

Transformative Pedagogies in Action: The “Click with Care” PR Campaign for Media Literacy among School Students

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ABSTRACT

The growing use of digital platforms has offered new opportunities while also creating concerns, particularly for school students. As a result, media literacy is a vital skill, particularly for school students who are still exposed to the negative effects of online misuse today. This paper discusses the application of the Service Learning Malaysia – University for Society (SULAM) approach in the “Click With Care” Public Relations campaign, which aimed to promote responsible online behaviour and critical thinking about digital content among secondary school students. The campaign occurred at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Kompleks (SMK Kompleks) and engaged 149 Form Three students in interactive workshops, influencer sharing sessions, video presentations, and quizzes. The study adopted a participatory action research technique, which was augmented with post program teacher interviews, student comments, and reflective journals written by the university students who executed the campaign. The indicated improved awareness of misinformation, safer digital habits, and greater understanding of ethical online interaction. Data was confirmed observable positive changes in how students behaved online. In addition, the innovative and interactive activities improved learning engagement and effectiveness. For the university students, the reflective journals indicated progress in cooperation, event planning, communication, and social responsibility, illustrating the benefits of learning from actual involvement in the community. Finally, including community-based initiatives within academic programs may help students learn while also making important contributions to society. The “Click With Care” campaign demonstrates how practical and contextually relevant educational practices may better prepare pupils for today's digital issues.

Keywords Transformative Pedagogy; SULAM; Public Relations; Media Literacy; Community Engagement

INTRODUCTION

The digital environment has transformed communication, learning and social interaction, allowing adolescents to access information and express themselves, but it also exposes them to risks such as misinformation, cyberbullying and risky online behaviour. This issue has become a need for dedicated media literacy programmes that integrate learning with practical applications (Livingstone, 2018). In Malaysia, The Community Service Learning Programme of Universiti Malaysia (SULAM) was introduced as a transformative pedagogy that combines classroom teaching with practical applications. Based on experiential and community-based concepts, SULAM promotes academic enrichment and social responsibility by encouraging higher education students to engage in contributing to the community (KPT, 2019). This new educational paradigm, which goes beyond traditional teaching and focuses on transformative learning, prioritizes a student-centred approach, critical reflection and active participation (Mezirow, 2000).

This study focuses on the “Click With Care” Public Relations campaign, developed by undergraduates in the Bachelor of Public Relations and Contemporary Media (Honors) program. The campaign aimed to raise digital safety awareness among secondary school students at SMK Kompleks while simultaneously enriching the professional and civic competencies of university participants. By embedding the campaign within the

SULAM framework, this initiative demonstrates how transformative pedagogies can simultaneously advance student learning outcomes and community empowerment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Impact of Digital Platforms on School Students

COVID-19 has changed the landscape of education today, with students' reliance on digital platforms. It has shaped the way school students access, process, and interact with information. However, this reliance on these platforms has brought both opportunities and risks, making it important for policymakers and stakeholders to understand its implications. While digital technology has increased student accessibility and engagement, it has also introduced challenges related to online well-being, distractions, and safety. Therefore, media literacy has emerged as a critical requirement to ensure that students benefit from digital platforms while minimizing harmful negative impacts.

Digital platforms can enhance interactive learning and provide flexibility and innovation that optimize knowledge acquisition and align with modern pedagogical approaches (Fathi et al., 2025). For example, platforms such as SkoooolNigeria.com have improved academic performance and student engagement in resource-poor areas (Anyim & Uche, 2013). In addition, access to educational resources is one of the advantages of digital platforms that allows the creation of repositories that can be used by teachers and students to improve learning outcomes (Ladbrook, 2014). Accessibility can benefit students, especially those who may have limited resources (Anyim & Uche, 2013). Critical skills of competency acquisition have been shown to increase student satisfaction and success when supported by effective teaching strategies through digital platforms (Sobodić et al., 2022). Therefore, reliance on digital literacy fosters essential 21st-century competencies, including information evaluation, collaboration, and adaptability (Halpern et al., 2020). Despite their benefits, digital platforms pose risks to students' health. Studies show that excessive use of devices has been linked to eye strain, musculoskeletal problems, and sleep disturbances (Berezina & Stepanova, 2020). In addition, excessive screen time has resulted in a delay in engaging in physical activities that are important for adolescent development (Berezina & Stepanova, 2020). In addition, uncontrolled use of social media and online games has been linked to a student's academic performance (Mayen et al., 2025). More worryingly, many adolescents are recorded to be addicted to the internet (Jiang et al., 2023). The development of the use of digital platforms increases vulnerability to cybersecurity threats when exposed to cyber risks, including phishing and malware, without sufficient awareness (Castillo & Anand, 2025). Privacy concerns, including cyberbullying and data misuse, remain pressing issues, highlighting the importance of integrating cybersecurity awareness into digital education (Castillo & Anand, 2025).

Importance of Media Literacy

Media literacy helps students to critically evaluate information using cognitive skills in an era of information overload. It helps them distinguish reliable sources from misinformation, thus improving their academic and social outcomes (Halpern et al., 2020). By fostering awareness of online risks, media literacy can promote safe and ethical digital behavior. Students equipped with media literacy knowledge are less vulnerable to cyberbullying and privacy violations (Castillo & Anand, 2025). In addition, it also promotes healthy habits in internet use and reduces the long-term risks associated with excessive screen exposure (Berezina & Stepanova, 2020). Media literacy not only increases safety while using the internet but also empowers students to take responsibility for their learning. It strengthens self-efficacy, which is a key factor in maintaining engagement with educational platforms (Chen et al., 2022). In this sense, media literacy serves as a protective tool to ensure students use the digital ecosystem responsibly and effectively.

Therefore, the integration of digital platforms in education brings both opportunities and risks. While increasing engagement, accessibility, and skills development, it also poses challenges to student well-being, academic performance, and online safety. Therefore, media literacy is essential in equipping students with the skills to maximize digital benefits while minimizing harm. Future strategies should prioritize the integration of media literacy into the curriculum to foster resilient, responsible, and competitive learners.

Cyberbullying, Online Safety, and Misinformation

Cyberbullying is a hot topic among adults today because it contributes to physical symptoms, including headaches and sleep disturbances, often accompanying these psychological challenges, contributing to low self-esteem and isolation (Grech & Lauri, 2022; Sharma et al., 2024; Li et al., 2021). More serious issues such as anxiety, depression, suicide attempts, and social withdrawal are among the causes of cyberbullying (Kumar & Goldstein, 2020; Grech & Lauri, 2022; Kota & Selkie, 2018; Sharma et al., 2024). The disguise of identities and the rapid spread of harmful content online increase its impact, making cyberbullying extremely difficult to control (Santre, 2023). Although interventions such as school-based prevention programs and self-compassion training have been introduced, their overall effectiveness remains limited (Aledoh et al., 2024; Kota & Selkie, 2018; Sharma et al., 2024).

Adolescents also face increasing online safety risks, including privacy violations, inappropriate content, and online sexual exploitation (Roehrer et al., 2024; Wisniewski et al., 2013; Mwijage & Ghosh, 2024). The growth of mobile devices and social media has amplified these risks, offering learning opportunities and threats to well-being (Ghosh, 2016a; Zimmermann & Tomczyk, 2025). Traditional interventions, such as parental control apps, remain underused, and their effectiveness is questionable in addressing the complex realities of adolescent online safety (Ghosh, 2016b).

Sharing false information is another pressing challenge for adolescents who are active users of digital media. Exposure to false information has been linked to harmful health behaviors, poor educational choices, and distorted social beliefs (Al Arfaj et al., 2025; Al Arfaj et al., 2024; Skipper, 2025). Adolescents often lack the critical appraisal skills to identify misinformation, relying heavily on external cues or intuitive judgments (Skipper, 2025). Social media algorithms exacerbate this problem by reinforcing content that prioritizes engagement over accuracy (Al Arfaj et al., 2025).

The Necessity of Media Literacy Education

To mitigate these risks, media literacy education has emerged as a critical strategy. It strengthens adolescents' ability to analyze and evaluate information, fostering critical thinking that helps combat misinformation (Suárez-Perdomo et al., 2025; Šušterič et al., 2025; Hobbs & Rowe, 2008). Programs that emphasize active media production and critical engagement have been shown to enhance adolescents' capacity to identify false information and reduce vulnerability to online harms (Abimbade, 2025; Yang et al., 2024). Moreover, media literacy supports the development of essential digital skills for communication, collaboration, and responsible online interaction in a highly digitized society (Zimmermann & Tomczyk, 2025; Yang et al., 2024). The intersection of cyberbullying, online safety challenges, and misinformation highlights the complex risks adolescents face in digital environments. While technological interventions exist, they are often insufficient in addressing the full spectrum of issues. Embedding media literacy education into school curricula is therefore vital to empower adolescents with the skills necessary for safe, critical, and responsible digital engagement.

Strategies for PR Campaigns to Promote Digital Literacy and Responsible Online Behavior

To effectively engage students, PR campaigns must utilize digital platforms that align with their daily habits and preferences. Social media channels, for example, are powerful tools for delivering targeted and engaging activities, shaping perceptions, and influencing behavior (Tran et al., 2024). Incorporating interactive content such as videos and project-based learning (PjBL) on platforms like Instagram has been shown to foster greater student involvement in promoting digital literacy and responsible practices (Iskandar et al., 2025).

Embedding digital literacy, cybersecurity, and ethical practices into the educational curriculum is crucial to preparing students for navigating the complexities of the digital environment (Munasinghe & Hewawasam, 2025). Long-term educational initiatives, such as the Digital Literacy Pedagogical Sessions (#DLPS), provide students with sustainable tools and knowledge to manage their digital futures responsibly (Barbosa, 2024). Such structured programs ensure continuity in developing skills beyond one off interventions.

Successful PR campaigns extend beyond individual classrooms by mobilizing communities to collectively foster digital citizenship. Collaborative approaches that involve educators, students, and policymakers enhance the effectiveness of digital media initiatives (Suwana, 2021). Additionally, campaigns that encourage student-led projects and ethical guidelines help build a school culture that prioritizes diversity, empathy, and responsibility (Iskandar et al., 2025).

Incorporating metacognitive self-regulation and resource management strategies enhances students' critical evaluation skills and ethical decision-making online (Zheng & Kim, 2025). PR campaigns that emphasize active participation in digital communities and encourage reflective engagement with digital content help integrate the principles of digital citizenship into daily practice (Suwana, 2021).

Beyond technical proficiency, PR campaigns must emphasize values and ethics in media literacy education. Ethical and empathetic approaches enable students to navigate the digital media landscape responsibly and with greater sensitivity toward others (Tsang, 2025). Furthermore, integrating media literacy with ideological and political education equips students with the critical capacity to analyze, challenge, and contribute constructively within a democratic society (Yang & Li, 2024).

Linking theory to practice is vital for fostering meaningful student engagement. Activities such as online activism and persuasive speaking provide students with opportunities to understand their civic roles and the impact of their online behavior (Kibsey, 2022). Similarly, real-life scenarios and role-playing exercises enhance students' ability to apply digital literacy skills across academic, social, and civic contexts (Van Der Merwe, 2014).

By strategically combining targeted messaging, curricular integration, community engagement, interactive learning, ethics-focused instruction, and practical applications, PR campaigns can create a holistic framework for digital literacy. This approach equips students not only with technical knowledge but also with ethical judgment and social responsibility, nurturing a generation of informed and conscientious digital citizens.

METHODOLOGY

A participatory action research (PAR) approach guided the design and implementation of the "Click With Care" campaign. This approach was selected because it encourages active collaboration between university students, educators, and the school community, while also allowing continuous reflection and improvement throughout the project cycle. The PAR framework supported planning, implementation, observation, and reflection phases, ensuring that the campaign remained responsive to the needs of the participants.

The program involved 149 Form Three students from SMK Kompleks as the main participants. University students enrolled in the Public Relations course acted as campaign planners and facilitators. They designed workshop activities, prepared learning materials, and executed engagement sessions. School teachers played a supportive role by managing logistics, monitoring student participation, and providing feedback on the students' learning and behavioural outcomes.

Data collection was qualitative in nature. The study gathered information from three sources: (i) open-ended student feedback collected after activity sessions, (ii) semi-structured interviews with teachers conducted at the end of the program, and (iii) reflective journals written by the university students who organized the campaign. All collected data were analyzed thematically. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns related to awareness, digital literacy skills, and changes in online behaviour among school students, as well as the development of communication, teamwork, and social responsibility among university participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate the campaign's dual contribution to both school and university stakeholders. Majority of students agreed improved ability to identify misinformation, enhanced understanding of safe online practices, and increased awareness of respectful digital communication thru this program. Campaign's materials such as videos, posters, and quizzes as highly engaging and effective. Open-ended responses

emphasized the interactive nature of the activities, which made the content accessible and enjoyable. Teacher interviews reinforced these findings, observing greater critical awareness and caution among students in navigating online platforms after the program. These findings are consistent with prior research showing that interactive media-based initiatives enhance student engagement and digital competence (Fathi et al., 2025; Iskandar et al., 2025).

Before the program, most students already possessed basic knowledge of digital safety, though some areas such as recognizing digital footprints and knowing where to report online misuse showed gaps. Similar findings have been reported in digital literacy studies, where students demonstrate basic awareness but lack deeper understanding of critical safety concepts (Sobodić et al., 2022). The results showed basic awareness of digital safety, but certain concepts such as reporting misuse and digital footprints were less understood. The results suggest that while students had a general awareness of online safety, there was still uncertainty about deeper aspects such as privacy risks and reporting mechanisms. This highlights the importance of structured digital literacy interventions to strengthen these competencies (Munasinghe & Hewawasam, 2025).

While for University Students, reflective journals revealed that undergraduate participants developed stronger competencies in teamwork, communication strategy, and project management. Many reported a deeper appreciation of their role as socially responsible communicators. The campaign provided authentic opportunities to bridge theory and practice, consistent with SULAM's objectives of experiential and civic-based learning. These reflections align with previous research demonstrating that service-learning fosters critical thinking, empathy, and civic engagement (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996).

Collectively, the results illustrate how transformative pedagogies extend the learning space beyond the classroom. By situating knowledge within real-life contexts, "Click With Care" not only enhanced digital literacy among secondary students but also cultivated professional readiness among undergraduates.

CONCLUSION

The "Click With Care" campaign provides evidence of how SULAM can be applied as a transformative pedagogy to address pressing communication challenges. The initiative successfully raised digital literacy awareness among school students while simultaneously enriching the competencies of university participants. By combining participatory action research with experiential learning, the program created mutual benefits for both education and community stakeholders. The study highlights the importance of embedding service-learning and real-life projects into curricula, as these initiatives foster academic, personal, and civic development. Moving forward, campaigns such as "Click With Care" can serve as models for integrating Public Relations education with societal needs, particularly in advancing national priorities on digital safety and literacy.

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