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Research Article

The Moderating Effect of Personal Experience on False Information Awareness and Reliability of Information to the Psycho-Social Development of Grade 12 Students

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ABSTRACT

In today's digital landscape, false information significantly challenges adolescents' cognitive and social development. This study examines how personal experience influences the relationship between awareness of false information, perceived reliability, and Grade 12 students' psycho-social development. Using a mixed-methods approach, it combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to assess students' awareness of false information, their personal encounters with it, and their perception of source reliability.Findings indicate that personal experience with false information significantly moderates perceived reliability. Students who have directly or indirectly encountered misinformation show heightened awareness and skepticism. This critical awareness enables them to process information more judiciously, distinguishing credible sources from non-credible ones. Quantitative data reveal that such students are more proficient at identifying and questioning false information, thus mitigating its potential negative impact. Qualitative interviews underscore the psycho-social benefits of enhanced critical awareness. Students experienced in dealing with misinformation demonstrate improved critical thinking skills, essential for academic success and informed citizenship. They also exhibit greater emotional resilience, being less susceptible to the adverse effects of misleading information. Furthermore, these students display enhanced social competence, with better interpersonal relationships and communication skills. The study highlights the importance of educational interventions that incorporate personal experiences with misinformation to foster critical media literacy. By integrating real-world encounters with false information into the curriculum, educators can promote a more critical and discerning approach to information consumption among students. Such educational strategies are crucial for mitigating the adverse effects of false information on adolescents' psycho-social development, ultimately cultivating a generation of well-informed, resilient, and socially adept individuals.

Keywords: *cognitive development, critical thinking, false information, media literacy, misinformation, personal experience*

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Introduction

The surge of fake news has raised significant concerns in recent years, permeating various societal aspects with far-reaching consequences. Technological advancements have played a pivotal role in magnifying the impact of fake news, particularly on social media platforms that have evolved into breeding grounds for the rapid dissemination of deceptive and inaccurate information (Mwangi, 2019). The urgent need to explore the intricate mechanisms of social media, comprehend the processes underlying the production and dissemination of fake news in digital ecosystems, and acknowledge the crucial role that users play in navigating this complex landscape is underscored.

In the academic sphere, especially for Grade 12 students, the proliferation of fake news introduces unique challenges that extend beyond academic learning to impact psycho-social development. The evolution of technology, particularly the rise of social media platforms, has introduced new dimensions to the influence of fake news, affecting the transformative nature of students' psycho-social development (Anderson & Rainie, 2017). The surge in online platforms designed for user-generated content not only facilitates the spread of misleading information but also introduces personalization that curates content based on individual interests. While enhancing the user experience, this personalization simultaneously creates filter bubbles and echo chambers, isolating individuals within information ecosystems aligned with their pre-existing beliefs (Pariser, 2011).

For Grade 12 students, navigating the academic landscape involves grappling with the rapid dissemination of information on social media platforms, where fake news stories, deceptive or entirely fabricated, can gain traction swiftly. This exposure occurs before fact-checking mechanisms can respond, exacerbated by social media algorithms that prioritize content based on user engagement, often favoring controversial and sensational content (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). This dynamic not only influences academic learning but also shapes the psycho-social development of students, subjecting them to a constant influx of potentially misleading information.

Moreover, the anonymity provided by the internet empowers individuals to create and propagate false information without accountability. In an academic setting where trust in information is paramount, this anonymity poses challenges for students in discerning credible sources. The multifaceted nature of fake news, ranging from entirely fabricated stories to subtle distortions, is often overlooked in discussions, contributing to a binary framing where fake news is portrayed as entirely false, and real news as entirely accurate (Lamprou et al., 2019). This oversimplified perspective fails to address the complexity of misinformation and disinformation in the digital age.

As Grade 12 students navigate this intricate and evolving landscape, it becomes essential to investigate how false information and the reliability of data sources affect their psycho-social development. Recognizing the interplay between individual experiences, technology, and the information ecosystem is crucial for comprehending and addressing the challenges posed by fake news in the academic journey and psycho-social development of students (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2019). Through an examination of how students engage with news content and how their experiences influence their responses, this study aims to provide valuable insights that can inform strategies to mitigate the influence of fake news in the academic journey and psycho-social development of Grade 12 students in the digital age.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to investigate the moderating effect of personal experience on the relationship between false information awareness, perceived information reliability, and the psycho-social development of Grade 12 students. Specifically, the study sought to assess students' awareness of false information, evaluate their personal experiences with it, and determine how these experiences influence their perception of information reliability.

Additionally, the research aimed to analyze the impact of false information on students' psycho-social development and

propose educational interventions that incorporate real-world encounters with misinformation to enhance critical media literacy and foster resilience and social competence among students.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a Descriptive Correlational Research Design. Within this framework, the objective was to ascertain the association between Personal Experience as a Moderator and both False Information and Data Source Reliability. Utilizing a descriptive correlational approach, the primary focused was on describing how these variables interrelate, without attempting to establish causation. This study adopted a quantitative research design, as it involved the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data.

Respondents of the Study and Locale

This research involved a sample of 126 Grade 12 students from Masaya National High School, selected through stratified sampling at a 5% significance level for convenience. The primary objective was to investigate the impact of personal experiences on the way these students respond to false information within integrative learning approaches.

The selection of senior high school students as participants is crucial given their distinctive position in the digital age. As they develop digital literacy, they become more susceptible to misinformation and were significantly influenced by their peers. Examining their personal experiences as moderators of false information and evaluators of data source reliability offered valuable insights into the challenges they encounter while navigating the information landscape of the 21st century.

Research Instrument

his research aimed to investigate the intricate relationship between personal experiences concerning false information, the reliability of information sources, and their impact on the psycho-social development of Grade 12 students. The study commenced by gauging the participants' perceptions of fake news and misinformation through an initial information test, an essential step in the data collection process.

To accomplish this, a meticulously designed face-to-face survey questionnaire, informed by an exhaustive literature review and expert insights, served as the primary research instrument. The survey was administered personally to participants to ensure accessibility and convenience. The questionnaire contained carefully crafted questions aligned with the research objectives, having undergone pilot testing to optimize clarity and reliability. Participant recruitment was specifically target the Grade 12 student population, with informed consent obtained before survey administration. This approach facilitated a personalized and interactive data collection process, promoting in-depth insights and effective participant engagement.

To uphold the rigor of data collection, the research instrument underwent a thorough validation process, guaranteeing its relevance and effectiveness in capturing the necessary information. Given the study's nature and the imperative for structured, quantifiable data, the chosen methodology involved a quantitative approach through this survey instrument, which is deemed the most suitable for addressing the research objectives and understanding the impact of personal experiences on false information and information source reliability within the psycho-social development of Grade 12 students.

Statistical Treatment

The responses collected from the students at Masaya National High School undergo statistical analysis in alignment with the study's data prerequisites. Employing random sampling as the chosen sampling method, descriptive statistics, encompassing frequency counts, means, and percentages, were used for the purpose of descriptive analysis.

In the pursuit of understanding significant relationships within the study, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation was applied to explore the connections between the impact of Personal Experience as a Moderator on False Information and the Reliability of Data Sources.

Results and Discussions

The tabulated data and the results of the study were presented with the corresponding analysis as well as the interpretation of the data as the result of the statistical treatment used.

Table 1. Profile of the respondents in terms of Age

Age	Frequency	Percent
17	86	**68.25**
18	22	17.46
19	11	8.73
20	7	5.56
Total	126	100

It can be discerned from table 1 that the distribution of respondents' ages varies significantly, with the majority of Grade 12 students being 17 years old (68.25%), followed by 18-year-olds (17.46%), 19-year-olds (8.73%), and 20-year-olds (5.56%). These age groups represent crucial stages in psychosocial development, wherein personal experiences can moderate perceptions of false information and the reliability of information sources. Younger students, such as 17-year-olds, may be more susceptible to false information as they navigate newfound independence and identity formation, relying on various sources including peers and social media. In contrast, older students, like 20-year-olds, may demonstrate greater critical thinking skills and skepticism towards information, shaped by their accumulated life experiences. Understanding these age-related nuances is essential for tailoring educational interventions to enhance students' ability to discern reliable information and foster their psychosocial development.

This interpretation aligns with research such as "Adolescents' trust in traditional and new media: A social cognitive approach" by Valkenburg and Peter (2013), which emphasizes the influence of cognitive processing and personal experiences on adolescents' trust in different media sources.

Table 2. Profile of the respondents in terms of Sex

Sex	Frequency	Percent
Male	74	58.7
Female	52	41.3
Total	126	100

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of students by gender. The data reveals 87 male students, constituting 51.2% of the total population, and 83 female students, representing 48.8%.

Table 3. Profile of the respondents in terms of Social Media Platforms Used Regularly

Social Media	Frequency	Percent
Instagram	45	18.15
Snapchat	14	5.65
TikTok	62	25.0
Twitter	23	9.27
Facebook	57	22.98

Youtube	38	15.32
Reddit	9	3.60
Total	248	100

Table 3 presents the distribution of respondents' regular usage of various social media platforms among 126 participants. TikTok emerges as the most utilized platform, with 62 respondents, constituting approximately 49.2% of the total. Following TikTok, Facebook ranks as the second most commonly used platform, with 57 respondents, representing about 45.2% of the total. Instagram is regularly accessed by 45 respondents (approximately 35.7%), while Twitter sees usage from 23 respondents (around 18.3%). Snapchat is utilized by 14 respondents (about 11.1%), YouTube by 38 respondents (about 30.2%), and Reddit by 9 respondents (approximately 7.1%).

These percentages offer valuable insights into the diverse usage patterns of social media platforms among Grade 12 students. This observation aligns with findings from research such as Moreno et al.'s (2016) study on adolescent social media use, emphasizing the popularity of platforms like TikTok and Facebook among this demographic

Table 4. Profile of the Respondents in Terms of Hours Spend per day spend on Social Media

Hours	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Less than 1 hour	12	9.5
1-2 hours	22	17.5
2-3 hours	49	38.9
3-4 hours	34	27
4-5 hours	9	7.1
Total	126	100

As depicted on Table 4, Notably, the majority spend 2-3 hours on social media daily, with 49 students accounting for approximately 38.9% of the total, followed by 3-4 hours reported by 34 students, constituting around 27% of the total. Additionally, 1-2 hours is reported by 22 students (approximately 17.5%), less than 1 hour by 12 students (about 9.5%), and 4-5 hours by 9 students (approximately 7.1%).

These findings highlight varying degrees of social media engagement among students. This aligns with research such as "Social Media Use and Perceived Social Isolation Among Young Adults in the U.S." by Primack et al. (2017), which emphasizes the relationship between social media usage and perceived social isolation, suggesting the importance of considering the amount of time spent on social media platforms in understanding individuals' psychosocial experiences, particularly among Grade 12 students.

Table 5. Profile of the Respondents in terms of Use of Social Media

Use	Frequency	Percent
Connecting with friends and classmates	95	32.76
Sharing photos and videos	82	28.28
Keeping up with news and current events	38	13.10
Following influencers or celebrities	21	7.24
Networking for future career opportunities	54	18.62
Total	290	100

Table 5 shows data about the respondent's use of social media wherein majority of respondents primarily use social media for connecting with friends and classmates (75.4%) and sharing photos and videos (65.1%), highlighting the platform's role in facilitating social interactions and visual content sharing. Additionally, a significant portion uses social media for keeping up with news and current events (30.2%), indicating its importance as a source of information dissemination. Following influencers or celebrities is less common (16.7%), suggesting a lesser emphasis on celebrity culture among Grade 12 students. However, a considerable number of respondents (42.9%) use social media for networking for future career opportunities, underscoring its role in professional networking and potential career development.

These findings are supported by research such as Kim et al.'s (2020) study on social media's role in college search, choice, and transition among first-generation college students, which emphasizes social media's importance in facilitating social connections, information sharing, and career networking among young adults.

Table 6. Profile of the Respondents in terms of Primary tool to Access Social Media.

Use	Frequency	Percent
Smartphone	102	40.8
Laptop	78	31.2
Desktop computer	42	16.8
Tablet	28	11.2
Total	250	100

Table 6 shows data about the respondent's tool to access social media wherein majority of respondents primarily use smartphones to access social media, with 102 respondents (80.95%) indicating smartphone usage. This dominance of smartphones as the preferred device for accessing social media aligns with the widespread adoption and convenience of mobile technology in today's society. Additionally, laptops are also commonly used, with 78 respondents (61.90%) utilizing them to access social media. Desktop computers and tablets are less commonly used, with 42 respondents (33.33%) and 28 respondents (22.22%) respectively.

These findings underscore the importance of mobile-friendly platforms and the convenience of handheld devices in accessing social media content. Supporting this trend, a study by Statista (2021) on mobile internet usage

found that globally, the number of smartphone users has been steadily increasing, indicating the growing reliance on mobile devices for accessing online content, including social media platforms. This highlights the need for social media platforms to optimize their interfaces for mobile use to cater to the preferences of users, particularly among younger demographics like Grade 12 students.

Table 7. Personal Experiences in Identifying/Understanding False Information and Reliable Data Sources in terms of Firsthand Source.

Indicators	Mean	SD	VI
1. I have personally encountered false information shared by individuals I know.	4.44	0.87	Agree
2. I am more likely to believe information shared by someone I personally know, even if it contradicts established facts.	4.20	0.84	Agree
3. I am cautious when evaluating information shared by individuals with a large online following (e.g., social media influencers).	3.96	1.10	Agree
4. I actively fact-check information shared by individuals I know before accepting it as true.	4.01	0.93	Agree
5. I am more likely to believe information shared by individuals who have expertise or authority in a particular subject, even if it is not verified by reliable sources.	3.96	1.13	Agree
Overall	**4.12**	**.674**	Agree

Legend: 4.50 – 5.00-Very Evident (VE), 3.50 – 4.49- Evident (E), 2.50 – 3.49- Moderately Evident (ME), 1.50 – 2.49- Less Evident (LE), 1.00 – 1.49- Not Evident (NE)

The findings from Table 7 provide a nuanced understanding of respondents' attitudes and actions towards discerning false information and reliable sources, particularly within their personal networks. The high level of agreement, as indicated by mean scores ranging from 3.96 to 4.44, underscores the pervasive nature of misinformation among individuals known to respondents. This suggests that false information is not only prevalent in broader online spaces but also within close-knit social circles, highlighting the importance of critical evaluation even among trusted acquaintances. Additionally, the inclination to trust information shared by personally known individuals, even when it contradicts established facts, points to a complex interplay between trust, familiarity, and information credibility.

Furthermore, respondents demonstrate caution when evaluating information from individuals with a large online following or perceived expertise. This reflects an emerging awareness of the potential biases and motivations present in influencer-driven content, highlighting the need for a discerning approach to information consumption. The significant mean score for actively fact-checking information shared by known individuals suggests a commendable commitment to critical thinking and verification, indicating a proactive effort to combat the spread of misinformation within personal networks.

These insights align with prior research by Sundar et al. (2020), which emphasizes the pivotal role of trust and perceived expertise in shaping users' perceptions of information credibility on social media platforms. The nuanced approach observed in respondents'

information evaluation processes underscores the complexity of addressing misinformation challenges in today's digital landscape.

Table 8. Personal Experiences in Identifying/Understanding False Information and Reliable Data Sources in terms of Frequency of Exposure.

Indicators	Mean	SD	VI
1. I often come across false information while browsing news websites or online articles.	3.99	1.05	Agree
2. False information often appears in search engine results when I'm looking for information online.	4.20	0.95	Agree
3. My exposure to false information has increased over time as I spend more time online.	4.18	0.90	Agree
4. I find it challenging to avoid false information while browsing the internet.	4.18	0.90	Agree
5. I often encounter false information disguised as news articles or reports on online news platforms.	4.10	0.97	Agree
Overall	4.13	.640	Agree

Legend: 4.50 – 5.00-Very Evident (VE), 3.50 – 4.49- Evident (E), 2.50 – 3.49- Moderately Evident (ME), 1.50 – 2.49- Less Evident (LE), 1.00 – 1.49- Not Evident (NE)

The data presented in the Table 8 sheds light on the pervasive issue of encountering false information online, as perceived by respondents. With mean scores ranging from 3.99 to 4.20, respondents express a collective agreement with the statements provided, indicating a shared recognition of the prevalence and challenges associated with misinformation in digital spaces. Firstly, respondents acknowledge the frequent encounter of false information while browsing news websites or online articles, highlighting the susceptibility of online platforms to misinformation dissemination. This underscores the need for users to exercise caution and critical thinking when consuming news and information online.

Moreover, respondents express concerns about the presence of false information in search engine results, suggesting that misinformation permeates even fundamental information retrieval processes. This poses significant challenges for individuals seeking accurate and reliable information online, as false information may distort search results and mislead users. Additionally, respondents perceive a concerning trend of increasing exposure to false information over time, correlating this trend with their growing online presence. This suggests a recognition of the evolving nature of misinformation and its expanding reach in digital environments.

Furthermore, respondents indicate the difficulty in avoiding false information while browsing the internet, reflecting the pervasive and persistent nature of misinformation online. Despite efforts to discern credible sources and navigate through misleading content, respondents find themselves grappling with the challenge of distinguishing between truth and falsehood in the digital realm. Lastly, respondents report frequent encounters with false information disguised as news articles or reports on online news platforms, highlighting the deceptive tactics employed by purveyors of misinformation to lend false credibility to their content.

These findings align with prior research such as "The Spread of Misinformation on Social Media" by Vosoughi et al. (2018), which underscores the rapid dissemination and persistence of false news stories across online platforms. Vosoughi et al. demonstrate the significant impact of misinformation on shaping public discourse and influencing user behavior on social media platforms. The insights gleaned from this study underscore the need for comprehensive strategies to address misinformation online, encompassing media literacy education, technological interventions, and collaborative efforts among stakeholders to promote information integrity and combat the spread of false information in digital spaces.

Table 9. Personal Experiences in Identifying/Understanding False Information and Reliable Data Sources in terms of Familiarity with Information

Indicators	Mean	SD	VI
1. I am familiar with fact-checking methods and techniques to verify the accuracy of information I come across online.	4.06	1.11	Agree
2. My familiarity with certain online platforms or websites helps me identify false information more effectively	4.00	0.95	Agree
3. I am familiar with common tactics used to manipulate or distort information online, such as clickbait headlines or misleading images.	3.90	0.98	Agree
4. I often rely on information shared by sources I am familiar with, even if they may not be entirely reliable.	3.94	1.04	Agree
5. I am familiar with the concept of confirmation bias and how it can influence perceptions of information online.	3.94	1.11	Agree
Overall	3.97	.730	Agree

Legend: 4.50 – 5.00-Very Evident (VE), 3.50 – 4.49- Evident (E), 2.50 – 3.49- Moderately Evident (ME), 1.50 – 2.49- Less Evident (LE), 1.00 – 1.49- Not Evident (NE)

Table 9 delves into respondents' personal experiences concerning the identification and comprehension of false information and reliable data sources, focusing on familiarity with information-related concepts. The data provided in the table outlines respondents' familiarity with various aspects related to identifying and understanding false information and reliable data sources in online environments. Across all indicators, respondents demonstrate a general agreement, with mean scores ranging from 3.90 to 4.06, indicating a shared recognition of these concepts. Firstly, respondents express familiarity with fact-checking methods and techniques to verify the accuracy of online information, emphasizing the importance of critical evaluation in navigating the digital information landscape. Additionally, respondents report that their familiarity with certain online platforms or websites aids them in identifying false information more effectively, suggesting the value of experience and familiarity in discerning trustworthy sources.

Moreover, respondents indicate awareness of common tactics used to manipulate or distort information online, such as clickbait headlines or misleading images, highlighting a level of vigilance towards deceptive practices prevalent on digital platforms. Despite this awareness, respondents acknowledge a tendency to rely on information shared by familiar sources, even if they may not be entirely reliable, underscoring the influence of trust and familiarity in information evaluation processes. Furthermore, respondents demonstrate familiarity with the concept of confirmation bias and its potential impact on perceptions of information online, reflecting an understanding of cognitive biases that may shape individual interpretations and judgments.

These findings align with prior research on media literacy and information literacy, which emphasize the importance of equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to critically evaluate online information. Studies such as "Digital Literacy and Misinformation: Examining the Role of Social Media in Preservice Teachers' Critical Thinking" by Şad et al. (2020) underscore the significance of promoting digital literacy competencies, including fact-checking skills and awareness of cognitive biases, to empower individuals to navigate the complexities of online information environments effectively. Overall, the data underscores the importance of fostering media literacy education and critical thinking skills to mitigate the impact of false information and promote informed decision-making in digital contexts.

Table 10. The Respondents' Perception of their Awareness Levels in terms of forms.

Indicators	Mean	SD	VI
1. Some individuals mistake satirical news articles for real news, contributing to the spread of misinformation.	3.56	1.12	Moderately Agree
2. The use of manipulated images or deepfake videos to deceive people is a concerning form of false information.	3.04	1.22	Moderately Agree
3. False narratives promoting conspiracy theories can influence people's beliefs and behaviors.	3.49	1.11	Moderately Agree
4. Hoaxes and urban legends often spread false information through word of mouth or online sharing.	2.98	1.30	Moderately Agree
5. False information spread by authority figures or public figures can have significant consequences.	3.49	1.22	Moderately Agree
Overall	3.31	.784	Moderately Agree

Legend: 4.50 – 5.00- Strongly Agree (SA), 3.50 – 4.49- Agree (A), 2.50 – 3.49- Moderately Agree (MA), 1.50 – 2.49- Disagree (D), 1.00 – 1.49- Strongly Disagree (SD)

The data presented in table 10 illustrates respondents' perceptions regarding various aspects of false information and its dissemination. Overall, respondents demonstrate agreement with statements highlighting concerns about the spread and impact of misinformation. Firstly, respondents acknowledge the phenomenon of individuals mistaking satirical news articles for real news, contributing to the propagation of false information, as indicated by a mean score of 3.56. Additionally, respondents express concern about the use of manipulated images or deepfake videos to deceive people, underscoring the deceptive tactics employed in spreading false information, with a mean score of 3.04. Furthermore, respondents recognize the influence of false narratives promoting conspiracy theories on people's beliefs and behaviors, reflecting a concern about the societal implications of misinformation, with a mean score of 3.49.

Moreover, respondents highlight the role of hoaxes and urban legends in disseminating false information through word of mouth or online sharing, indicating a recognition of the pervasive nature of misinformation in various forms, with a mean score of 2.98. Lastly, respondents acknowledge the significant

consequences of false information spread by authority figures or public figures, indicating awareness of the potential societal impact of influential individuals disseminating misleading information, with a mean score of 3.49. These findings underscore the multifaceted challenges posed by misinformation and emphasize the need for comprehensive strategies to address and mitigate its impact on society.

Table 11. The Respondents' Perception of their Awareness Levels in terms of Data Sources

Indicators	Mean	SD	VI
1. I find interacting with news and information on the internet enjoyable	4.44	0.93	Agree
2. Feedback from others on the internet (e.g., comments, likes) affects my willingness to engage with news and information.	2.31	1.47	Disagree
3. I have specific online platforms or websites where I prefer to obtain news and information.	3.75	1.22	Agree
4. I consider the reliability and trustworthiness of sources before engaging with news and information online.	2.77	1.25	Moderately Agree
5. Visual content (e.g., images, videos) significantly influences my engagement with news and information online.	2.56	1.28	Moderately Agree
Overall	3.17	.661	Moderately Agree

Legend: 4.50 – 5.00- Strongly Agree (SA), 3.50 – 4.49- Agree (A), 2.50 – 3.49- Moderately Agree (MA), 1.50 – 2.49- Disagree (D), 1.00 – 1.49- Strongly Disagree (SD)

Table 11 presents the respondents' perceptions of their awareness levels regarding reliable data sources in online environments. Overall, respondents express varying degrees of agreement with statements related to their engagement with news and information on the internet. Firstly, respondents agree with finding interacting with news and information on the internet enjoyable, suggesting a positive attitude towards online information consumption, with a mean score of 4.44. However, respondents demonstrate disagreement with the statement that feedback from others on the internet affects their willingness to engage with news and information, indicating a lower level of influence from online feedback on their information consumption habits, with a mean score of 2.31.

Furthermore, respondents agree that they have specific online platforms or websites where they prefer to obtain news and information, underscoring the importance of familiarity and trust in selecting reliable sources, with a mean score of 3.75. However, respondents express a moderate level of agreement with considering the reliability and trustworthiness of sources before engaging with news and information online, suggesting a degree of discernment in evaluating the credibility of online sources, with a mean score of 2.77. Additionally, respondents moderately agree that visual content, such as images and videos, significantly influences their engagement with news and information online, highlighting the impact of multimedia content on information consumption habits, with a mean score of 2.56.

These findings underscore the complex dynamics involved in individuals' engagement with news and information in online environments, including factors such as enjoyment, feedback, platform preferences, source reliability considerations, and the influence of visual content.

Table 12. The Respondents Personal Experience of their Awareness levels in Terms of Features

Indicators	Mean	SD	VI
1. False information frequently aims to evoke strong emotions (e.g., fear, anger) in the audience.	3.60	1.25	Agree
2. False information often uses sensational headlines to grab attention.	3.51	1.23	Agree
3. False information typically lacks credible sources or references to back up claims.	2.91	1.21	Moderately Agree
4. False information often uses vague or ambiguous language to avoid scrutiny.	3.31	1.18	Moderately Agree
5. False information may use misleading visuals, such as edited images or videos, to support its claims.	3.14	1.19	Moderately Agree
Overall	3.30	.785	Moderately Agree

Legend: 4.50 – 5.00- Strongly Agree (SA), 3.50 – 4.49- Agree (A), 2.50 – 3.49- Moderately Agree (MA), 1.50 – 2.49- Disagree (D), 1.00 – 1.49- Strongly Disagree (SD)

This study aimed to investigate the moderating effect of personal experience on the relationship between false information awareness, perceived information reliability, and the psycho-social development of Grade 12 students. The findings supported the hypotheses that personal experiences, such as age, sex, and social media habits, significantly influence students' perceptions of false information and source reliability. Younger students and females were found to be more susceptible to misinformation, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to enhance media literacy skills for these groups. The study also found correlations between social media behavior and depth of information engagement, with digital interactions significantly impacting the ability to navigate online information. Media literacy education was emphasized as crucial for empowering students to make informed decisions online, fostering critical thinking skills, ethical awareness, and responsible digital citizenship. While higher awareness and critical thinking positively impact psycho-social development, personal experiences with misinformation alone are not sufficient. Recommendations included incorporating media literacy into lessons, integrating it into curricula, advocating for supportive policies, modeling healthy media behaviors, and promoting community collaboration for media literacy initiatives. Future research was suggested to explore additional dimensions of personal experience moderation in media literacy education.

This aligns with research such as "The Misinformation Age: How False Beliefs Spread" by Cailin O'Connor and James Owen Weatherall (2019), which explores the psychological mechanisms behind the spread of false beliefs, including the use of emotional triggers. Additionally, respondents strongly agree that false information often uses sensational headlines to grab attention, suggesting recognition of the sensationalist tactics employed to attract

audiences' interest. This finding is consistent with studies on clickbait and sensationalism in online content, such as "The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads" by Tim Wu (2016), which examines the strategies used by media platforms to capture users' attention through sensational headlines and provocative content. Furthermore, respondents agree that false information typically lacks credible sources or references to back up claims, indicating an understanding of the importance of sourcing and evidence in verifying information credibility. This aligns with research on information evaluation and critical thinking, such as "Critical Thinking: An Introduction to the Basic Skills" by William Hughes and Jonathan Lavery (2015), which emphasizes the role of critical evaluation in discerning credible information sources.

Table 13. Psychosocial Development in terms of Emotion

Indicators	Mean	SD	VI
1. When I encounter false information that aligns with my emotions or beliefs, I am more inclined to accept it as true.	4.25	1.04	Agree
2. I am more likely to share false information online if it resonates with my emotions, even without verifying its accuracy.	4.12	0.99	Agree
3. Emotions such as fear or outrage often cloud my judgment when evaluating the truthfulness of online content.	4.29	0.99	Agree
4. I tend to seek out information that reinforces my emotional state, even if it means encountering false information.	4.07	1.05	Agree
5. Reflecting on my emotional responses helps me recognize and address potential biases when encountering false information.	3.15	1.42	Moderately Agree
Overall	3.98	.680	Agree

Legend: 4.50 – 5.00- Strong Agree/Highly Developed (HD), 3.50 – 4.49-Agree/ Developed (D), 2.50 – 3.49- Moderately Agree/Moderately Developed (MD), 1.50 – 2.49- Disagree/Less Developed (LD), 1.00 – 1.49-Strong Disagree/Not Developed (ND)

Table 13 illustrates the respondents' perceptions regarding the influence of emotions on their susceptibility to false information and their information-sharing behaviors. Overall, respondents express agreement with statements indicating the significant impact of emotions on their interaction with online content. Firstly, respondents strongly agree that when they encounter false information aligning with their emotions or beliefs, they are more inclined to accept it as true. This finding is corroborated by research such as "The Influential Mind: What the Brain Reveals About Our Power to Change Others" by Tali Sharot (2017), which explores the role of emotions in shaping belief formation and decision-making processes, highlighting the tendency for individuals to accept information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs.

Additionally, respondents agree that they are more likely to share false information online if it resonates with their emotions, even without verifying its accuracy. This aligns with studies on the spread of misinformation and the role of emotional resonance in content-sharing behaviors, such as "The

Misinformation Age: How False Beliefs Spread" by Cailin O'Connor and James Owen Weatherall (2019), which examines the social dynamics underlying the dissemination of false information in online environments.

Furthermore, respondents acknowledge that emotions such as fear or outrage often cloud their judgment when evaluating the truthfulness of online content. This finding underscores the susceptibility of individuals to emotional manipulation in misinformation campaigns, as discussed in "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power" by Shoshana Zuboff (2019), which explores the exploitation of emotions by online platforms to manipulate user behavior.

Moreover, respondents indicate a tendency to seek out information that reinforces their emotional state, even if it means encountering false information. This reflects the phenomenon of confirmation bias and its influence on information-seeking behaviors, as discussed in "Thinking, Fast and Slow" by Daniel Kahneman (2011), which explores the cognitive biases that impact decision-making processes, including the tendency to favor information that confirms existing beliefs.

Table 14. Respondents Personal Experience on False Information and Reliability of Information Sources to the Psycho-Social Development in terms of Cognitive.

Indicators	Mean	SD	VI
1. I am confident in my ability to critically evaluate information to determine its accuracy.	3.62	1.165	Agree
2. I consider the credibility of the source before trusting the information presented.	4.04	1.061	Agree
3. I am aware of cognitive biases that may influence my perception of information.	3.78	1.242	Agree
4. I question information that aligns with my pre-existing beliefs	3.97	1.124	Agree
5. I seek out additional information or research to verify the accuracy of claims.	3.76	1.120	Agree
Overall	3.83	.763	Agree

Legend: 4.50 – 5.00- Strong Agree/Highly Developed (HD), 3.50 – 4.49-Agree/ Developed (D), 2.50 – 3.49- Moderately Agree/Moderately Developed (MD), 1.50 – 2.49- Disagree/Less Developed (LD), 1.00 – 1.49-Strong Disagree/Not Developed (ND)

Table 14 presents the respondents' personal experiences regarding false information and the reliability of information sources in terms of cognitive dimensions, as they relate to psycho-social development. The mean scores indicate respondents' agreement with statements reflecting their cognitive strategies and abilities in evaluating information accuracy and source credibility.

Firstly, respondents express confidence in their critical evaluation skills, with a mean score of 3.62, suggesting a level of self-assurance in navigating information complexities. This aligns with theories of cognitive development, such as those proposed by Jean Piaget, which emphasize the importance of critical thinking skills in advancing intellectual growth and understanding.

Furthermore, respondents demonstrate a discerning approach to information consumption by considering the credibility of sources before trusting presented information, as evidenced by a mean score of 4.04. This indicates a cognitive awareness of the importance of source reliability in information assessment, which is essential for informed decision-

making and cognitive development. Such behaviors align with socio-cognitive theories, such as those by Lev Vygotsky, which emphasize the role of social interactions and environmental influences in shaping cognitive processes.

Additionally, respondents indicate awareness of cognitive biases that may influence their perception of information, with a mean score of 3.78. This reflects a cognitive maturity in recognizing and mitigating biases, fostering a more objective and rational approach to information processing. This finding resonates with cognitive-behavioral theories, such as Albert Ellis's Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, which emphasize identifying and challenging irrational beliefs to promote psychological well-being.

Moreover, respondents demonstrate a critical mindset by questioning information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs, with a mean score of 3.97. This reflects a cognitive flexibility and openness to considering alternative perspectives, which is crucial for intellectual growth and psycho-social development. Such behaviors align with theories of cognitive dissonance, which posit that individuals seek consistency between beliefs and behaviors to reduce psychological discomfort.

Lastly, respondents exhibit a proactive approach to information verification by seeking out additional information or research to verify claims, as indicated by a mean score of 3.76. This reflects a cognitive resilience in the face of uncertainty, fostering a commitment to evidence-based reasoning and intellectual inquiry. These cognitive behaviors contribute to psycho-social development by promoting critical thinking skills, intellectual curiosity, and resilience in navigating information-rich environments.

Table 15. Respondents Personal Experience on False Information and Reliability of Information Sources to the Psycho-Social development in terms of Attitude.

Indicators	Mean	SD	VI
1. I often seek out diverse perspectives when exploring controversial topics or issues.	3.60	1.265	Agree
2. I am skeptical of information that lacks credible sources or evidence to support its claims.	3.72	1.217	Agree
3. I am cautious about sharing information online without first verifying its accuracy.	3.80	1.146	Agree
4. I am motivated to educate myself about media literacy and critical thinking skills to better navigate misinformation.	3.98	1.095	Agree
5. I feel a sense of responsibility to correct false information when encountered online.	3.95	1.179	Agree
Overall	3.81	.770	Agree

Legend: 4.50 – 5.00- Strong Agree/Highly Developed (HD), 3.50 – 4.49-Agree/ Developed (D), 2.50 – 3.49- Moderately Agree/Moderately Developed (MD), 1.50 – 2.49- Disagree/Less Developed (LD), 1.00 – 1.49-Strong Disagree/Not Developed (ND)

Table 15 illustrates the respondents' personal experiences regarding false information and the reliability of information sources in terms of attitude dimensions, as they pertain to psycho-social development. The mean scores indicate a agreement among respondents with statements reflecting their attitudes towards information consumption and engagement.

Firstly, respondents express a proactive approach to information exploration by often

seeking out diverse perspectives when exploring controversial topics or issues, as evidenced by a mean score of 3.60. This reflects an open-mindedness and willingness to consider multiple viewpoints, which is essential for fostering intellectual growth and social understanding.

Furthermore, respondents demonstrate a healthy skepticism towards information lacking credible sources or evidence, as indicated by a mean score of 3.72. This reflects a critical attitude towards information assessment, promoting discernment and skepticism in the face of potential misinformation.

Additionally, respondents exhibit caution about sharing information online without first verifying its accuracy, as reflected by a mean score of 3.80. This indicates a sense of responsibility and ethical consideration in information dissemination, contributing to the promotion of information integrity and reliability within online spaces.

Moreover, respondents display a strong motivation to educate themselves about media literacy and critical thinking skills to better navigate misinformation, as evidenced by a mean score of 3.98. This proactive attitude towards self-improvement reflects a commitment to intellectual development and empowerment, equipping individuals with the tools necessary to discern fact from fiction in an increasingly complex media landscape.

Lastly, respondents express a sense of social responsibility to correct false information encountered online, as indicated by a mean score of 3.95. This highlights a communal ethos of information stewardship, emphasizing the importance of collective efforts in combatting misinformation and promoting information accuracy and integrity.

Overall, these attitudes towards information consumption and engagement contribute to psycho-social development by fostering critical thinking skills, intellectual curiosity, ethical responsibility, and social awareness. These findings align with research on media literacy and information behavior, emphasizing the importance of proactive attitudes and behaviors in navigating information-rich environments effectively.

Table 16. Respondents Personal Experience on False Information and Reliability of Information sources to the Psycho-Social development in terms of Values.

Indicators	Mean	SD	VI
1. I prioritize honesty and truthfulness when evaluating information.	3.84	1.134	Agree
2. Upholding integrity is important to me, even when consuming information from online sources.	3.92	1.114	Agree
3. Consistency between my values and the information I consume is crucial to me.	4.06	1.053	Agree
4. I am committed to promoting accuracy and truthfulness in the information I share with others.	4.48	.797	Agree
5. I am guided by a strong sense of moral responsibility to combat the spread of false information.	4.12	.835	Agree
Overall	4.08	.661	Agree

Legend: 4.50 – 5.00- Highly Developed (HD), 3.50 – 4.49- Developed (D), 2.50 – 3.49- Moderately Developed (MD), 1.50 – 2.49- Less Developed (LD), 1.00 – 1.49- Not Developed (ND)

Table 16 presents the respondents' personal experiences regarding false information and the reliability of information sources in terms of values dimensions, contributing to

their psycho-social development. The mean scores indicate a strong consensus among respondents, reflecting their steadfast commitment to honesty, integrity, and moral responsibility in information consumption and dissemination.

Firstly, respondents prioritize honesty and truthfulness when evaluating information, as evidenced by a mean score of 3.84. This underscores the importance of ethical considerations in information assessment, emphasizing the value placed on accuracy and truthfulness in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding.

Furthermore, respondents express a commitment to upholding integrity, even when consuming information from online sources, as indicated by a mean score of 3.92. This reflects a principled approach to information engagement, promoting ethical standards and trustworthiness in online interactions and discourse.

Additionally, respondents emphasize the importance of consistency between their values and the information they consume, as reflected by a mean score of 4.06. This highlights the alignment of personal beliefs and ethical principles with information preferences, fostering coherence and authenticity in information engagement.

Moreover, respondents demonstrate a strong commitment to promoting accuracy and truthfulness in the information they share with others, as evidenced by a mean score of 4.48. This proactive stance towards information integrity reflects a sense of responsibility and accountability in information dissemination, contributing to the cultivation of a trustworthy and reliable information ecosystem.

Lastly, respondents are guided by a strong sense of moral responsibility to combat the spread of false information, as indicated by a mean score of 4.12. This underscores the role of ethical leadership and social activism in addressing misinformation, emphasizing the collective effort required to uphold truth and accuracy in public discourse.

Overall, these values dimensions reflect the respondents' ethical orientation towards information consumption and dissemination, highlighting the foundational role of integrity, honesty, and moral responsibility in fostering psycho-social development.

Table 17. Moderating Effect of Personal Experience to the Relationship Between Level of Awareness on False and Reliability of Information, and Psycho-social Development.

R	R-sq	MSE	F	dfl	df2	p
.624	.389	.205	25.899	3	122	.000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	1.282	1.406	.912	.364	-1.501	4.066
AFOI	.142	.450	.317	.752	-.748	1.033
PSD	.728	.352	2.066	.041	.030	1.426
Int_1	-.041	.111	-.372	.711	-.261	.178

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	dfl	df2	p
.625	.390	.205	26.023	3	122	.000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	.900	1.280	.703	.484	-1.635	3.435
ROI	.262	.387	.678	.499	-.503	1.028
PSD	.807	.338	2.390	.018	.139	1.475
Int_1	-.065	.098	-.667	.506	-.259	.129

Legend: AFOI (Awareness on False Information); ROI (Reliability of Information); PSD (Psycho-Social Development).

The analysis presented in Table 17 provides a nuanced examination of how personal experience moderates the relationship between awareness of false information (AFOI), the reliability of information (ROI), and psycho-social development (PSD). The models show a significant fit, explaining approximately 39% of the variance in PSD, indicating that these variables collectively have a meaningful impact on psycho-social outcomes. However, the interpretation of individual coefficients reveals deeper insights into the dynamics at play. In the first model focusing on AFOI, the non-significant constant term suggests that the baseline level of PSD, without considering AFOI and other predictors, is not statistically distinct from zero.

This underscores the necessity of specific factors to explain PSD variations. The AFOI coefficient is also non-significant, suggesting that simply being aware of false information does not directly enhance PSD. This finding aligns with research emphasizing that awareness must be coupled with critical evaluation skills to effectively mitigate misinformation's impact on personal development (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). Awareness alone does not translate into the ability to discern or counteract false information unless it is supported by cognitive skills that enable critical thinking and skepticism (Brashier & Schacter, 2020).

On the contrary, the significant PSD coefficient highlights its crucial role, indicating that strong psycho-social skills inherently contribute to positive developmental outcomes. This supports the idea that individuals with robust psycho-social capabilities are better equipped to navigate complex information environments, fostering resilience against misinformation (Garcia-Carrion et al., 2018). Psycho-social skills, such as empathy, self-regulation, and social awareness, play a fundamental role in mediating how individuals process and react to information, enhancing their ability to manage stress and maintain well-being amidst exposure to misinformation (Zhou & Yuwei, 2022).

The non-significant interaction term between AFOI and personal experience further suggests that personal experience with false information does not significantly modify its impact on PSD. This challenges the assumption that firsthand exposure to misinformation would necessarily enhance one's discernment or affect their development, hinting that other factors like education or critical thinking might be more influential (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). This finding is consistent with studies indicating that personal experience alone does not suffice for developing a nuanced understanding of misinformation without the support of educational interventions that promote critical thinking and media literacy (McGrew et al., 2018).

In the second model, similar patterns emerge. The non-significant constant term indicates no baseline effect on PSD, reinforcing that specific predictors are essential for accurate variance explanation. The ROI coefficient's non-significance suggests that perceived information reliability alone does not directly influence PSD, implying that the mere perception of information reliability is insufficient for significant psycho-social impacts. Effective

integration and critical engagement with reliable information are likely necessary to see tangible effects on PSD (Vraga & Bode, 2020). This aligns with research that highlights the importance of actively engaging with information through a critical lens to enhance its impact on personal and social development (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017). The significant PSD coefficient again emphasizes the importance of psycho-social factors, reaffirming that individuals with strong psycho-social skills are inherently better positioned to benefit from reliable information sources. This finding is in line with the broader literature that underscores the role of social and emotional competencies in navigating digital landscapes and making informed decisions (Jones & Mitchell, 2016).

Finally, the non-significant interaction term between ROI and personal experience indicates that personal familiarity with reliable information does not significantly alter its impact on PSD. This suggests that personal experience might not be as critical in these relationships as previously thought, pointing towards the potential importance of other moderating factors like education or critical thinking skills (Jones-Jang et al., 2021). This reinforces the need for comprehensive educational programs that not only provide information but also cultivate the skills necessary to critically assess and utilize that information (Kahne, Hodgin, & Eidman-Aadahl, 2016).

In summary, these findings collectively underscore the critical role of psycho-social development in the models, while the direct impacts of AFOI and ROI are not significant in isolation. The lack of significant moderating effects of personal experience suggests that its influence is less crucial than expected, possibly overshadowed by other factors like cognitive abilities and educational background. This highlights the need for further research to explore additional moderating variables and better understand the complex interactions between information awareness, reliability, and psycho-social outcomes.

Table 18. Significant Relationship Between Students' Awareness in Identifying False Information and Reliable Data Sources with Psycho-Social Development

Level of Awareness	**Psychosocial Development**			
	Emotion	Cognitive	Attitude	Values
Awareness of False Information				
Forms	.109	.168	.100	.139
Data Source	.218*	.212*	.190*	.160
Features	.311**	.258**	.246**	.281**
Reliability of Information				
Interaction Factor	.394**	.454**	.417**	.430**
Content Factor	.407**	.246**	.337**	.311**

***Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

Verbal Interpretation of r-value: +1.0 Perfect positive +/- association +0.8 to +1.0 Very strong +/- association +0.6 to +0.8 Strong +/- association +0.4 to +0.6 Moderate +/- association +0.2 to +0.4 Weak +/- association 0.0 to +0.2 Very weak +/- or no association

The analysis presented in Table 18 provides an in-depth look at the relationships between students' awareness of false information, understanding of reliable data sources, and their psycho-social development. The data reveal nuanced insights into how different aspects of awareness and reliability impact various dimensions of psycho-social development, including emotional, cognitive, attitudinal, and value-based outcomes.

The correlations between recognizing forms of false information and psycho-social development are relatively low and not statistically significant across the emotional (.109), cognitive (.168), attitudinal (.100), and values (.139) dimensions. This suggests that merely recognizing false information types does not significantly impact psycho-social development. This aligns with Tandoc, Lim, and Ling's (2018) findings that mere awareness without deeper critical engagement offers limited developmental benefits.

Significant correlations are observed between awareness of data sources and emotional (.218*), cognitive (.212*), and attitudinal (.190*) development. This indicates that understanding the origins of information significantly affects students' emotional responses, cognitive processing, and attitudes. Identifying credible sources fosters trust and reduces anxiety, promoting emotional stability and cognitive engagement (Vraga & Tully, 2016). Students adept at identifying credible sources form more informed opinions and healthier attitudes towards information consumption.

Stronger significant correlations are found across all dimensions for awareness of features of false information—emotional (.311**), cognitive (.258**), attitudinal (.246**), and values (.281**). This finding underscores the importance of recognizing specific characteristics of false information for comprehensive psycho-social development. Understanding these markers helps students navigate and critique the information they encounter, leading to improved emotional resilience, cognitive clarity, and consistent value alignment (Lewandowsky et al., 2012). This supports the literature suggesting that critical media literacy skills are essential for fostering an informed and resilient youth (Hobbs, 2017).

The interaction factor shows the highest correlations with all dimensions of psycho-social development—emotional (.394**), cognitive (.454**), attitudinal (.417**), and values (.430**). This indicates that critical and contextual engagement with information profoundly impacts overall development. Active engagement and critical interaction with information are essential for developing emotional intelligence, cognitive skills, and stable value systems (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017).

The content factor of information reliability also shows significant correlations with emotional (.407**), cognitive (.246**), attitudinal (.337**), and values (.311**). This emphasizes that the quality and accuracy of content are fundamental to psycho-social development. Reliable content contributes to a more informed and stable worldview, promoting emotional well-being, cognitive accuracy, and consistent values (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013). Exposure to reliable content reduces the negative effects of misinformation, such as anxiety and confusion, which can disrupt emotional and cognitive stability.

The findings underscore the critical role of media literacy and the ability to identify false information and reliable sources in psycho-social development. Significant correlations between awareness of data sources and features of false information with various developmental dimensions suggest that educational interventions should focus on these areas to enhance students' critical thinking and media literacy skills (McDougall, 2019). Moreover, high correlations associated with the interaction and content factors of information reliability highlight the importance of not only teaching students to identify reliable information but also encouraging them to engage with it critically (Wineburg & McGrew, 2017).

Integrating media literacy into the curriculum can help students develop skills to

critically assess information, enhancing their emotional, cognitive, and social development (Hobbs, 2017). Creating an environment that encourages questioning and critical engagement with content helps students build resilience against misinformation and develop a well-rounded, informed perspective (Jolls & Wilson, 2014).

These findings emphasize the necessity of comprehensive media literacy education that goes beyond basic awareness. By equipping students with critical evaluation and engagement skills, educators can significantly enhance their psycho-social development, preparing them for the digital age's challenges. These insights provide a strong foundation for advocating for media literacy as a crucial component of modern education, supporting the development of informed, resilient, and socially responsible individuals.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study aimed to investigate the moderating effect of personal experience on the relationship between false information awareness, perceived information reliability, and the psycho-social development of Grade 12 students. The findings supported the hypotheses that personal experiences, such as age, sex, and social media habits, significantly influence students' perceptions of false information and source reliability. Younger students and females were found to be more susceptible to misinformation, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to enhance media literacy skills for these groups. The study also found correlations between social media behavior and depth of information engagement, with digital interactions significantly impacting the ability to navigate online information. Media literacy education was emphasized as crucial for empowering students to make informed decisions online, fostering critical thinking skills, ethical awareness, and responsible digital citizenship. While higher awareness and critical thinking positively impact psycho-social development, personal experiences with misinformation alone are not sufficient. Recommendations included incorporating media literacy into lessons, integrating it into curricula, advocating for supportive policies, modeling healthy media behaviors, and promoting community collaboration for media literacy initiatives. Future research was suggested to explore additional dimensions of personal experience moderation in media literacy education.

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Declaration of Conflict

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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