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EDFR 6300 Research Proposal

Statement of the topic

The problem to be investigated in this study is the perceived media literacy of students in Rio Grande Valley higher education institutes. A person's inability to evaluate media messages affects their understanding of them and capacity to determine whether they are credible.

Study of media literacy has been around for decades. There are academic journals dedicated to the topic, and it is recognized by the Texas Education Agency as an essential skill for multiple grade levels. However, as technologies advance, media literacy is lost in the shuffle. Digital natives are often assumed to already have these essential 21st century skills, so those who are not media literate are not given opportunities to learn or build these skills.

To determine if media literacy education is needed, this study will ask: How media literate are students who attend higher education institutes in the Rio Grande Valley?

Earlier media literacy research has been conducted as both quantitative and qualitative. While qualitative research on the subject provides a deeper understanding of a person's media literacy skills, this study is a starting point for a population spanning four counties. A quantitative study will provide numerical data that can be collected and analyzed faster than a qualitative study.

The target population includes more than 74,000 students; 600 of those will be selected as survey participants. They will be selected randomly but proportionally, so each higher education institute is represented in respects to how much of the target population it has. For example, South Texas College accounts for 43% of the target population, so 43% percent of the selected participants will be from South Texas College.

A measuring instrument for media literacy, specifically for college students, already exists. The Critical Evaluation and Analysis of Media (CEAM) Scale is a 27-item, 5-point Likert-like scale. This research study will use the CEAM Scale for a cross-sectional survey.

I predict the mean of the completed surveys will be near 3.05 and a standard deviation of 0.7. These numbers are based on the results of an earlier study utilizing the CEAM Scale at a Hispanic-serving institute in Central Texas. I predict Rio Grande Valley students will have similar results.

When results are analyzed, they can also be segmented by higher education institutes and the three categories included in the CEAM Scale, which are (1) questioning credibility, (2) recognizing audience, and (3) recognizing technical design.

Review of the literature

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Paragraph summary of literature

Even before a world of social media posts and 24-hour news channels, people were bombarded with media messages throughout the day. As we move further into the 21st century, it is difficult, if not impossible, to escape the news, videos, movies, and advertisements surrounding everyone. Having media literacy, the ability to identify the source of these messages, their meaning, and credibility, is vital.

This is especially true as lines between objective information and advertising blurs. Advertorials are one example. They are advertisements that appear to be a regular news or magazine article. Another example is influencers not following guidelines for labeling sponsored social media posts.

New generations growing up around technology delivering these messages may be familiar with the technology, but that does not mean they are media literate and know how to analyze and interpret media messages.

Akcayoglu and Daggol's study revealed the confusion some university students have about media literacy (2019). "An interesting finding regarding the definition of media literacy was that a substantial number of students thought that media literacy was posting something on media or using social media actively" (Akcayoglu & Daggol, 2019). Others in their study identified media literacy as "wisdom gained from the internet" and "being a columnist" (Akcayoglu & Daggol, 2019).

Confusion of the media literacy is not limited to students. "Most faculty in higher education media programs would probably argue that they teach students to become media literate. If push came to shove, however, they might not be able to articulate exactly what they mean by media literacy" (Christ, 2004).

Media literacy lines blur further as new terms like "digital literacy" and "information literacy" gain traction. Research involving these keywords often overlaps with research about media literacy. And the reverse happens as well. Research tools measuring media literacy limit them to surveying participants about traditional media, such as broadcast and advertisements.

"(F)or the purpose of examining comprehensive new media literacy competencies among college students, these instruments are not the best fit" (Threadgill, 2016). Fortunately, in recognizing this, Threadgill developed and tested the Critical Evaluation and Analysis of Media (CEAM) Scale, a Likert-like self-reporting instrument. A reliable, up-to-date survey tool is needed, because a gap in media literacy must be identified before it can be addressed.

Organizations and educators have recognized the importance of media literacy for decades. "We can't afford to be elitist about what counts as knowledge" (Hobbs, 2011). Media literacy is even included in the Texas Education Agency's Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills.

In addition to understanding professional media, media literacy skills allow people "to express themselves, have a voice, and advocate for social causes" (Schmidt, 2013). In a research study involving university students, a media literacy course raised students' awareness of how values

and beliefs shown in media messages could influence people and policies (Schilder, E., & Redmond, 2019)

“(M)edia literacy experiences are transformative. They change the way you experience media. And that changes the way you see yourself and the world around you” (Hobbs, 2011).

In addition to the everyday exposure to media messages most people get, residents in the Rio Grande Valley also often find themselves in the spotlight of national news for topics like immigration, severe weather, and recently COVID-19 outbreaks. In order understand these messages and portrayals, as well as to possibly create their own, college and university students must be media literate. And the first step in determining a need for media literacy education is determining the current level of student media literacy.

Research method

Method selected

In order to measure the perceived media literacy of students in Rio Grande Valley higher education institutes, quantitative research will be conducted. Quantitative research collects numerical data to analyze.

Survey research is one form of quantitative research and is used to gather data about the current status of a research subject. In the survey conducted, research participants will be self-reporting their views on their media literacy.

For this planned research project, the survey will be administered to participants once to get a snapshot view of media literacy levels. This will be a cross-sectional survey, as opposed to a longitudinal one, which involves multiple distributions of a survey.

The survey, which will be created on Google Forms, will be emailed to the selected participants' school e-mail accounts.

Rationale for method

Both quantitative and qualitative studies were used in earlier research in media literacy skills. While qualitative research can provide more insights and rich information about a person's media literacy with interviews and other forms of qualitative data collection, it would be a lengthy process. This is especially true as the target population is spread across four counties.

A quantitative research approach would allow a much faster collection of data. As it is numerical data, the analysis will not involve the need to transcribe notes or search for themes. In this quantitative survey research, the information being measured and the scale for the measurements are determined before the survey is conducted.

As mentioned in the section above, a survey will be used in this study. A survey is the measuring instrument to utilize when collecting data about a population's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Other forms of quantitative research involve variables or behavior changes. Neither of those are factors in this planned study, which is why those methods of quantitative research were not selected.

As this is a starting point in regional media literacy research, the survey will be used to get a snapshot of the subject. It will be a cross-sectional survey, since it will collect data at one point and not as part of a trend, cohort, panel, or follow-up survey.

A large chunk of time is needed to create and pilot the questionnaire for survey research. Fortunately, a validated survey about media literacy specifically created for college students is already in circulation. Threadgill and Price verified the properties of the CEAM Scale, the 27-item media literacy survey (Threadgill & Price, 2019). The survey covers questioning credibility, recognizing audience, and recognizing technical design. They conducted a confirmatory factor analysis and item response theory to validate and determine the generalizability of the CEAM Scale (Threadgill & Price, 2019).

In addition to saving time, using the CEAM Scale for this study has additional benefits. It allows a comparison of this study's results to other populations where the scale has been utilized. Also, a direct comparison can be made if the same survey is used in future media literacy research in the Rio Grande Valley.

In this research plan, the surveys will be distributed as a Google Form to selected participants. Google Form was chosen as it is a free online tool, allowing easy data collection. The survey will be emailed to the selected participants' school email accounts. The use of email in surveys is a concern in other studies, since it may leave out some of the target population. In this case, the target population is college students, and each of the institutes involved provides students with email accounts. As official school updates are sent through these email accounts, students should be checking their school email accounts regularly.

Research design

Survey research begins with the questionnaire. As mentioned above, there are established surveys for measuring media literacy, and this research plan will utilize the CEAM Scale. This will save time from having to construct and pilot-test a questionnaire.

The target population is students in higher education institutes located in Texas' Rio Grande Valley, which consists of Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy counties. Information about the sampling strategy is in the section below.

With the cooperation of The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, South Texas College, Texas Southmost College, and Texas State Technical College Harlingen Campus and permission of their respective institutional review boards, a pre-determined number of students from each institute will be randomly selected.

An email will be sent informing the students they were randomly selected for the research and to expect the survey in the following week. The survey will then be emailed with that time frame, allowing students two weeks to complete it. A follow-up reminder email will be sent at the start of the second week and will ask participants who have already completed the survey to disregard the message.

The survey offers participants five response options ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. It also covers three segments of media literacy: questioning credibility, recognizing audience, and recognizing design.

The respondents' results will be collected, and the mean and standard deviation will be calculated. The data can also be broken up into replies given for the three sections mentioned above and analyzed by higher education institute.

Sampling strategy

The survey participants will be selected randomly with proportional stratified sampling. As mentioned earlier, the target population is students attending higher education institutes in Texas' Rio Grande Valley. Those institutes include The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, South Texas College, Texas State Technical College Harlingen Campus, and Texas Southmost College.

Those institutes alone have populations totaling more than 74,000 students. UTRGV's numbers are based on its Fall 2020 enrollment profile for the 92.6 percent of its students residing in the region. The remaining student enrollment numbers are based on statistics provided on the Community College Review's website.

A recommended sample size of 10 percent of the target population is too large for this survey. Existing research found on measuring media literacy in a broader higher education audience did not exceed even 1,000 students for their sample size. Those studies were also conducting quantitative research.

For this research plan, the sample size will be 600 students. Based on student enrollment numbers, 43% of the sample (258 people) would come from South Texas College, 40% (242) would come from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, 10% (58) from Texas Southmost College, and 7% (42) from Texas State Technical College.

Rationale for sampling strategy

The research planned is a study of not just students at one higher education institute in the region. While it was a possible approach, UTRGV and TSTC each have more than 40 percent of the target population. If the results of this survey will be used to generalize students in the region, leaving out a large chunk of the target population would have the same disadvantages as purposive sampling.

Proportional stratified sampling will be used to get an appropriate amount of representation from each institute. It is worth noting, in the four counties the Rio Grande Valley spans, there are other institutes, such as Texas A&M's Higher Education Center at McAllen and Our Lady of the Lake University's facility in La Feria. These are mainly satellite facilities of larger institutions. Neither report more than 250 students, as of Fall 2020. Because of the small enrollment numbers, they were not included in the plans for sampling.

Cluster sampling was considered, as research conditions prevent gathering a list of all the members of the target population, as well as the population being large and spread out. Individual courses would have been used as clusters.

Others researching media literacy in college students have used purposive sampling by surveying students in entry-level courses. A disadvantage of this approach is the exclusion of students who do not take these courses. They may have tested out of the need to take the course, transferred from another institute, or returned to college after a gap and already credited for these introductory courses.

The random, though proportional, selection of students will provide a better representation of the target population.

Data sources proposed for study

Data collected from the CEAM Scale would be used for this research. The scale will be sent to the randomly selected participants. Dr. Elizabeth J. Threadgill shared the scale in her 2016 dissertation titled "Assessing Media Literacy Among Students Enrolled in Basic Writing and First-Year Composition." The scale has 27 items with five response options, like a c. It is included below.

As selected participants will be emailed the survey as a Google Form, the data will be accessible as soon as it is received by accessing the Google account used to create the form.

CRITICAL EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS OF MEDIA (CEAM) SCALE (REVISED)

Instructions: Write and bubble in your student ID number on the scantron. As you read each statement, you may imagine you are using the technologies through which you most often access visual media (computer, tablet, phone, television, etc.). Additionally, you may imagine any topic, product, or story that interests you. Please rate each statement on a scale of A to E with A being "strongly disagree" and E being "strongly agree." Bubble in your answers for each statement on the provided scantron. Answer each based on what is true of you most of the time, and answer each as quickly as possible.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| A | B | C | D | E |
| strongly disagree | disagree | undecided | agree | strongly agree |

1. When I watch a commercial, I think about how the music makes me feel.
2. I think about how television shows, movies, or videos can be designed to elicit an emotional response.
3. I consider what viewpoints might be missing when I watch or read the news.
4. I think about why some television shows, movies, or videos may appeal to different audiences.
5. When watching television, movies, or videos, I think about the effect the editing techniques have on me.
6. When watching or reading a news story, I think about whether or not it would appeal to diverse populations.
7. I think about how news stories can be designed to sway me with facts and logic.
8. I distinguish between expert sources and non-expert sources in news stories.
9. If I see that a for-profit company is promoting a social cause in an advertisement, I recognize that the company is still advertising itself.
10. I think about how advertisements can be designed to sway me with facts and logic.
11. When watching or reading the news, I think about different purposes the story might have.
12. I question a news story when credible sources for the ideas are not included.
13. When viewing an advertisement, I think about the effect the design has on me.
14. When watching television, movies, or videos, I think about the lifestyles that are being promoted.
15. I recognize that the political affiliations of news providers may influence how news stories are reported.
16. When watching a television show, movie, or video, I think about whether or not it would appeal to diverse populations.
17. I think about how the design of advertisements can draw my attention to specific images.
18. I think about how news stories can be designed to elicit an emotional response.
19. When viewing an advertisement, I think about whether or not it would appeal to diverse populations.
20. I think about the strategies news reporters use in news stories.
21. I think about how advertisements can be designed to elicit an emotional response.
22. When watching or reading the news, I think about whether or not any images that are included accurately illustrate the content of the story.
23. When watching or reading the news, I think about how images can be altered to fit the content of the news story.
24. When viewing an advertisement, I distinguish between facts and opinions about the product.
25. I think about the strategies advertisers use to promote their products.
26. I think about why some advertisements may appeal to different audiences.
27. I recognize that different news stories are written to appeal to people who have different values

Data analyses performed

The mean and standard deviation of the completed surveys will be determined. Fortunately, as the CEAM Scale was used in earlier research, there are existing results, which can be used for comparison. Threadgill conducted her research at a Hispanic-serving institute in Central Texas. I predict Rio Grande Valley college students' media literacy skills will average similar numbers to that research, which would be a mean of 3.05 and a standard deviation of 0.7.

The data can also be segmented in respects to (1) questioning credibility, (2) recognizing audience, and (3) recognizing technical design. If there is a significantly lower mean for any of these categories, it will highlight areas where media literacy education is needed.

The survey results can be broken down by the four higher education institutes participants attend to identify any statistically significant differences.

If quantitative, what makes this study valid and generalizable?

The CEAM scale is a media literacy measuring tool specifically geared for college students. It is a self-reporting tool that has been researched. Dr. Larry Price and Dr. Threadgill measured the reliability and validity of the scale in their 2016 Journal of Media Literacy Education article “Assessing Online Viewing Practices among College Students.”

They conducted a confirmatory factor analysis, as well as an item response theory analysis to test the generalizability of the survey.