Enhancing Media Literacy Among Older Adults for Creative Engagement: A Case Study in Khlong Sam Wa, Bangkok, Thailand

Nitta Roonkaseam, Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand
Sirimon Puengsangwal, Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand
Nisararat Wilailuk, Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand
Pratchaya Tongchum, Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand

Abstract

In Thailand's rapidly evolving digital landscape, media literacy is crucial for older adults' well-being and active participation. This study aimed to enhance media literacy among older adults in Khlong Sam Wa, Bangkok, Thailand, focusing on creative and safe digital engagement. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving 41 participants in a six-module curriculum covering foundational media literacy concepts, media ecology, legal and ethical considerations, and active media participation. Pre- and post-test assessments and qualitative interviews were conducted. Results showed significant improvement in participants' media literacy scores, from 16.24 to 18.39 out of 20. Qualitative findings revealed increased confidence in digital navigation, a deeper understanding of media influence, and a newfound enthusiasm for creative expression. Participants produced two TikTok videos raising awareness about romance scams, demonstrating the practical application of their new skills.

Keywords: Media Literacy, Older Adults, Creative Engagement

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Introduction

In Thailand's rapidly evolving digital landscape, older adults face unprecedented challenges in navigating an increasingly digitalized society. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digital adoption, transforming how information is consumed and shared, particularly through social media platforms like Facebook, LINE, and TikTok. This digital transformation has exposed older adults to new vulnerabilities, as evidenced by recent data from Khlong Sam Wa district, where investment scams (37%), romance scams (28%), and fraudulent health product advertisements (22%) constitute the majority of reported online threats. Lee (2018) emphasizes that addressing these emerging digital threats requires media literacy education that extends beyond traditional classroom settings.

The shift towards digital platforms has fundamentally altered the information ecosystem, particularly affecting how older adults engage with media content. While this transformation has democratized content creation through user-generated content (UGC), it has also presented significant challenges. Research by Pérez-Escoda and colleagues (2021) reveals a growing distrust in traditional media sources, leading users to rely more heavily on peer networks for information—a trend that potentially increases vulnerability to misinformation. Thailand's Anti-Fake News Center has documented this phenomenon, reporting over 20 million shares of false information between October 2020 and June 2021. This situation is particularly concerning for older adults, who often encounter unique obstacles in developing media literacy due to varying levels of digital literacy and the rapid evolution of digital technologies (Lee, 2018).

When people turn to content that aligns with their existing biases, often without proper verification, it can lead to significant negative impacts on health beliefs, scientific understanding, and cultural relationships. In Thailand, this challenge is compounded by sophisticated online scams targeting older adults through various channels, including investment schemes, romance scams, and fraudulent health products. The prevalence of these threats, coupled with declining trust in traditional information sources, creates a pressing need for targeted intervention.

Given these challenges, this study aimed to enhance media literacy among older adults in Khlong Sam Wa, Bangkok, empowering them for creative and safe digital engagement. While existing research has established the importance of media literacy education, there remains a significant gap in understanding how to effectively develop these skills among older adults, particularly those aged 60 and above in urban communities. Through a structured curriculum covering foundational media literacy concepts, media ecology, and legal considerations, this research sought to bridge the digital literacy gap and promote more resilient online behaviors. The study focused on developing practical skills for identifying and responding to online threats while fostering active participation in digital spaces, addressing the critical need for targeted media literacy education that specifically considers the unique vulnerabilities and learning needs of older adults in rapidly digitalizing urban environments.

Research Objectives

This study was guided by four interconnected objectives designed to create sustainable change in how older adults engage with digital media in the Khlong Sam Wa community:

1. To assess the media literacy levels of older adults before and after participating in the intervention program, provide quantitative measures of the program's effectiveness.
2. To enhance participants' fundamental skills in critical evaluation of media content, particularly focusing on their ability to identify and analyze potential online threats such as investment scams, romance scams, and misleading health information.
3. To develop practical competencies in navigating digital platforms safely and effectively, enabling participants to confidently engage with social media while maintaining awareness of potential risks.
4. To evaluate how participants apply their newly acquired media literacy skills in addressing real community issues, as demonstrated through their creation of awareness content about romance scams on TikTok.

Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively evaluate the effectiveness of a media literacy intervention program for older adults in Khlong Sam Wa, Bangkok. The methodology was designed to address the study's four interconnected objectives through both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis.

Population and Sample

The study focused on adults aged 40 and above residing in Khlong Sam Wa district, Bangkok. This age threshold was strategically selected based on research indicating that individuals born before 1983 often face unique challenges in digital adaptation compared to younger "digital natives". Through purposive and convenience sampling, we recruited 41 participants who met our specific inclusion criteria: permanent residence in Khlong Sam Wa district, basic smartphone proficiency, regular access to digital devices, and ability to attend all training sessions.

Research Instruments and Data Collection

The research instruments were developed in alignment with the NBTC's MELit Project framework. At the core of our study was a six-module curriculum, adapted into an intensive two-day format delivering 12 hours of focused training. The curriculum was designed to build competencies in media literacy, media ecology, legal and ethical issues, digital safety, active participation, and content creation. To gather comprehensive data, we utilized multiple instruments including a 20-point scale pre- and post-test assessment measuring media literacy knowledge, semi-structured interview protocols for in-depth qualitative insights, and structured observation forms for documenting participant engagement and challenges.

Our data collection process unfolded across three distinct phases. The pre-intervention assessment established baseline measurements through media literacy tests and initial participant interviews regarding digital media habits and challenges. During the intervention implementation, we delivered the six-module curriculum while conducting continuous participant observation and facilitating hands-on practical exercises and group activities. The post-intervention evaluation comprised post-test administration, follow-up interviews exploring participant experiences and perceived changes, and assessment of practical applications through participants' created content.

Figure 1: The Six-Module Curriculum Structure of the Media Literacy Intervention Program, Showing the Progression From Foundational Concepts to Practical Application

Data Analysis

The analysis of our data followed a comprehensive approach integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods. Our quantitative analysis encompassed descriptive statistics of participant demographics and pre/post-test scores, paired t-tests to measure statistical significance of changes in media literacy scores, and analysis of specific competency areas showing greatest improvement. The qualitative component involved thematic analysis of interview transcripts to identify key patterns in participant experiences, content analysis of observation notes documenting learning progression, and integration of quantitative and qualitative findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of program effectiveness.

This methodological framework was specifically designed to capture both measurable improvements in media literacy skills and deeper insights into participants' learning experiences and behavioral changes in digital media engagement. The integration of multiple data collection methods and analysis approaches allowed us to develop a nuanced understanding of how older adults engage with and learn about digital media literacy.

Research Findings

The study demonstrated notable improvements in media literacy across multiple dimensions. These findings are organized and presented according to the study's four primary objectives.

Assessment of Media Literacy Levels Among Older Adults

The study's findings revealed significant improvements in participants' media literacy skills based on pre-test and post-test assessments of 41 participants. The quantitative analysis showed a statistically significant increase in media literacy competency after completing the intervention program, with the mean score rising from 16.24 to 18.39 out of 20 points (p<.001).

Table 1: Summary of Pre-test and Post-test Scores (N=41)

Statistical Measure	Pre-test	Post-test	Change
Mean Score	16.24	18.39	+2.15
Highest Score	19	20	+1
Lowest Score	10	15	+5
Score Range	9	5	-4

A detailed analysis of individual performance revealed several significant findings. The intervention's effectiveness was particularly evident in the achievement of maximum scores, with three participants reaching 20 points in the post-test. The program's positive impact was further demonstrated by the fact that 85% of participants showed improvement in their scores, with only one participant experiencing a slight decline in performance. Most notably, one participant demonstrated remarkable progress, improving from 10 to 20 points. The intervention also appeared to create more consistent performance levels across the group, as indicated by the narrowing of the score range from 9 points in the pre-test to 5 points in the post-test and the decrease in standard deviation from 2.31 to 1.92.

These quantitative findings provide compelling evidence of the media literacy intervention program's effectiveness in enhancing participants' competencies. The substantial improvements observed across most participants, along with the statistical significance of the changes, suggest that the program successfully achieved its educational objectives, contributing to enhanced media literacy skills among the target population.

Enhancement of Critical Evaluation Skills

The qualitative analysis through participant interviews revealed significant improvements in critical evaluation skills, with behavioral changes manifesting in both individual and collective learning contexts. Our findings highlighted three key areas of development that emerged from participants' experiences and reflections.

The first notable change was participants' adoption of more rigorous information verification practices. As one participant emphasized: "I now check information sources before sharing," demonstrating a fundamental shift from passive content consumption to active critical evaluation. This behavioral change reflected a deeper understanding of digital media responsibility and the importance of source verification.

The second significant development was the emergence of knowledge transfer within family networks. Participants began taking on educational roles within their families, particularly with younger generations. This was exemplified by one participant who reported teaching her grandchildren about online safety - a role transformation that highlights both increased confidence and practical application of learned skills.

The third key observation was the development of peer learning networks among participants. The program fostered a collaborative learning environment where participants actively shared experiences and strategies for evaluating online content. This peer-to-peer knowledge exchange enhanced the learning process and created sustainable support systems for continued skill development beyond the formal training sessions.

Figure 2: Participants Engaging in Collaborative Content Creation Activities,
Demonstrating the Practical Application of Media Literacy Skills

These findings suggest that the program not only enhanced individual critical evaluation skills but also catalyzed broader social learning dynamics, creating multiple channels for knowledge sharing and skill reinforcement within both family and community contexts.

Development of Digital Platform Navigation Skills

The findings revealed significant advancements in participants' practical digital competencies across multiple dimensions, demonstrating the program's effectiveness in developing essential digital navigation skills. Our observations align with Vroman and colleagues' (2015) findings that older adults can develop strong digital competencies when provided with structured support and opportunities for hands-on practice. Participants showed marked improvement in their ability to independently navigate various social media platforms, reflecting increased confidence in their digital interactions. This enhanced confidence was particularly evident in their improved understanding of digital safety measures and their heightened ability to recognize and respond to potential online threats.

A particularly noteworthy outcome was the spontaneous emergence of peer-to-peer learning networks among participants. This finding supports Sayago and colleagues' (2013) ethnographic research, which identified collaborative learning and mutual support as crucial factors in older adults' successful ICT adoption. These informal networks became valuable platforms for sharing experiences and digital safety tips, creating a supportive learning environment that extended beyond the formal training sessions. Martínez-Alcalá and colleagues' (2018) similarly found that such peer support networks significantly enhance digital literacy retention among older learners.

The impact of the program reached beyond individual participants, as many began transferring their newly acquired knowledge to family members. This intergenerational knowledge transfer reflects findings by Ivan and Hebblethwaite (2016), who documented how older adults can become active digital participants and mentors within their families

once they gain confidence with technology. Several participants reported teaching digital safety skills to their grandchildren, demonstrating what Schehl et al. (2019) describe as a "digital empowerment cycle," where increased digital competence leads to greater social engagement and knowledge sharing across generations.

Figure 3: Participants Demonstrating Their Content Creation Skills Through Tiktok Video Production, Addressing Romance Scams in Their Community

Application of Media Literacy Skills in Addressing Community Issues

The practical application of acquired media literacy skills was most notably demonstrated through participants' creation of awareness content about romance scams on TikTok, reflecting their successful transformation from passive consumers to active content creators. The participants developed engaging content that effectively addressed a significant community concern through various creative approaches. Their videos skillfully simulated realistic scam scenarios using chat conversation formats, making the content both relatable and educational for their target audience. The participants demonstrated sophisticated understanding by illustrating common tactics employed by romance scammers and clearly showing the gradual trust-building process that fraudsters typically use before attempting financial scams.

The effectiveness of their content was particularly evident in how they tailored their messages to resonate with their peer group. Participants carefully considered age-appropriate presentation styles and communication approaches, ensuring their content would be both accessible and impactful for their target audience. This thoughtful adaptation of content demonstrated not only their technical skills in digital content creation but also their deep understanding of their audience's needs and preferences.

The success of this content creation project was further supported by both quantitative and qualitative findings, indicating that the program effectively achieved its objectives in enhancing media literacy among older adults. The consistently high attendance rate and enthusiastic participation in content creation activities suggested that the intervention format

successfully addressed the learning needs of the target demographic. Perhaps most significantly, the project fostered the development of a supportive learning environment where participants actively collaborated in skill development, contributing to improvements in media literacy at both individual and community levels.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the effectiveness of media literacy enhancement among Thai older adults in the digital age, revealing three significant transformations. First, there was a substantial improvement in media literacy scores from 16.24 to 18.39 out of 20. Second, participants transformed from passive consumers to active content creators, particularly evident in their creation of TikTok videos addressing romance scams. Third, peer-to-peer learning networks emerged, extending the program's impact to families and communities.

These findings lead to three practical recommendations: piloting the curriculum in three diverse districts within the next year, implementing a peer learning "buddy system" to leverage tech-savvy older adults' expertise, and developing specialized modules focusing on creative video content production. For future research, we recommend conducting longitudinal studies to examine long-term impact, developing standardized assessment tools specifically designed for older adults, and investigating cultural factors influencing program effectiveness across different communities.

This study represents a significant step toward understanding how to effectively enhance media literacy among older adults while highlighting the importance of continued research and development in this crucial area. The findings suggest that implementing these recommendations can contribute to creating a more inclusive and empowering digital environment for Thai older adults.

While this study demonstrates promising results, several limitations should be noted. The relatively small sample size of 41 participants and the focus on a single district may limit generalizability. Additionally, the short duration of the intervention (12 hours over two days) may affect the long-term retention of skills. Implementation challenges include varying levels of digital device access among older adults, potential resistance to new technology adoption, and the need for ongoing technical support beyond the formal training period. Future studies should address these limitations through larger-scale implementations across diverse demographics and longer intervention periods.

The practical implementation of this program faces several challenges that require consideration. These include securing sustainable funding for program expansion, maintaining participant engagement over time, and adapting the curriculum to accommodate different learning paces and technological comfort levels. Additionally, the rapid evolution of digital platforms and scam tactics necessitates regular curriculum updates to remain relevant and effective.

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Contact email: nitta@pnru.ac.th