students know how to search for news or stories, but a lot still have trouble deciding what they can actually trust. Picking up solid media skills helps in class, but the impact goes way beyond that. It helps students grow and think sharper every day.

This shows that finding information is easy, but checking if it is true is more difficult. Studies by Cuadra (2025) and Ayisi et al. (2024) show that when students are exposed to different media, they learn to question information and think more deeply. However, Fajardo (2023) found that many Filipino students still struggle to check the accuracy of information and identify credible sources. This shows that having access to information is not enough without proper guidance. To support this, media literacy has been included in basic education through DepEd Order No.6, s.2019. It highlights the importance of preparing students for the digital world. Son (2024) explains that media literacy includes four key skills: accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and creating media content.

The literature shows that media literacy is important for developing students' critical thinking and responsible use of information. However, its development depends on effective teaching, proper use of technology and continuous support for both teachers and students. Recent studies show that media literacy is a vital skill that supports critical thinking and responsible use of information. However, learners need stronger support in developing their ability to critically evaluate media content in real-world contexts.

Accessing Media Content

Accessing media content in the digital age refers to the ability to locate information, understand, and evaluate information across different online platforms. It is shaped not only by technology but also by users' skills and the rapidly changing media environment.

The first aspect of access involves identifying information and checking key details such as authorship, source and credibility. However, de Cerquin et al. (2025) note that digital platforms have changed significantly over time, requiring users to constantly adjust their search and verification strategies. Today it is very easy to get information because of technology.. Just getting information is not enough. Students should also know how to check if the information is true. Park and Cho found in 2023 that students can easily search for information online. Many still have trouble knowing if the information is trustworthy. This shows that finding information is easy but checking if it is true is much harder.

In the Philippines many people use their phones and social media every day. Avram explained in 2020 that media has become a part of life. Because of this people can easily get information anytime they want. However Shtern, Hill and Chan said in 2021 that people are often influenced by what they see and hear from others online. Because of this they may believe the information without checking if it is true first. Technology and information are, around us and students should learn how to use technology and check the information they find. People should be careful when they see information online. They should always check if the information is true before they believe it. Similarly, David et al. (2020) note that Philippine newsrooms now rely heavily on digital platforms for faster news distribution, increasing both access and exposure to unverified content.

Because of this, strengthening basic media literacy skills is essential. Fajardo (2023) and Lan (2024) emphasize the need for learners to identify credible sources, recognize basic information markers, and verify content effectively. At the same time, media content itself affects understanding. Navo (2023) observes that some online news may use simplified or sensational styles, while Farago et al. (2024) explain that media framing influences how audiences interpret information. Meanwhile, Cuadra (2025) reports that artificial intelligence is increasingly used in the Philippine news production, improving efficiency but also raising concerns about accuracy and responsibility.

That's why it's so important to learn how to check information. Even with so much at our fingertips, a lot of students still struggle to tell what's true and what's not. This really highlights why we need stronger media literacy skills.

Analyzing Media Critically

Media literacy matters more than ever. Students run into all kinds of information online every day. It's not just about collecting facts instead it's about understanding what you're seeing and questioning messages before you accept them as truth. When students study media carefully, they can better understand how messages affect the way people think and see the world. In this regard, Avram et al. (2020) stress that media literacy is important in identifying and addressing hidden biases in media content. This suggests students' need to develop greater analytical skills to recognize underlying meanings and possible distortions in media messages.

Furthermore, Nurfala et al. (2024) found that students interpret social media content based on their personal and social identities, such as gender and lived experiences. This implies that media interpretation is not entirely objective, as learners may understand the same message differently depending on their background. Therefore, critical media analysis is shaped by both cognitive skills and social contexts. Cadelum et al. (2024) explain that critical media literacy enables learners to identify the values, ideologies, and power structures embedded in media messages. This encourages students to think beyond the surface level by questioning who created the message, why it was produced and whose perspectives are represented or excluded. They also highlight that learners should engage in both analyzing and creating media to fully understand how meaning is constructed.

Similarly, Advinc and Douglas (2020) state that critical media literacy involves evaluating the credibility, purpose, and accuracy of media content. This helps learners become more responsible consumers of information, especially in a digital environment where misinformation is widespread. These consistently show that media literacy plays a key role in developing learners' critical thinking skills. It enables students to critically analyze, question, and evaluate media messages, leading to more informed, reflective, and responsible individuals in an increasingly complex media environment.

Evaluating Media Messages

Media literacy education plays an important role in helping students understand and critically evaluate media messages in today's digital world. It equips learners with the ability to check the truthfulness, usefulness and credibility of information, which is essential given their constant exposure to online content. Recent studies show that media literacy improves how individuals process and judge information. Pimentel (2020) found that media literacy messages shared through social media can help users think more critically about news and online content. In the same way, Nurfala et al. (2024) explained that well-designed messages make it easier for the audience to understand and evaluate information effectively. Shabani and Keshavarz (2023) found that students with good media literacy skills are better at telling whether information online is true or false. This shows that media literacy can help stop the spread of wrong information.

Additionally, the media literacy will help the students make proper choices regarding whether the information can be considered reliable enough to be used. This is because according to David (2025), one should critically verify everything that is seen and read. The whole process helps individuals prevent themselves from falling into any misinformation. In addition, according to Orhan (2023), the students with the ability to critically verify the sources are able to determine whether the news is false or not. Just like the students in Philippines, the media literacy has the same effects on Filipino students. This is because, according to Nygren (2022), media literacy helps the students think, communicate and interpret information.

However, Fajardo (2023) revealed that most Filipino students only learn how to verify the information available online. Maningo et al. (2024) highlighted the growing need to strengthen media literacy education in the Philippines to address the increasing spread of fake news and misinformation. Recent studies consistently show that media literacy education enhances students' ability to critically evaluate media messages and identify misinformation. However, there is still a need to further strengthen these skills, especially among learners in the Philippine context, to better equip them for responsible participation in today's digital environment.

Creating Media Content

Recent studies show that media literacy is important in helping students' think to make a good decision in today's media-filled world. In the Philippine context, media literacy is not only about understanding information, but also about creating it responsibly. Carambas and Tibaldo (2025) explained that students should not simply accept what they see in the media. Instead, they need to learn how to question, understand, and create their own messages. This shows that media literacy involves both critical thinking and content creation.

A key part of media literacy is the ability to create media content. It is not enough for students to only watch or read information; they must also learn how to produce their own content. This allows them to share ideas, express themselves, and actively participate in digital spaces. With many tools now available in the classroom, creating media such as posters, videos, and digital stories has become more accessible to students. Ilayhi et al. (2025) and Sugiarto et al. (2025) explained that tools like Canva and digital comics help students present their ideas in creative and engaging ways. These tools improve not only students' technical skills but also their ability to organize and communicate information clearly.

Another important part of media literacy is making your own content. Students can use different tools to arrange and share information in a clear way. But making content is not only about using gadgets or internet. Addatu (2022) explain that students should also learn to be good and responsible when they make things. They must make sure what they make is true, fair, and respect others. When they do activities and projects, they learn to think well before they make or share anything. Even if many students know how to use these tools, some still have hard time to check if information is right. They also not easy to see if ideas are unfair or only tell one side of the story. This shows that knowing how to use technology is not enough. Students also need to develop good thinking skills.

These studies show that media literacy is not only about understanding media. It also about making and sharing information in good way. Students need both skill to use gadgets and skill to think well. When they learn both together, they can become careful and good users and makers of media.

Fake News Identification Skills

Fake news become a big problem today because information spread very fast on social media. Fake news often look like real news, so it make hard to know which one is true. Because of this, many people, specially students, find it hard to tell if what they read or watch is right or wrong.

Studies show that there are different way to spot fake news. De Beer and Matthee (2020) explain that checking fake news can be done in two way: by yourself or with help of machine. Doing it by yourself mean you check facts and read carefully. Using machine mean you use computer tools to find signs of wrong news. This show that both your own thinking and technology help to stop fake news. Also, skill like knowing how to use media and information help a lot to find out what is real. A study by Jones-Jang et al. (2021) found that individuals with strong information literacy are more capable of identifying misinformation. This means that people who know how to evaluate sources, check credibility, and verify

facts are less likely to be misled by false information. Similarly, Orhan (2023) emphasized that critical thinking skills help individuals carefully examine information before accepting it as true.

Other research also shows that external factors can influence fake news identification. Gaozhao (2021) found that labeling or flagging content as fake can help users recognize misleading information. However, the effectiveness of these labels depends on whether users trust and pay attention to them. This means that even with technological support, users' attitudes and perceptions still play an important role. From a psychological perspective, Batailler et al. (2022) explained that fake news identification depends on two things: the ability to distinguish between real and fake information, and the tendency to make accurate judgements. This implies that errors identifying fake news may come not only from lack of knowledge but also from personal bias and decision-making processes.

In the Philippine context, fake news is a growing concern, especially among young people. Deinla et al. (2022) found that students' ability to identify fake news is influenced by their political beliefs and exposure to social media. This highlights the need for stronger educational interventions to improve students' critical thinking and evaluation skills. The literature shows that fake news identification is a complex process that involves multiple skills. It requires critical thinking, media literacy and the ability to verify information from different sources. Supporting this, Jones-Jang et al. (2021) and Orhan (2023) both emphasize that individuals with strong analytical and information literacy skills are better at detecting misinformation. Furthermore, UNESCO (2025) and Cho, Mortensen, and Liu (2025) highlight that media literacy, including the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create media content, is essential for understanding and verifying information in the digital age.

Recognizing Credible Sources

Fake News has become a serious issue in today's digital world, especially on social media, where information spreads quickly without proper checking. Because of this, the ability to recognize credible sources is very important in identifying fake news. This skill involves checking the author of the information, the reliability of the website or domain, and the overall trustworthiness of the publication. Sitaula et al. (2020) explain that information from well-known and reputable organizations is usually more credible. In the same way, Hinsley and Holton (2021) found that people often look at both the news itself and where it came from before deciding if they should believe it. This shows that the source of information is very important when checking if something is true.

However knowing which sources you can trust is not always easy. You need to think and study the information before believing it. Szydlowski (2025) explained that it is important to know where information comes from and which sources you can trust. So this has become harder because fake news has become more complicated. It can spread in places and communities. Morais and Peniero-Naval (2025) explained that false information is different from one place, to another. So it is not easy to use one rule to decide what is true. What is not.

Because of this many people still have difficulty knowing if information is fake or real. They need to be extra careful when checking information. Fake news and real news can look very similar. Szydlowski said that people need to know where information comes from. People need to study the information. They need to check if the sources are trustworthy. If you do not know if the source is trustworthy you should not believe the information.

Spezzano et al. (2021) found that individuals are often misled by attention-grabbing headlines and images, which affect their judgment of whether news is real or fake. These findings show that simply reading

information or checking it quickly is not enough. Machete and Turpin (2020) explained that people should think carefully, ask questions, and study information before accepting it as true.

The same problem can also be seen among Filipino students. Fajardo (2023) found that many Filipino students are still learning how to check if information is trustworthy, especially when it comes to knowing who wrote it and where it came from. Numandi (2025) also explained that many high school students find it hard to tell the difference between trusted information and information that is meant to influence people's opinions. In addition, Maningo et al. (2022) found that many young people had difficulty identifying fake news during the pandemic. This showed that they still needed to improve their media literacy skills.

The reviewed literature shows that recognizing credible sources is a key but challenging skill in detecting fake news. While checking sources, analyzing content, and applying critical thinking are important strategies, many learners still find it difficult to apply them effectively in real situations. This highlights the need to strengthen media literacy education and help students develop stronger critical thinking skills so they can better evaluate information and become responsible digital citizens.

Critical Analysis of Content

Fake news has become a serious problem, especially in the Philippines where many people rely on social media for information. Studies show that fake news is not only about false information but also about how messages are created and presented to influence readers. Because of this, students need strong skills in identifying fake news and critically analyzing content.

According to Mabanag (2024), fake news should be analyzed by looking at both text and visual elements, such as images and layout. These elements shape how meaning is understood, so students must learn to examine media content carefully. This suggests that critical literacy helps students become more aware and careful in interpreting information. Similarly, Samillano Jr. (2025) explains that identifying fake news requires strong reading and evaluation skills. Fake news often use words that make people feel strong, have loud and interesting titles, and come from places that not always trust. Because of this, students should not believe anything right away. Instead, they must check first if it is true or not.

Delante (2024) also find that seeing too much fake news and bad posts online can change how people think and choose what to do. This show that students need to learn good thinking skill so they can judge well what they see. When there was pandemic, wrong news spread very fast because many people share it without check first. Smith and Perry (2022) explain that checking facts and where the news come from is very important, so people will not be trick. This show why students must be teach how to look at information online before they believe it or share it to others.

Studies also show that fake news often includes false details, missing context, or misleading information. According to Orhan (2023), these features make it difficult to distinguish truth from falsehood. This suggests that students must analyze both content and context when reading information. Furthermore, Mendoza et al. (2023) explain that fake news is often built around persuasive narratives influenced by social and political factors. These narratives make false information more believable, so students need to understand the purpose behind the content they read.

From a broader perspective, Machete and Turpin (2020) highlight that critical thinking is one of the most effective ways to detect fake news. Individuals who question and evaluate information carefully are more likely to identify misinformation. This emphasizes the importance of developing critical thinking skills among students. In terms of content features, Hamed et al. (2023) and Capuano et al. (2023) explain that fake news often uses exaggerated claims, emotional appeal, and biased language. This shows that analyzing tone and word choice can help identify unreliable content.

Moreover, Di Domenico et al. (2021) note that fake news spreads quickly because it is designed to attract attention and engagement. This suggests that students should be cautious of viral content. Visual elements also contribute to misinformation, according to Cao et al. (2020), images and videos can make fake news appear more credible. Therefore, students should be cautious of viral content. Additionally, Sugiarto (2025) stresses that fake news should be understood in terms of both content and context. This means a deeper analysis is needed beyond surface reading. Different approaches also help in identifying fake news.

Awareness of Media Technology

The rapid growth of social media has made information easier to access, but it has also increased the spread of fake news. Because of this, identifying false information is not only a technical task but also a critical skill that depends on users' awareness and understanding of media technology. Several studies agree that technology alone cannot fully solve the problem of fake news. Khan et al. (2020) argue that detection systems can help identify false content, but they are not enough to stop its spread. In the same way, Gunawan et al. (2022) and Tufchi et al. (2023) highlight the growing use of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence in detecting fake news. However, all these studies consistently emphasize that these tools are only effective when users understand and properly use them. This shows a clear agreement that technology supports detection, but human awareness remains essential.

In terms of users' capability, Barakat et al. (2021) found that individuals who are more familiar with digital platforms are better at identifying fake news. This aligns with Al Zou'bi (2022), who reported that students trained in media and information literacy demonstrate stronger skills in evaluating and verifying information. Both studies suggest that knowledge and awareness of media technology directly improve fake news identification; in contrast, Maningo et al. (2022) found that many young people still struggle to recognize fake news despite being active on social media. This difference highlights that exposure to technology alone does not guarantee understanding; users must develop critical and technical skills. Moreover, Gaozhao (2021) examines the role of platform-based tools such as warning labels. The study found that these features can support fake news identification, but their effectiveness depends on how users interpret and trust them.

This finding supports the earlier claim that technology is only helpful when combined with users' awareness. Similarly, Mykytiuk et al. (2023) emphasize that people often encounter fake news without realizing it, further reinforcing the need for stronger awareness and responsible skills. In the local and behavioral context, Elemia et al. (2023) showed how fake news spreads easily in political networks, especially among individuals with lower awareness. Supporting this, Lavilles et al. (2023) found that users who are more aware of fake news are more likely to verify information before sharing it. These studies align in showing that awareness does not only improve identification but also influences responsible online behavior.

The literature consistently shows that fake news identification is shared responsibly between technology and users. While technology tools provide support, most studies agree that awareness, media literacy and understanding of digital platforms are the key factors that strengthen users' ability to detect misinformation. The differences in findings further suggest that being exposed to social media is not enough; users must actively develop the skills needed to critically evaluate information.

Cross Checking Information

Studies show that identifying fake news depends on a person's ability to verify information by checking and comparing it with reliable sources. Ghadiri et al. (2022) explain that fake news detection systems work by comparing information with trusted sources and that false information can be reduced when claims are

verified using multiple credible references. De Beer and Matthee (2020) noted that cross-checking information is important not only as a human skill but also as a key process in automated systems used for detecting misinformation. Gaozhao (2021) highlighted that fact-checking tools' labels or warning signals help users become more careful in judging information. As a result, Ghadin et al. (2023) imply that people are more likely to think critically when they are guided by alerts and that simple fact-checking tools can improve awareness, although their effectiveness still depends on a person's level of media literacy. Moreover, Fung et al. (2021) highlight that fake news is easier to detect when information is checked across different types of media, such as text and images. Similarly, Hisnley and Holton (2021) noted that false information becomes more evident when there are inconsistencies between sources, and using multiple sources strengthens verification and improves accuracy in identifying misinformation. In the Philippine context, Maningo et al. (2022) found that many young adults still struggle to identify fake news even though they are active social media users. Lavilles et al. (2023) supported this and noted that frequent exposure to digital content does not automatically develop strong verification skills and highlighted the need to strengthen media literacy education, particularly in teaching learners how to properly evaluate and cross-check sources. Similarly, Machete and Turpin (2020) emphasized that users practice cross-checking by comparing multiple sources before accepting information as true and that verification habits are already present but are not always consistently applied. Hence, Morais and Naval (2025) explained that making cross-checking a regular practice can improve the accuracy of information judgment. The literature shows that fake news identification depends on cross-checking information, fact-checking tools, and media literacy skills.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the Media Literacy Theory, which helps explain how people understand and use information from different kinds of media. This theory explains that people do not simply believe everything they see or read. According to UNESCO (2025), media literacy means being able to find, understand, check, and create media messages. Since media messages are made by people, they may contain different ideas, opinions, or even bias. Because of this, people need to think carefully so they can tell which information is true and which information is false. This study focuses on four important skills: finding information, studying information carefully, checking if information is true, and creating media content. Buckingham (2023) explained that these skills help people tell the difference between trustworthy information and misinformation.

Furthermore, Media Literacy Theory operates through four distinct domains under fake news identification which include: recognizing credible sources, critical analysis of content, awareness of media technology, and cross-checking information (Orhan, 2023). Recognizing credible sources means knowing who wrote something, where it was published, and whether you can trust the institution behind it. Fajardo (2023) points out how important this skill is—Filipino students often have a hard time figuring out if an author is reliable or not. That's a pretty strong argument for better media literacy education.

But there's more to it than just checking who wrote what. Students also need to break down the content itself—check the facts, look for bias, question the evidence, and think about why someone might be sharing a message in the first place. Nygren and others (2020), along with Riego and Villarba (2023), noticed that students who learned how to evaluate news credibility got a lot better at catching misinformation. Novo (2023) and Orhan (2023) found the same thing—students who actually pause and think catch fake news before it fools them. Basically, sharp thinking makes all the difference.

It's not just about what you read, either, or who wrote it. Students have to realize that technology shapes almost everything they see online. Social media and digital tools tweak what shows up on your feed every day. Bernardino (2025) explains how being aware of this helps students spot things like edited videos, staged photos, and the same lies making the rounds. And finally, there's one more thing not settling for just one source. Double-checking info across different places is a skill everyone needs. This means students should compare information from several trusted sources before believing it. Orhan (2023) found that students who do this are better at spotting fake news. Addatu (2022) also found that lessons and activities can help students improve these skills.

These studies show that media literacy helps students become better at identifying fake news. Students who know how to check sources, study information carefully, understand technology, and compare information from different sources are less likely to believe false information. Because of this, this study focuses on how media literacy helps Grade 9 students identify fake news.

Conceptual Framework

The Independent variable is media literacy in terms of accessing media content, analyzing media critically, evaluating media messages, and creating media content. However, the dependent variable is fake news identification based on recognizing credible sources, critical analysis of content, awareness of media technology, and cross-checking information. The study rests on the assumption that there is a significant relationship between the respondents' level of media literacy and the assessment of fake news identification.

Media literacy helps students make sense of all the information they see every day and figure out how to handle it. It's all about knowing how to find, understand, check, and even create your own media. In this study, we look at media literacy by breaking it into four main skills. First, there's analyzing media. That means you don't just scroll past news stories, ads, videos, or social media posts—you take a closer look. You start asking yourself what the creators are really trying to say, and why they want you to think or feel a certain way. Maybe the headline tries to scare you, or the images are designed to make you happy or angry. When students get good at this, it's a lot harder to fool them. They get better at spotting tricks and deciding for themselves what to trust.

Next, evaluating media messages is all about checking if something's true and if it's safe to believe. You need to look for real facts and proof. Can you tell the difference between real and fake news? If you can, you're a lot less likely to fall for false stories or spread them around. This skill is key for using media wisely and staying away from misinformation. Finally, creating media content is about students making their own work. It's about producing something accurate, thoughtful, and useful not just copying what's already out there. They use different tools and ways to share their ideas. They learn how words, pictures, and other things work together to tell what they mean. This also help them see how messages can change what people think. This skill is important because it make students more careful and good when they make and share their own work.

It also enables them to recognize how media messages can influence or potentially mislead the audience. Students with a high level of media literacy are expected to demonstrate enhanced critical faculties necessary for detecting biases and evaluating reliable sources. This will give them a stronger defense against misinformation.

The dependent variable of the study is fake news identification among Grade 9 students. It refers to the students' ability to determine whether information is true, false or misleading. Students skill in using media is measured by four things. These things show how well students understand and check what they

see online or read. This includes knowing which places give news looking at information carefully knowing how gadgets change what we see and checking the same news from other places. When students have all these skills it shows if they can tell what is real and safe to believe.

Knowing which source is good means students can tell if the news comes from a person, website or group that they can trust. Students need to know who makes the story and if that source is honest. The media skill helps students stay away from news or stories that tell only one side. It also teaches students to be more careful before they believe anything online. The media skill is important because it helps students use right information, for school and every day life. Students skill in using media is very important to learn. Critical Analysis of Content focusing on looking closely at how information is shared and finding out if it is trying to fool people. It includes seeing words that make people feel angry very happy or too excited. It also means checking if the news is not fair or if it sounds wrong and does not make sense. This skill helps students think more than what they see or read at first. It makes them ask questions and look well before they believe anything about the news. This is important because it keeps students safe from tricky news.

Also knowing about media technology means understanding how media technology works. It means knowing that social media, websites and other online places change what people see. The tools, on media technology often choose which posts or videos show up more. Knowing about media technology helps students understand why some news keeps appearing on their phone or screen about media technology. This also helps them become more responsible and careful when using digital media. This is important because it helps students navigate online spaces wisely and avoid being misled by algorithm -driven information.

Cross-checking Information encompasses the students' habit of verifying facts by comparing them across multiple reliable sources. It includes using fact-checking tools, checking publication dates and reviewing context and supporting evidence. This practice helps ensure that the information they encounter is accurate before believing or sharing it. It also promotes responsibility and care in handling information. This is important because it reduces the spread of fake news and strengthens students' ability to make informed and accurate decisions.

This framework illustrates that the ability to identify fake news is not an isolated skill but a product of these combined literacies. It implies that while media literacy provides the critical mindset necessary to question information.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the level of media literacy and fake news identification skills among Junior High School students in District II schools, division of Cagayan de Oro City, during the School Year 2025-2026.

It specifically answered the following questions:

1. What is the respondents' level of media literacy in terms of accessing media content, analyzing media critically, evaluating media messages, and creating media content?
2. What is the respondents' level of fake news identification skills based on recognizing credible sources, critical analysis of content, awareness of media technology, and cross-checking information?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the respondents' level of media literacy and fake news identification skills?

Scope and Limitation

This study focused on media literacy and fake news identification skills among Junior High School students.

nts in District II schools, Division of Cagayan de Oro City, during the School Year 2025-2026. The respondents are the one hundred eighty (180) Grade 9 students of West II District, Cagayan de Oro City. The Independent variables are limited only to media literacy in terms of accessing media content, analyzing media critically, evaluating media messages, and creating media content. Moreover, the dependent variables are also limited to fake news identification based on recognizing credible sources, critical analysis of content, awareness of media technology, and cross-checking information.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the levels of Media Literacy and Fake News Identification Skills among Junior High School students of PN Roa Senior High School, Canitoan National High School, Iponan National High School, and Bulua National High School. This design was very appropriate and allows the researcher to quantify students' literacy levels, identify patterns, and explore associations between variables without manipulating them. The descriptive component provided a detailed account of students' skills and behaviors, while the correlational component investigates the relationships between media literacy, independent variable, and fake news identification, the dependent variable. Hence, it provided a practical and ethical approach in understanding existing competencies among Grade 9 students in their natural educational context.

Study Setting

The study was conducted within the Schools Division of Cagayan de Oro City, specifically across four identified mega schools located in the West district. Pedro Oloy N. Roa Sr. High School, Canito-an National High School, Iponan National High School and Bulua National High School. These public secondary institutions are situated within peri-urban communities that represent a critical demographic cross-section of the city. A focal point of this setting is Pedro Oloy N. Roa Sr. High School, formerly Calaanan National High School, which is located in Sitio Cala-anan, Barangay Canito-an. The immediate locality is historically significant as a government resettlement project, a characteristic that heavily shapes the student population across the area. Consequently, the population is drawn from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, primarily composed of low to middle-income families.

These schools were chosen for the study for three reasons: they have students who need help they have many kinds of learners and they follow school rules. Grade 9 students were chosen for reasons too. First they use media and the internet a lot but many still haven't learned enough about how to check information. So they can easily believe news.

Second these schools have Filipino Grade 9 students who use phones and can go online anytime. Last these schools use the lessons, from the Department of Education. Doing this study here helps us see clearly how well Grade 9 students know about using media.

Research Respondents

The respondents of the study were the one hundred eighty (180) Grade 9 students from West II District, Cagayan de Oro City, School Year 2025-2026. These students were currently enrolled in the aforesaid schools where the study was conducted: Iponan National High School, Bulua National High School, Canito-an National High School, and Pedro Oloy N. Roa Senior High School.

Sampling Technique

In this study, Slovin's formula was used with 7% margin of error and a population of 1586 to get the desired number of respondents, which is one hundred eighty (180). The stratified sampling technique was

utilized to get the appropriate number of respondents by school. This was done by dividing the computed sample size by its population. Once selected, the identified students were invited to participate in the survey during the data collection period. Only those who were officially enrolled in Grade 9, present at the time of data collection, and who voluntarily agreed to participate were included in the study. This structured approach to sampling enhances the representation of the sample, minimizes selection bias, and strengthens the validity and reliability of the study findings.

Research Instrument

The instrument used in gathering the data was a questionnaire composed of two parts:

Part 1 dealt with the respondents' media literacy in terms of accessing media content, analyzing media critically, evaluating media messages, and creating media content. This is based on Potter's Media Literacy Theory.

Part II inquired about fake news identification skills based on recognizing credible sources, critical analysis of content, awareness of media technology, and cross-checking information. The variables were also adapted from Potter's Media Literacy Theory. However, the indicators are researcher-made with 10 items each using the four options: 4- Strongly Agree, 3- Agree, 2- Disagree, and 1- Strongly Disagree.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument, the items were reviewed by two DepEd Regional Supervisors and one education professor, all of whom were experts in the field. They evaluated the instrument to confirm its clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study's objectives. This expert validation ensured that the instrument accurately reflects the intended constructs.

Then, a pilot test was conducted on thirty (30) Grade 9 students who had similar characteristics to the final respondents but were not included in the actual study. The pilot test was conducted at Pedro Oloy N. Roa Senior High School on January 19, 2026, by the researcher. The pilot test showed good results because the students were able to understand all the questions. There were no questions or problems about the survey.

To check if the survey was reliable, Cronbach's alpha was used. The result was 0.80, which showed that the survey had a high level of consistency. This means that the questions were able to measure what they were supposed to measure. Because of this, the survey was considered valid, reliable, and suitable for the study.

Statistical Treatment of Data

After gathering the data the researcher used statistical tools. For Problem 1 and Problem 2 we used the standard deviation to understand their media skills. The mean and standard deviation helped us see how good they are with media. For Problem 3 we used something called Pearson r. It helped us find out if there is a connection between knowing media and being able to spot news. We looked at media and fake news to see if they are linked. The Pearson r tool was used to check this link, between media knowledge and spotting news.

Ethical Considerations

This study makes sure to protect every student's rights, dignity, and safety. We approach each step with honesty, care, and respect. Before anyone joins, both students and their parents hear exactly why we're doing this, what's involved, the possible benefits, and any risks. Everyone gives written permission before moving forward. Since the students are minors, we always get their parents' or guardians' consent, and we also make sure the students themselves are okay with joining. We select students based on what the

study requires. Joining is their own choice, no one is force. All students was treat fair no matter their gender, family life, or grades in school.

The researcher have no own interest that can change the result, and follow all right steps and rules in doing this work. The study was conducted under a qualified supervisor to ensure that all ethical principles guided the research from planning to dissemination. This narrative approach reflected a commitment to respecting the respondents' voices, ensuring transparency, and fostering an ethical research environment appropriate for investigating digital literacy's role in promoting critical media skills among studen.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part presented the results and discussion on media literacy and fake news identification skills among Junior High School Students. The data were presented in tabular form for better appreciation.

Results

Problem 1: What is the respondents' level of media literacy in terms of accessing media content, analyzing media critically, evaluating media messages, and creating media content?

Table 1
Summary of Respondents' Level of Media Literacy

Variable	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Accessing Media Content	3.15	0.76	Literate
Analyzing Media Critically	3.08	0.79	Literate
Evaluating Media Messages	3.11	0.80	Literate
Creating Media Content	3.17	0.80	Literate
Overall	3.13	0.79	Literate

Legend:

3.26 – 4.00 - Strongly Agree / Highly Literate 1.76 – 2.50 – Disagree / Slightly Literate
2.51 – 3.25 – Agree / Literate 1.00 – 1.75 – Strongly Disagree / Not Literate

The result show the students' general skill in using media in four parts with an overall **mean of 3.13 (SD=0.79)**, interpreted as **Literate**. This mean they are good and know how to use media well. So, students usually feel pretty confident when they're searching for information, studying, checking details, or creating their own stuff. They've figured out how to understand and use media the right way. Their scores in these areas are all pretty close, which means their skills are balanced.

In class, especially when they're doing research or discussing things online, you see them put these skills to work. They look into where information comes from, compare different sources, and double-check before sharing anything. If something doesn't seem right, some students ask questions. These habits show they're really applying what they've learned in real life. It helps them think things through, make smart choices, and use information responsibly.

Lan (2024) points out that students who learn about fake news are more careful about what they believe online. That just proves how important it is to pay attention and think before jumping to conclusions. Machate and Turpin (2020) also say that critical thinking helps people spot false information, because it makes you question and check the facts. All these studies just prove that your media skills get stronger the more you know, the more you check, and the harder you think.

Students actually scored highest in creating their own media—an average of 3.17. So, they clearly feel most confident when they're making something themselves. It shows they know how to create things that are fair, true, and accurate. Because they often work online and do projects, making and sharing content feels pretty natural for them. Using their phones and social media every day gives them a lot of practice checking facts and keeping away from unreliable sources. All that practice builds their confidence and helps develop solid habits. In the end, this helps them learn better. It sharpens their thinking, makes them better speakers and writers, and lets them produce schoolwork that's true and reliable.

This agree with Potter (2020), who say that knowing media is not just about reading or watching. Making your own work means doing it in an right way. This is similar to what Addatu said in 2022 that when teachers help students with activities the students get better at making things and thinking well.

The students did not do well when it came to looking at media carefully they got a score of 3.08. This means they know how to do it. They are not as good at it as they are at other things. Even though students are good, at using media they do not feel as sure of themselves when they have to look at it. They have a time finding unfair ideas, hidden meanings and figuring out if the news is true or not.

In life students like to use tools and make things but they have a hard time checking the news. We see this when they are working on research and projects. They focus on finishing their work of checking if the facts are good. This shows that their ability to judge information is still getting better. It can be hard for them to know which news to trust. Checking facts is important because it helps them understand their lessons better make choices and do their school work well.

This is what Fajardo said in 2023 that Filipino students are still learning how to tell if information is good. Szydowski said in 2025 that thinking well is very important to spot news. It helps people look closely and ask questions before they believe something. These study show that skill in media grow when you pay attention, check facts, and learn to think carefully.

Problem 2: What is the respondents' level of fake news identification skills based on recognizing credible sources, critical analysis of content, awareness of media technology, and cross-checking information?

Table 2
Summary of the Respondents' Level of Fake News Identification Skills

Variable	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Recognizing Credible Sources	3.08	0.83	High
Critical Analysis of Content	3.07	0.84	High
Awareness of Media Technology	3.11	0.82	High
Cross-Checking Information	3.20	0.78	High
Overall	3.12	0.82	High

Legend:

3.26 – 4.00 - Strongly Agree / Very High 1.76 – 2.50 – Disagree / Low
2.51 – 3.25 – Agree / High 1.00 – 1.75 – Strongly Disagree / Very Low

Table 2 presents the summary of students' level of **fake news identification** with an overall mean of **3.12 (SD=0.82)**, interpreted as **High**. This means students are pretty good at spotting and judging fake news. They've picked up some basic media literacy skills and know a few quick ways to figure out if something they find online is true.

In the classroom, you can actually see their confidence growing when they check information online. They're exposed to so much stuff every day that it's kind of natural for them to start questioning things and using easy fact-checking methods. Still, they don't always remember to use these strategies. Their skills are coming along, but most of the time, it's still pretty basic. This approach definitely helps them get better at judging what they see online. But you can also tell they need more practice with deeper analysis and more thorough checking if you want them to develop really strong media literacy.

Learning about media makes a major difference. It gives people real tools to understand and verify online info. UNESCO (2025) pointed out that media literacy helps learners find information, analyze it, and dig deeper into what they see online. That's how they make smarter decisions about what to trust. (2021) also emphasized that individuals with stronger media literacy skills are more effective in identifying false or misleading content. People point out that thinking carefully is really important when it comes to getting the facts right about information we find online.

The thing that stood out the most was that students are good at checking information from places with an average score of **3.20 (SD= 0.78)**. This is considered **High**. What this means is that students are strong at looking at lots of sources checking if things are true and making sure everything is correct before they believe it or share it with others. This shows that students are already doing some important things to figure out if news is fake or not.

Students know that what we see on the internet and social media can change the way information is shared and sometimes it can even be changed. Students understand that what we see in the media can be influenced by lots of things, like the online platforms and social media and this can affect the information we get from the online platforms and social media. This shows that they have a basic idea of how online media works. However, their understanding is still developing and needs to be improved. More guidance can help them become more aware and critical when using media.

This finding supports the idea of Fung et al. (2021), who explain that fake news detection improves when information is checked across different media sources for consistency. They highlight that comparing content from multiple platforms helps identify false or misleading claims. In addition, Gaozhao (2021) also found that individuals who actively cross-check information on social media are more successful in spotting fake news. The study emphasizes that careful verification of details strengthens users' ability to judge whether information is true or false.

On the other hand, the lowest mean was the variable, **critical analysis of content** with mean score of **3.07 (SD=0.84)**, interpreted as **High**. This means that kids are a little bit weaker when they have to think really deep about information. They might have a hard time finding secret messages, onesided stories, or sneaky little lies.

In the classroom, we see that while kids can find fake news when it is easy, they still find it more harder to check trickier stuff that needs bigger thinking and smart choices. This happens because the easy signs on the outside are fast to see, but thinking deep takes more time, focus, and practice with internet stuff. This shows that even if they can spot easy fake news, they still needs to get better at deep thinking and checking skills. This is super important because finding fake news also needs a strong brain and good choices. The results also show that not all kids have the same skills. Some kids are more careful and feel happy checking information, while other kids are not as good at it. This difference might happen because of how much internet they see, how they think, and their practice with online stuff. This matches what a person named Machete and Turpin (2020) said. They said that deep thinking is super important if you want to find fake news.

Also, Cho et al. (2025) suggest that students understand how online media works, although this skill still needs further strengthening to deepen their awareness and understanding.

Problem 3: Is there a significant relationship between the respondents' level of media literacy and fake news identification skills?

Table 3

Result of the Test on Relationship Between the Respondents' Level of Media Literacy and Fake News Identification Skills

Media Literacy	Fake News Identification Skills				
	Recog. Info	Cred. Srcs. Overall	Crit. Anal. Cont.	Awr. of Med. Tech.	Cr. Chk.
	r- value	r- value	r- value	r- value	r- value
	p- value	p- value	p- value	p- value	p- value
Accessing	0.53 ** 0.12 NS	- 0.26** 0.46 NS	0.27** 0.45 NS	0.37** 0.30 NS	0.26** 0.33 NS
Analyzing	0.72* 0.02 S	- 0.23** 0.52 NS	0.43** 0.21 NS	0.18** 0.62 NS	0.23** 0.27 NS
Evaluating	- 0.70* 0.02 S	- 0.35** 0.32 NS	0.24** 0.51 NS	- 0.02** 0.96 NS	- 0.83** 0.27 NS
Creating	- 0.24** 0.50 NS	- 0.24** 0.50 NS	0.36** 0.30 NS	0.14** 0.70 NS	0.20** 0.39 NS

Legend:

*Significant

**Not significant

Table 3 presents the relationship between students' media literacy (independent variable) and fake news identification skills (dependent variable). The result show weak and no strong link. This means that how well students use media does not necessarily tell us if they can spot news. Even if students know how to find things and read them and check them and make things online these skills are not yet fully learned or used well when they come across wrong or tricky information.

In life students may know how to use their phones and many different websites but they still have a hard time telling what is true and trusted news and what is fake and wrong news. This finding tells us that just knowing how to use media in a way is not enough to find wrong information. It means that being good at

using tools and websites does not automatically make you good at checking if news is true and right. This shows that media skills are not enough and students need to learn thinking while they study about using media well. So the study finds that there is no strong link between how much students know about media and their ability to tell which news is fake.

We can understand media skills better by looking at studies. Generalao from 2026 says that using gadgets and the internet helps students learn and enjoy their lessons but it only works well if teachers use them in the way. In the way Orbigiso and Pontillas, from 2026 explain that even if teachers know how to use technology they still face some problems when using it for teaching media skills. These problems may stop students from learning and using their media skills fully especially when they need to check if information is true or not. This is a big part of media skills.

Barakat et al. (2021) further explained that users' ability to identify fake news in social media depends on how carefully they evaluate and verify information before trusting it. This shows that active checking of details is important in improving accuracy in identifying false content.

When we look at different parts, just finding and reading stuff only helps a little bit, and it does not work all the time. Knowing how to find a story helps kids see good pages, but it don't always make them check the facts or see how the internet tricks them. In the same way, looking closely at a post helps them understand it, but it does not help them check who wrote it, know about tech, or find fake news. This mean that kids can find and read a story, but they often forget to ask if it is a lie. It shows a big gap between reading a story and knowing if it is true.

The kids usually just believe whatever stories are easy to find without checking if they are right. This makes it super easy for fake news to trick them. Also, being able to pick a favorite post or make your own video has almost no power to help kids find lies. This means that just because a kid can make an online video, it do not make them better at spotting fake stories. It shows that these skills are just too simple and are not enough to find sneaky lies. Students may evaluate or create media content, but they often fail to apply careful verification in real situations.

These findings align with studies emphasizing that access and analysis alone are insufficient without verification skills. Farago et al. (2024) explained that simply being able to access and understand information is not enough to ensure accuracy. They stress that individuals must also verify information through careful checking of sources and evidence. Fajardo (2023) highlighted that learners may understand and analyze content, but still struggle to identify false information if they do not practice verification. This shows that analysis must be paired with critical thinking skills. In addition, Avram et al. (2020) also emphasize that misinformation is best detected when individuals actively compare and verify information across multiple sources. They argue that verification is a key step in reducing the spread of false news.

Furthermore, the findings show that no single media literacy dimension is sufficient for effective fake news identification. It means that students' media literacy skills are present but not fully integrated into a consistent critical thinking process. It denotes that effective misinformation detection requires a combination of accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and especially verifying information.

As observed, students can engage with media, but they struggle to apply these skills critically and consistently. This highlights the need for stronger training in analysis, verification, and critical thinking to improve. Students' media literacy skills are present but are not yet fully integrated into a consistent critical thinking process. Effective misinformation detection requires a combination of accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and especially verifying information.

Generalao (2026) supports this by explaining that the use of multimedia technology in learning can improve engagement and performance, but its effectiveness depends on how well it is applied in instruction. This implies that tools alone are not enough without proper integration of critical thinking practices. Also, Ghadin et al. (2022) emphasize that automated fake news detection systems rely heavily on cross-checking information with reliable sources. Their study highlights that verification through trusted references is essential in identifying false content accurately. Moreover, Gunawan et al. (2022) show that technology-based approaches to fake news detection often combine multiple processes such as analysis, comparison, and verification. They stress that no single method is sufficient, reinforcing the need for integrated strategies in detecting misinformation.

Conclusion

This study finds that students show skills when they make their own media work. Students are careful to use words that're clear and true and fair when they create something to share. This shows that students can tell their ideas in a way and a right way and a neat way. Also students do well when they check if the news is real or fake. Students feel sure when they look at different places and compare what they read to see if the news is the same.

More, than that students think carefully when they look at stories or posts online and students know well that it is important to check the facts first in this world where we use phones and the internet every day. Students know that checking the facts is important when students use the internet and students use phones. Students show skills when students make their own media work and students check the facts.

Recommendation

From the findings of the study, the following are recommended;

1. Teachers should give students work where they look at news, videos, posts online and other things from the media. They should help students check where the news and information come from if the information is true why it is made and if the media can be trusted. This will help students learn to think and use the media in the right way.
2. Teachers should tell students to ask questions about what they read, watch or hear from the media. Talking in class thinking about what they learn from the media and doing exercises to check the sources of the news and information can help students see if something is unfair know which information from the media is good and make choices about what they see online from the media.
3. Teachers should make activities that help students get used to checking if the information from the media is true and safe before they believe it or share it. Students should look at trusted places to compare the facts from the media ask about things that have no proof from the media and think well about why something from the media is made and what it means from the media. This way students can make choices, about the media.

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