Examining the Role of Media Literacy in Promoting Gender Equality Practices in Lusaka District, Zambia

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ABSTRACT:

Overview: *This study explored how media literacy programs can contribute to shifting societal attitudes towards gender equality, focusing on the effectiveness of media education in shaping the views of both men and women in Lusaka.*

Body of Knowledge: *The study examined the extent to which media literacy programs empower individuals, particularly youth, to challenge discriminatory narratives and advocate for equitable practices. It also assessed the effectiveness of integrating media literacy into educational curricula and community initiatives in fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect for gender diversity.*

Methods: *A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative research designs to gain a comprehensive understanding of how media literacy influences gender equality practices. A combination of purposive and stratified random sampling was used to select the participants as well as institutions. The sample consisted 200 respondents; Media consumers, Media practitioners, Advocacy groups as well as Educators and students. Structured open-ended interviews, focus groups and questionnaires were used to respondents to collect data. The quantitative data were analyzed using appropriate statistical methods, such as descriptive statistics using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) and Microsoft excel whereas the qualitative data were analyzed thematically by coding them to categorize responses into themes.*

Results: *The findings revealed that Media literacy plays a pivotal role in fostering gender equality practices by equipping individuals with the ability to critically analyze and interpret media content. Additionally, the study found that media literacy also supports civic engagement by encouraging individuals to use media as a platform to advocate for gender equality.*

Recommendation: *Government through local leaders should launch community campaigns using various media platforms to raise awareness about gender equality practices and the role of media in shaping perceptions, ensuring active participation from local influencers, civic leaders, and advocacy groups.*

Keywords: *Bias Awareness, Empowerment, Gender Equality, Media Literacy, and Representation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Examining the role of media literacy in promoting gender equality practices in Lusaka District, Zambia, highlights the transformative potential of empowering individuals with critical media analysis skills. Media literacy enables communities to recognize and challenge gender stereotypes, biases, and discriminatory practices perpetuated through various media channels. By fostering an informed and critical audience, media literacy initiatives can encourage the consumption and creation of content that supports equitable gender norms and narratives (Jha et al., 2020). Furthermore, these initiatives play a pivotal role in equipping individuals, particularly youth and marginalized groups, with the tools to advocate for gender equality and engage in meaningful discourse. In Lusaka District, integrating media literacy into educational curricula, community programs, and policy frameworks could significantly enhance efforts to promote gender-equitable practices, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and balanced societal landscape.

Media literacy plays a crucial role in promoting gender equality practices by equipping individuals with the skills to critically analyze, interpret, and engage with media content. In the context of Lusaka District, Zambia, media literacy can empower individuals, particularly women and marginalized groups, to challenge stereotypes, question biases, and advocate for equitable representation in media narratives. It enables communities to discern and

resist harmful gender norms perpetuated through traditional and digital media, fostering an environment that supports gender-sensitive communication (Klasen & Lamanna, 2009). Furthermore, media literacy facilitates informed dialogue and participatory decision-making, encouraging the use of media as a platform for highlighting issues such as gender-based violence, economic disparities, and unequal access to opportunities. Gay (2000) says that by integrating media literacy into educational and community programs, stakeholders can drive transformative change, promote awareness of gender equality, and nurture a culture of inclusivity and fairness across various societal domains.

Kickbusch (2001) noted that empowerment plays a pivotal role in research focused on examining the role of media literacy in promoting gender equality practices. Media literacy fosters critical thinking skills, enabling individuals to identify and challenge stereotypes, biases, and discriminatory narratives perpetuated by various media platforms. Through empowerment, individuals, particularly women and marginalized groups, gain the confidence and knowledge to assert their rights and advocate for equitable representation in media and society (Chanda & Ngulube, 2024). Empowerment also encourages active participation in creating content that challenges traditional gender norms, reshaping perceptions, and fostering inclusive narratives. By equipping people with the tools to critically analyze media messages, empowerment becomes a catalyst for behavioral and societal transformation, paving the way for gender-sensitive practices and attitudes. Thus, empowerment is not only a goal but also a means through which media literacy contributes to achieving gender equality.

Bias awareness is a critical component in examining the role of media literacy in promoting gender equality practices, as it involves understanding and identifying stereotypes, prejudices, and unequal representations perpetuated through various media forms. Developing awareness of biases equips individuals with the ability to critically analyze content and recognize the subtle or overt gender imbalances often embedded in advertisements, news, films, and social media platforms (Acilar & Sæbo, 2023). This awareness fosters a more informed and reflective media consumption habit, enabling audiences to challenge and question narratives that reinforce patriarchal norms or marginalize certain genders. Additionally, by promoting critical engagement, bias awareness empowers individuals to advocate for more equitable media representations, which are essential in reshaping societal attitudes and behaviors towards gender roles. Consequently, integrating bias awareness into media literacy education is pivotal in cultivating a culture that values and practices gender equality, influencing not only personal perceptions but also broader institutional and cultural dynamics (Banda & Mpolomoka, 2018).

Additionally, representation plays a critical role in examining the impact of media literacy on promoting gender equality practices. It encompasses how individuals and groups, particularly based on gender, are portrayed in various media forms, including television, social media, advertisements, and films. Media representation often shapes societal perceptions, attitudes, and stereotypes, influencing how gender roles are defined and reinforced (Chanda, 2023a). In the context of media literacy, fostering an awareness of how representation can perpetuate biases or inequalities becomes essential for challenging discriminatory narratives and promoting equitable portrayals. By analyzing and critiquing media content, individuals can develop a deeper understanding of the power dynamics in representation and advocate for balanced and diverse depictions of genders (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014). Thus, representation becomes a cornerstone of media literacy initiatives aimed at addressing structural gender inequalities and fostering a culture of inclusion and equality.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The role of media literacy in promoting gender equality practices is a critical area of study in Lusaka District, Zambia, where traditional gender norms and stereotypes continue to influence societal structures and individual behavior. Chanda (2024a) in her study observed that despite efforts to advance gender equality, many individuals lack the ability to critically analyze media content, which often perpetuates harmful stereotypes and biases. This gap in media literacy undermines progress toward achieving equitable practices in education, workplaces, and communities. Furthermore, the increasing influence of digital platforms and social media has amplified the need for comprehensive media literacy programs that empower individuals to recognize, challenge, and reshape gender narratives (Cooray & Potrafke, 2011). Therefore, this study sought to examine the extent to which media literacy initiatives can foster awareness, promote critical thinking, and drive the adoption of gender-equal practices among residents of Lusaka District. By addressing this issue, the study aimed to contribute to strategies that leverage media literacy as a transformative tool for achieving gender equality.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the level of media literacy among residents in Lusaka district and its influence on their awareness of gender equality practices.
- To examine how media literacy initiatives contribute to the promotion of gender-equitable attitudes and behaviors in Lusaka district.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the Social Learning Theory. The theory, proposed by Albert Bandura, suggests that individuals learn behaviors, attitudes, and skills through observation, imitation, and modeling, particularly within social contexts. This theory is crucial for examining the role of media literacy in promoting gender equality practices in Lusaka district, Zambia. Media literacy enables individuals to critically engage with media content, understanding its impact on shaping societal norms and behaviors (Chipunza, 2003). In the context of gender equality, media literacy can help individuals, particularly youth and women, recognize and challenge stereotypes, harmful representations, and biases portrayed in media. Eliasu (2023) noted that by observing

and emulating positive gender roles and equitable relationships depicted in media, individuals can adopt more progressive attitudes toward gender equality. Social Learning Theory highlights the importance of media as a tool for modeling behaviors and fostering change. In Lusaka, where media consumption is growing, media literacy programs can be pivotal in influencing attitudes toward gender norms and promoting equality by encouraging viewers to critically evaluate media content and actively engage in social change.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to illuminate the critical role of media literacy in fostering gender equality practices in Lusaka District, Zambia. By exploring how media literacy empowers individuals to critically analyze and challenge gender stereotypes, biases, and inequalities perpetuated by media content, the study contributes to the broader discourse on gender equity. It highlights the importance of equipping individuals, particularly young people and educators, with the skills to engage with media responsibly, fostering attitudes and behaviors that promote inclusivity and fairness. Furthermore, the study's findings can inform the development of targeted educational programs and policies that integrate media literacy into civic and gender education, ultimately supporting Zambia's commitments to gender equality as outlined in its national development agenda and international obligations, such as the Sustainable Development Goals. This research is particularly significant in a digital era where media influences societal norms and perceptions, making media literacy an indispensable tool for transformative social change.

2. METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative research designs to gain a comprehensive understanding of how media literacy influences gender equality practices. A combination of purposive sampling and stratified random sampling was used: Purposive sampling was used to select advocacy groups and media practitioners with expertise in media literacy and gender issues whereas stratified random sampling was used to select participants from different demographics to ensure diversity in responses. The sample consisted 200 respondents; 10% of the target population 2000. The study involved four different category of respondents; Media consumers (50), Media practitioners (15), Advocacy groups (25) as well as Educators (10) and students (100). Structured open-ended interviews, focus groups and questionnaires were used to respondents to collect data. The quantitative data collected through the questionnaires were analyzed using appropriate statistical methods, such as descriptive statistics using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) and Microsoft excel whereas the qualitative data from semi structured interviews and focus groups were analyzed thematically by coding them to categorize responses into themes. The study upheld research ethical considerations such as voluntary participation of the respondents, informed consent, confidentiality, honesty, and right of privacy.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Level of Media Literacy among Residents in Lusaka District and its Influence on their Awareness of Gender Equality Practices

According to the study results, cultural and social norms significantly shape media literacy among residents of Lusaka District, influencing how individuals interpret and engage with media content. Media literacy, defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages, is often intertwined with the cultural context in which individuals live (Fossen & Sorgner, 2019). In Lusaka, traditional norms and values play a critical role in guiding media consumption and interpretation. For instance, patriarchal values prevalent in certain communities can lead to selective attention toward media content that aligns with these norms, while dismissing progressive narratives on gender equality. Chanda & Madoda (2024) alluded that residents' awareness of gender equality practices is often mediated by the interplay between their level of media literacy and prevailing social norms. For example, individuals with higher media literacy are more likely to critically assess media representations of gender roles and advocate for equitable practices. Conversely, those with limited media literacy may uncritically absorb stereotypical portrayals of women and men, thereby reinforcing gender biases. The availability and diversity of media platforms further shape this dynamic, as urban residents are exposed to both traditional and digital media channels, each carrying distinct cultural narratives.

Chanda et al (2024a) supported this finding by adding that social norms also influence the dissemination of gender equality messages within households and communities. In settings where traditional norms dominate, discussions around gender equality are often perceived as challenging the status quo, limiting the acceptance of such practices. Media campaigns promoting gender equality may face resistance or misinterpretation unless tailored to respect and address these cultural sensitivities. On the other hand, communities with evolving social norms are more likely to engage with and internalize such messages, reflecting a gradual shift in attitudes (Akbarinejad et al., 2017). Ultimately, enhancing media literacy among residents of Lusaka District is crucial for fostering greater awareness of gender equality practices. This involves equipping individuals with the skills to critically evaluate media messages, particularly those perpetuating gender stereotypes. Community-based initiatives, such as workshops and public forums, can bridge the gap between cultural norms and progressive media narratives, fostering an environment where gender equality is not only understood but actively supported. By addressing the interplay between cultural and social norms and media literacy, Lusaka residents can be empowered to become advocates for equitable practices in their communities.

Additionally, the respondents stated that the prevalence of limited critical media literacy skills among residents in Lusaka District significantly impacts their ability to evaluate and interpret media content critically. Many residents lack the foundational skills necessary to analyze the reliability, credibility, and biases inherent in media sources, leaving them susceptible to misinformation and stereotypes perpetuated by various platforms (Bhat, 2022). Media narratives, especially in the realm of gender representation, often reinforce traditional roles and inequalities, which may be unconsciously internalized by

individuals with limited media literacy. This inability to scrutinize and challenge such portrayals perpetuates existing gender biases and reduces awareness of progressive gender equality practices.

The deficiency in critical media literacy skills directly influences residents' understanding and engagement with gender equality practices. One of the educator alluded that:

"Media serves as a powerful tool for advocacy and education, but when residents cannot discern factual, balanced representations from biased or harmful narratives, the impact of such advocacy is diminished".

For instance, campaigns promoting gender equity may be misunderstood or disregarded if individuals cannot differentiate them from traditional or sensationalized content. This gap in critical engagement not only stifles discussions about gender equality but also prevents residents from recognizing and supporting initiatives aimed at fostering equity in various spheres, including education, employment, and leadership (Chanda et al., 2024b). Enhancing critical media literacy among Lusaka residents is crucial for advancing gender equality practices. Media literacy programs that focus on teaching critical evaluation skills, such as identifying bias, analyzing framing techniques, and understanding the societal impact of media representations, can empower residents to engage more thoughtfully with gender-related content. Additionally, collaborations between educational institutions, community organizations, and media outlets can promote awareness campaigns that not only highlight gender issues but also teach audiences how to critically consume media. By fostering a culture of critical thinking, Lusaka residents can become more active participants in advocating for gender equality and challenging stereotypes that undermine progress toward inclusive societal practices.

Mubarakov et al (2024) in their study noted that media literacy encompasses the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media content critically, which is essential for navigating modern information ecosystems. In Lusaka, education systems that incorporate media literacy training equip individuals with skills to discern and challenge gender stereotypes often perpetuated in media. Programs focused on critical media engagement, offered through schools, community centers, and NGOs, provide residents with the tools to identify biases in media portrayals of gender roles and to advocate for more equitable representation (Mpolomoka et al., 2024). Such education creates a foundation for informed consumption of media and fosters a culture of critical inquiry that is essential for combating misinformation and promoting gender-sensitive narratives.

Workshops and campaigns tailored to educate residents on interpreting media messages critically, especially those concerning gender, have been instrumental in Lusaka District. By highlighting the subtle and overt ways media can shape societal attitudes toward gender roles, these initiatives empower individuals to challenge discriminatory practices (Chanda, 2024b). For instance, training sessions that emphasize deconstructing advertisements, news articles, or social media content can reveal how media perpetuates stereotypes, thereby encouraging residents to demand more balanced representations. Furthermore, media literacy training facilitates dialogue on gender issues, creating opportunities for residents to collaborate in addressing entrenched inequalities and promoting inclusive practices in their personal and professional lives. Foster et al (2023) noted that residents equipped with strong media literacy skills are better positioned to participate in discussions around gender policies and initiatives aimed at equity. This influence is evident in how individuals leverage social media platforms to raise awareness, campaign for gender-sensitive legislation, and challenge harmful cultural norms. In Lusaka District, such practices have contributed to a growing movement toward gender equity, with educated residents often leading advocacy efforts. However, the disparity in access to education and training poses challenges, as individuals with limited media literacy are more susceptible to accepting gender-biased narratives. Chanda (2024c) added that bridging this gap through inclusive and accessible media literacy programs is essential for ensuring that all residents can contribute to and benefit from a more gender-equitable society.

The study findings also recorded that access to media is a critical factor shaping the level of media literacy among residents of Lusaka District.

One of the media consumers pointed out that:

"With the proliferation of digital technology, residents have increasing access to diverse media platforms, including television, radio, social media, and news websites".

However, the extent of this access is influenced by socio-economic factors such as income, education, and location within the district. Urban residents are more likely to have access to digital media, while those in peri-urban and rural areas primarily rely on traditional media like radio and community-based programs (Chanda et al., 2024c). This disparity highlights a digital divide that limits uniform access to the informational resources needed to develop robust media literacy skills.

Media literacy is essential for interpreting and analyzing media content critically, particularly regarding gender equality practices. In Lusaka District, awareness of gender equality practices is often shaped by the type and quality of media content consumed. For example, residents exposed to international media sources may have a broader understanding of gender equality compared to those relying on local media, which might still portray traditional gender roles. Irvine (2003) says that social media platforms have emerged as significant tools for promoting gender equality, offering residents opportunities to engage in discussions, campaigns, and activism. Nevertheless, misinformation and biased narratives in some media sources can hinder the development of informed perspectives on gender equality. The influence of media access on awareness of gender equality practices is evident in how residents adopt or resist these practices. For those with high media literacy, access to diverse and credible sources fosters greater understanding and advocacy for gender equity. However, for residents with limited access or low media literacy, traditional gender norms may remain unchallenged. This underscores the need for media literacy programs that empower residents to critically evaluate media content and recognize biased or misleading information (Melissa, 2022). Enhancing media literacy in Lusaka District could play a pivotal role in promoting awareness and acceptance of gender equality practices, bridging societal divides and fostering inclusive development.

Additionally, Phiri et al (2024) stated that language and accessibility significantly influence the level of media literacy among residents of Lusaka District, shaping their ability to engage with and interpret media content. With Zambia being a multilingual society, the diversity of languages can create disparities in access to information. Media platforms often prioritize English and a few dominant local languages, limiting the inclusivity of critical information for residents who are proficient in other vernaculars. This linguistic barrier restricts some community members from accessing and comprehending gender equality narratives in the media, reinforcing gaps in awareness. Furthermore, the digital divide exacerbates this challenge, as access to affordable internet, smartphones, and other media technologies remains uneven, particularly in low-income areas. Media literacy, rooted in language accessibility, directly impacts residents' awareness and understanding of gender equality practices. Accessible and inclusive media content promotes critical thinking, enabling audiences to question traditional gender roles and appreciate the importance of equitable societal structures (Chanda et al., 2024d). However, when residents face challenges in understanding media messages due to language barriers or lack of accessibility, their capacity to engage with gender-sensitive narratives diminishes. This lack of engagement can perpetuate stereotypes and hinder advocacy for equality. Conversely, media outlets that utilize local languages and culturally sensitive communication strategies tend to foster greater awareness and acceptance of gender equality practices among diverse audiences.

The study results also revealed that the prevalence of misinformation and bias in media literacy among residents in Lusaka District poses significant challenges to their understanding of gender equality practices. Many residents rely on social media platforms and informal networks as primary sources of information, which are often rife with unchecked and misleading content. Efobi et al (2018) in their study noted that misinformation about gender roles, cultural norms, and policies aimed at promoting gender equality perpetuates stereotypes and hinders progress. Additionally, biases in reporting whether intentional or unintentional reinforce gender inequities, as certain narratives downplay or misrepresent the importance of equality. For example, portrayals of women in leadership roles may be either glorified or criticized disproportionately, creating conflicting messages that hinder a balanced perspective.

The influence of misinformation and bias on residents' awareness of gender equality practices is profound. When individuals consume distorted information, their perception of gender equality initiatives is shaped by misinformation, leading to skepticism or resistance toward progressive policies. For instance, campaigns addressing women's empowerment may be misconstrued as promoting division rather than equality. This misrepresentation fuels misunderstandings that limit public engagement and support for gender-focused programs (Ngulube et al., 2024). Furthermore, biases in media representation may marginalize the voices of advocates for gender equality, leaving many residents unaware of the tangible benefits such practices bring to their communities. Enhancing media literacy is essential to countering misinformation and bias among Lusaka District residents. Initiatives aimed at educating the public on evaluating sources, identifying bias, and critically analyzing information can empower individuals to make informed judgments (Chanda 2024d). Partnerships between educational institutions, civil society, and media organizations can play a pivotal role in promoting unbiased reporting and fostering an environment that values truth and inclusivity. By equipping residents with the skills to navigate media landscapes effectively, Lusaka can enhance awareness and support for gender equality practices, ensuring that media serves as a tool for empowerment rather than division.

Exposure to campaigns plays a significant role in shaping the media literacy of residents in Lusaka District, particularly in relation to gender equality practices. Campaigns that promote gender equality can offer crucial information and raise awareness about gender-related issues such as women's rights, equal opportunities, and the elimination of gender-based violence. For residents of Lusaka, regular exposure to these campaigns through various media channels, including television, radio, social media, and print media, enhances their understanding of gender equality practices and fosters a more informed population. The effectiveness of these campaigns depends largely on the residents' ability to critically engage with the content, interpret its messages accurately, and apply the knowledge to their everyday lives (Owusu, 2024).

The influence of exposure to gender equality campaigns on the media literacy of Lusaka residents also affects their attitudes and behaviors regarding gender roles. One of the advocacy group members noted that:

"As individuals become more media literate, they are more likely to recognize and challenge traditional gender norms that may hinder equality".

For example, when exposed to campaigns that showcase women in leadership roles or highlight the importance of equal access to education for girls, residents may develop a deeper understanding of how gender equality can positively impact societal development. This awareness, in turn, can lead to behavioral changes, such as supporting policies that promote gender equality or engaging in conversations that challenge harmful stereotypes (Phillips et al., 2015). Through media literacy, residents become more critical consumers of media, empowering them to discern between gender biases and advocate for more inclusive practices.

However, the impact of media campaigns on gender equality awareness is not uniform across all residents of Lusaka District. Variations in factors such as education level, socioeconomic status, and access to technology can influence the extent to which individuals are exposed to these campaigns and are able to engage with the messages effectively Chanda et al., 2023). Those with higher levels of education and better access to media platforms are generally more media literate and more likely to be aware of gender equality issues. Conversely, individuals from marginalized communities with limited access to digital media or formal education may have less exposure to these campaigns and thus less awareness of gender equality practices. As such, it is crucial for media literacy programs to be inclusive and accessible to all residents, ensuring that gender equality messages reach a broader audience and contribute to the advancement of gender equity in Lusaka.

The study results also indicated that media literacy plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions and attitudes toward gender equality among residents of Lusaka District. The ability to critically analyze media content enables individuals to identify and challenge stereotypical portrayals of gender roles that perpetuate discrimination and inequality. Stereotypes in media often reinforce traditional views, portraying women in subordinate roles and men as dominant figures, which influences societal norms and expectations (Mpolomoka et al., 2023). By fostering a deeper understanding of how media

constructs these narratives, residents can become more critical consumers of information, rejecting biased representations and demanding more equitable portrayals. Programs that promote media literacy, particularly in schools and community centers, are essential for building a population that questions the validity of stereotypes and advocates for balanced and inclusive media content.

Increased media literacy among Lusaka residents has a significant impact on their awareness and support for gender equality practices. One of the media practitioners observed that:

"When individuals learn to deconstruct media messages, they gain insights into the systemic barriers that hinder gender equity, such as unequal pay, limited opportunities for women, and underrepresentation in leadership roles".

This awareness can lead to greater advocacy for policies and initiatives aimed at addressing these disparities. For instance, media literacy campaigns can encourage residents to support women's empowerment programs, challenge discriminatory practices, and engage in discussions that promote equal rights. Moreover, such education fosters empathy and understanding by exposing individuals to diverse perspectives and narratives that celebrate gender diversity and inclusion Chanda, 2024e). The influence of media literacy on gender equality awareness also extends to how residents perceive and interact with social issues in their daily lives. As individuals become adept at identifying stereotypes, they are more likely to challenge discriminatory behaviors and attitudes within their communities. This shift in mindset promotes a culture of equality, where residents actively participate in breaking down harmful norms and fostering environments that value both men and women equally (Mlyakado, 2012). The ripple effect of media literacy goes beyond individual transformation; it contributes to a collective movement toward societal change, ensuring that gender equality is not only a theoretical concept but a lived reality in Lusaka District. By addressing stereotypes through enhanced media literacy, residents are empowered to advocate for and embrace practices that uphold equality and justice for all genders.
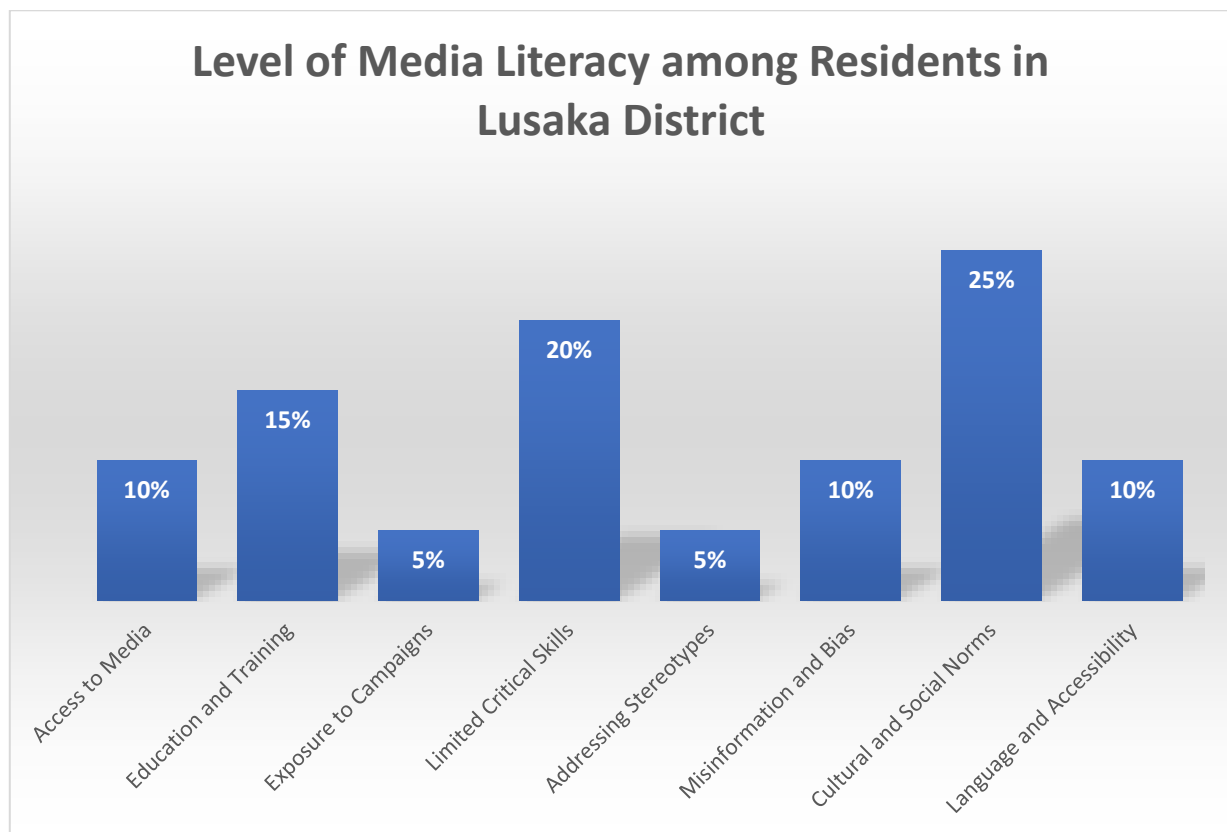

Figure1: Level of Media Literacy among Residents in Lusaka District and its Influence on their Awareness of Gender Equality Practices

3.2. How Media Literacy Initiatives Contribute to the Promotion of Gender-Equitable Attitudes and Behaviors in Lusaka District

According to the study results on how media literacy initiatives contribute to the promotion of gender-equitable attitudes and behaviors in Lusaka district. Challenging Gender Stereotypes was recorded to be the highest at 30%, Empowering Marginalized Voices at 20%, Educating the Younger Generation at 20%, Promoting Critical Consumption of Media at 15%, Advocacy and Activism at 10%, and lastly Fostering Collaboration with Media Outlets at 5%. The findings are summarized in figure 2 below;
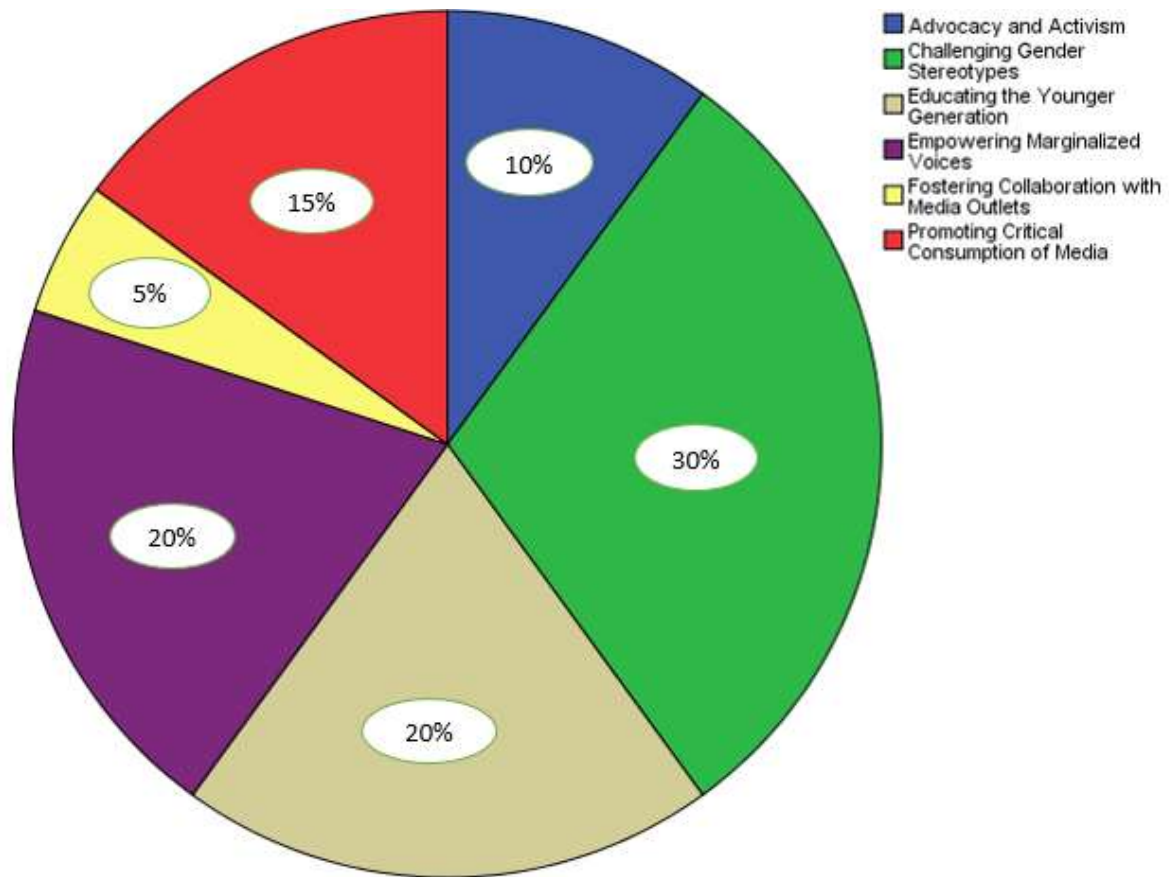
Figure2: How Media Literacy Initiatives Contribute to the Promotion of Gender-Equitable Attitudes and Behaviors

The study findings revealed that media literacy initiatives play a pivotal role in dismantling entrenched gender stereotypes and fostering gender-equitable attitudes and behaviors in Lusaka District. These programs educate individuals, particularly youth, on identifying and analyzing gender bias in media content. Through workshops, school programs, and community campaigns, participants are taught to critically evaluate the portrayal of men and women in advertisements, films, and news outlets. By understanding how media perpetuates stereotypes such as associating men with strength and leadership while relegating women to nurturing and domestic roles, individuals become empowered to question and reject these biases (Krieger-Boden & Sorgner, 2018). Such awareness-building activities not only challenge traditional gender norms but also encourage the consumption and creation of media that promotes diversity and equality. Furthermore, media literacy initiatives actively promote the representation of progressive gender roles in local content creation. By equipping young people with media production skills, these programs enable the development of content that showcases women as leaders, professionals, and innovators, breaking away from conventional depictions (Chanda & Ngulube, 2024)   . These initiatives often partner with local filmmakers, journalists, and content creators to amplify narratives that celebrate gender diversity and inclusion. For instance, showcasing stories of female entrepreneurs or male caregivers highlights the fluidity of gender roles and helps normalize equitable behaviors. As these narratives gain traction, they inspire viewers to adopt more inclusive attitudes and behaviors, gradually transforming societal perceptions and expectations in Lusaka District.

Media literacy initiatives serve as platforms for dialogue and advocacy, fostering a culture of critical thinking and gender equity. Community forums and online platforms associated with these initiatives provide spaces where individuals can discuss the harmful impacts of gender stereotypes and share personal experiences of overcoming bias. Chanda (2023b) says that such discussions challenge deeply rooted cultural norms and encourage participants to adopt gender-equitable practices in their daily lives. Additionally, these initiatives collaborate with policymakers and educators to integrate gender-sensitive curricula into schools, ensuring that young people grow up with the tools to question stereotypes and advocate for equality. Through sustained engagement and collaboration, media literacy initiatives contribute significantly to reshaping attitudes and fostering behaviors that align with the principles of gender equity in Lusaka District.

Moving on, media literacy initiatives also plays a critical role in empowering marginalized voices, particularly in promoting gender-equitable attitudes and behaviors. By teaching individuals to critically engage with media content, these initiatives enable them to recognize and challenge harmful stereotypes, biased narratives, and gender inequalities perpetuated in mainstream media. Media literacy programs provide marginalized groups, especially women and gender minorities, with tools to analyze, deconstruct, and question the portrayal of gender roles in advertisements, news, films, and social media platforms (Mohan, 2022). This empowers them to see beyond the dominant, often distorted, narratives and to voice their own stories and experiences, fostering a more inclusive media landscape.

Additionally, one of the students pointed out that:

"Media literacy initiatives contribute to changing societal attitudes by amplifying the voices of marginalized groups through alternative and independent media platforms. As these individuals gain the skills to create their own media content, they can share their perspectives, challenge traditional gender norms, and advocate for equal rights. This not only provides a platform for underrepresented communities but also educates the broader public on gender diversity, creating a more empathetic and informed society".

The representation of diverse gender identities in media, made possible by these initiatives, fosters greater awareness and understanding, which is essential for dismantling harmful stereotypes and promoting gender equality. Furthermore, media literacy helps individuals recognize the power dynamics at play within media institutions and understand how these dynamics can perpetuate gender inequities. By empowering marginalized voices, media literacy fosters a more active and engaged citizenry that advocates for systemic change (Chanda et al., 2024f). When people are equipped with the skills to critically evaluate and engage with media, they are better positioned to support policies and initiatives that promote gender equality in both the media and society. Through these efforts, media literacy initiatives contribute to long-lasting changes in attitudes and behaviors, ultimately fostering a culture of gender equity where marginalized voices are heard, respected, and valued.

The study results further showed that educating the younger generation about media literacy plays a pivotal role in fostering gender-equitable attitudes and behaviors. Media literacy initiatives equip young individuals with the critical thinking skills necessary to analyze and question gender stereotypes and biases portrayed in media content. Through these programs, learners are taught to deconstruct harmful narratives, recognize implicit biases, and challenge societal norms that perpetuate gender inequality (Ojha, 2011). This education encourages young people to critically evaluate the content they consume, enabling them to identify and resist the normalization of gender roles and stereotypes in advertising, entertainment, and social media. By promoting a critical understanding of media, these initiatives empower the younger generation to advocate for more inclusive and fair representations of all genders.

Furthermore, media literacy initiatives provide opportunities for young people to create and disseminate content that promotes gender equity. By incorporating practical components such as digital storytelling, video production, and social media campaigns, these programs not only teach critical consumption but also foster proactive media creation. This hands-on approach allows young learners to challenge traditional gender norms and amplify diverse voices and perspectives. Such activities build their capacity to engage in conversations about gender equity and to become change agents in their communities (Parkavi, 2016). Educating the younger generation to produce content that challenges gender stereotypes fosters a culture of inclusivity and respect, which can positively influence their peers and broader audiences. In addition to promoting gender-equitable attitudes, media literacy initiatives cultivate behaviors that support gender equity in everyday interactions. By fostering empathy, communication skills, and mutual respect, these programs encourage young individuals to reflect on how gender dynamics influence their relationships and decision-making. Learning to identify and address micro aggressions, discriminatory language, and unequal power dynamics enables young people to act as allies for gender equity. This behavioral transformation extends beyond media consumption, shaping their interactions in schools, workplaces, and social settings (Chanda, 2024f). Over time, such initiatives contribute to a more equitable society by instilling the values of fairness, inclusivity, and mutual respect in the leaders of tomorrow.

Media consumers alluded that promoting critical consumption of media is an essential strategy in media literacy initiatives aimed at fostering gender-equitable attitudes and behaviors. One of them believed that:

"Media literacy empowers individuals to critically analyze and evaluate the content they encounter, particularly in relation to gender portrayal".

This involves questioning stereotypes, biases, and the normalization of harmful gender norms in media. By encouraging individuals, especially youth, to engage actively with media, they can develop an understanding of how gender is constructed and represented in various platforms. This critical engagement leads to the identification of gender inequalities and empowers individuals to challenge and reject content that perpetuates harmful stereotypes, thereby promoting gender equality.

Media literacy initiatives that emphasize critical consumption help individuals recognize the influence of media on societal perceptions and behaviors regarding gender roles. When audiences become aware of the ways in which media outlets often reinforce traditional, binary gender norms, they can start to question the implications of such representations on their own attitudes and actions. By equipping individuals with the skills to interpret media messages, media literacy promotes an understanding of gender as a spectrum rather than a fixed, binary construct. Gay (2000) added that this shift in perspective encourages more inclusive and equitable attitudes toward diverse gender identities, helping to combat the marginalization of non-conforming individuals and communities. Furthermore, media literacy initiatives provide a platform for promoting diverse and positive representations of gender in media. Through critical consumption, audiences are empowered to advocate for media content that reflects a more accurate, nuanced, and inclusive portrayal of gender (Rammohan & Vu, 2018). When people actively seek out and support media that challenges gender stereotypes and highlights the complexities of gender experiences, it fosters a culture of respect and equality. Media literacy, therefore, not only helps individuals become informed consumers of media but also contributes to the broader societal effort to create a more gender-equitable environment.

Media literacy initiatives play a critical role in fostering advocacy and activism aimed at promoting gender-equitable attitudes and behaviors. By equipping individuals with the ability to critically analyze and interpret media messages, these initiatives empower people to recognize and challenge gender stereotypes and biases that perpetuate inequality. Media platforms often portray gender roles in ways that reinforce traditional expectations, marginalize women, and normalize harmful practices (Thibaut & Van Wijngaarden-Cremers, 2020). Media literacy programs enable participants to deconstruct these portrayals, fostering awareness about the negative impact of such representations on societal attitudes. This heightened awareness encourages individuals to engage in advocacy efforts that call for more balanced and diverse representations of genders in media, sparking grassroots activism and campaigns for change.

Furthermore, media literacy initiatives encourage active participation in digital activism, which serves as a powerful tool for promoting gender equity. Equipped with critical thinking and digital communication skills, individuals are better positioned to use social media platforms to amplify voices advocating for gender justice. Hashtags and online movements such as #MeToo and #HeForShe demonstrate the capacity of digital activism to challenge oppressive structures and amplify marginalized voices. Media literacy programs help participants navigate these platforms responsibly and effectively, ensuring their engagement contributes constructively to the discourse (Shayan, 2015). By promoting responsible content creation and sharing, these initiatives lay the groundwork for sustained online advocacy that raises awareness, influences public opinion, and pushes for policy changes. Advocacy and activism fostered through media literacy contribute to behavioral transformation at both individual and community levels. Media literacy programs often include elements of participatory education, where learners create content that reflects and promotes gender-equitable values. This process not only strengthens their understanding of the issues but also inspires others to adopt equitable practices in their personal and professional lives. By integrating these values into everyday interactions and institutional policies, media literacy initiatives ensure that the advocacy transcends beyond awareness into tangible changes in behaviors and attitudes (UNESCO, 2012). In this way, media literacy serves as a foundational tool in cultivating a society that values and practices gender equity in all spheres.

The study also revealed that fostering collaboration with media outlets is a crucial strategy for promoting gender-equitable attitudes and behaviors through media literacy initiatives. One of the educators suggested that:

"By working closely with media organizations, educational institutions, and community groups, media literacy programs can be developed that focus on challenging gender stereotypes and presenting diverse gender roles in a positive light".

Media outlets, with their broad reach, play a significant role in shaping societal perceptions and behaviors. Therefore, by partnering with these outlets, media literacy initiatives can provide platforms to educate audiences about the importance of gender equality, the harmful effects of gender stereotypes, and the significance of promoting inclusive narratives across media content (Yumusak et al., 2013).

Media literacy initiatives that foster collaboration with media outlets can help create content that reflects diverse gender identities and experiences, allowing for more accurate and representative portrayals of both women and men. These initiatives can also encourage critical thinking skills among audiences, enabling them to question and analyze the media they consume (Van Berkel et al., 2017). By teaching individuals to recognize biased or discriminatory messages in media, these programs can help shift societal attitudes towards more equitable views. The media industry, when equipped with the tools and knowledge provided by media literacy, can play an instrumental role in advocating for gender equity by creating content that challenges traditional gender norms and highlights positive, empowering representations. Additionally, collaboration between media outlets and media literacy initiatives can extend beyond content creation to include the promotion of public campaigns and community-based programs that raise awareness about gender issues. By working together, media outlets can amplify the impact of educational messages about gender equality and influence public discourse on the subject. Walby (2003) says that these efforts can lead to more widespread changes in attitudes and behaviors related to gender, as people become more aware of the need for equity in both their personal lives and the larger society. Through such collaborations, media literacy initiatives can be a powerful tool in transforming media consumption into a catalyst for social change, fostering a more gender-equitable world (Van Bavel, 2012).

4. CONCLUSION

In examining the role of media literacy in promoting gender equality practices in Lusaka District, Zambia, it is evident that enhancing individuals' capacity to critically analyze and engage with media content significantly contributes to challenging and transforming gender stereotypes. Media literacy empowers both men and women to identify and deconstruct biased portrayals, fostering more equitable perceptions and behaviors. Moreover, it equips communities with the tools to advocate for inclusive and fair representation in media, which is essential for driving systemic change in societal norms and attitudes. The study highlights that integrating media literacy programs into educational and community initiatives can amplify efforts to promote gender equality, encouraging active participation in reshaping cultural narratives. Ultimately, fostering media literacy creates an informed populace capable of championing equitable practices, thereby advancing the broader agenda of social justice and inclusion.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are actions that should be taken on the basis of the findings of this study;

1. **Integrate Media Literacy into Educational Curricula:**

- Learning institutions should develop and implement media literacy programs in schools and community centers to empower individuals, especially youth, with the skills to critically analyze media content.

2. **Engage Media Practitioners in Gender Equality Campaigns:**

- Government through local leaders should launch community campaigns using various media platforms to raise awareness about gender equality practices and the role of media in shaping perceptions, ensuring active participation from local influencers, civic leaders, and advocacy groups.

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