



An Examination of the Impact of Photography on Developing Media Literacy and Awareness among School-Going Teenagers

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Abstract:

This research study aims to critically examine the power of photography as a tool for teaching media literacy among school-going teenagers, specifically focusing on the role of visual storytelling in the digital age. The research design incorporates a qualitative approach, utilizing case study methodology to gain an in-depth understanding of how photography can enhance media literacy skills.

The sample for this study will consist of school-going teenagers from diverse backgrounds and educational institutions. Purposeful sampling will be employed to select participants who have engaged in photography activities or have shown an interest in visual storytelling. The sample size will be determined through data saturation, where new insights and themes cease to emerge from the collected data.

The methodology involves conducting focus group discussions and interviews with the selected participants to explore their experiences, perceptions, and learning outcomes related to using photography as a medium for media literacy education. Participants will also be encouraged to share their visual narratives or projects created using photography, which will be analyzed as artifacts of their learning process. Thematic analysis will be employed to identify recurring themes and patterns within the collected data. The Artefact analysis will focus on understanding the impact of visual storytelling on participants' media literacy skills, including critical thinking, visual interpretation, media analysis, and digital citizenship.

The findings of this study will contribute to the existing literature by providing insights into the effectiveness of photography as a pedagogical tool for teaching media literacy to school-going teenagers. The research findings will inform educators, curriculum developers, and media literacy advocates about the potential of visual storytelling in enhancing critical media literacy skills in the digital age. Additionally, the study will shed light on the experiences and perspectives of teenagers, helping to bridge the gap between youth culture, media education, and the evolving landscape of digital media.

Keywords: media literacy, photography, visual storytelling, digital media, teenagers

Introduction:

Photography is a valuable tool for teaching media literacy and critical thinking, allowing students to understand the constructed nature of visual language and the ways in which photographers make choices to convey messages to specific audiences. By interpreting or creating photographs, students can develop an understanding of how photographs are used for different purposes, how photographers make intentional decisions about composition, and how readers use their own experiences and understanding of visual language to interpret images. [1] A picture is worth thousand words. Thus, a good photograph is one which is able to convey the story without involving any individual to narrate what is happening. Developing media literacy skills in today's time is essential because media literacy is the ability to effectively navigate and interact with various forms of communication, encompassing skills such as accessing, analyzing, evaluating, creating, and acting upon information. This includes the capacity to identify the motivations behind an information source and the intended goals of a message. [2] The research involves the case study of photography projects executed by

school going children aged between 12 to 18 in order to understand how students learn about different concepts and then how do they visualise and convey the meaning of those concepts using the power of photography.

The study aims to explore how school-age children develop media literacy skills through photography projects, which can provide valuable insights into their critical thinking, creativity, and visual communication abilities. By examining the photography projects of students aged 12-18, the research can help identify patterns and trends in how children develop their media literacy skills, ultimately informing the development of effective educational strategies to promote media literacy in young people.

Advantages of photography and it's connection with classroom media literacy:

1. Photographs offer a unique access to tacit knowledge, allowing for a deeper understanding of reality as experienced and interpreted by teachers. Studies in kindergarten and adult education show that photography and photo-elicitation methods provide better understanding that would be difficult to access through other methods.
2. Photographs enable users to convey complex thoughts and tell richer stories, which can also aid teachers in developing audio-visual literacy. Other studies show that metaphor and hyperbole are prominent in teachers' photographic representations, demonstrating the value of multimodal languages and expressive resources in photography. This allows teachers to showcase their knowledge and practice, promoting professional development.
3. With the help of photo feedback exercises, teachers can gain insight into their own experiences and professional dilemmas by analysing and discussing photographs taken during interactive classroom sessions. This process allows them to reflect on their decisions and think critically about the underlying theories, beliefs, and values that shape their teaching methods, ultimately leading to a deeper understanding of their practice.
4. Production of images enables a collaborative approach between teachers and students, fostering democratic procedures that facilitate access to knowledge and improve teaching practices. Involving teachers as co-researchers is crucial, as it allows them to share their expertise and understanding of the knowledge, they base their teaching on, thereby enriching the research process.
5. Studies have shown that teachers, with vast experience, can adopt new ways to problem-solve and develop professionally through photo elicitation. This process encourages teachers to understand their teaching practices, question their assumptions, and create new ways of responding to challenging situations. The collective and deliberative dialogue generated through photo elicitation can lead to the development of alternative actions and the transformation of professional theories and practices.

Review of literature:

Photography is not limited to media and its role in enhancing media literacy. It authenticates written information, breaks literacy barriers and establishes an emotional connection with viewers. Photos, along with text, break the monotony and engage a viewer in a better way. [3] Visual literacy skills can be developed among students by conducting an experimental approach where several students participated in and contributed to qualitative analysis. Incorporating visual literacy into the design classroom is essential, as it enables students to interpret and construct meaning through images, developing their skills and keeping them engaged. Photography and visual reporting can be effective tools to achieve this.

Latest technology and social media made photography popular among general public but people adopted photography because it helps them in recording and sharing their experiences. It caters to an individual's social and emotional needs. Thus, photography links psychology with modern technology use. [4]

Design teachers should prioritize incorporating visual literacy into their daily tasks, as it not only prepares students to become professional designers but also addresses other essential skills. By developing visual literacy, students will be equipped to face the challenges of a rapidly changing society, making them a holistic professional with a comprehensive skillset. [5]

Photography is a valuable educational research tool that provides access to data that can't be expressed through words. It allows researchers to narrate experiences, evoke emotions, and reveal participants' beliefs and

perspectives, complementing verbal narration to provide a deeper understanding of reality and subject actions. [6]

Students are often familiar with photography, but they may overlook the symbolism and messages embedded in images. However, photographs can convey messages and perspectives, regardless of their purpose, whether it's entertainment, commerce, or art. By examining the creative artist's approach to photography, students will develop their visual thinking skills to uncover and analyze the symbolism, messages, and viewpoints present in the images. [7]

The association of pictures only with mass thinking and media persuasion, implying a primitive form of thinking, is problematic and has contributed to the devaluation of pictures in education. However, perception is a crucial part of thought and cognition, and visual and other sensory experiences are essential for learning and understanding, as stated by Arnheim in his research. A study conducted at a University in China found that Exposure to photos promoting sustainability can boost low-carbon awareness and encourage behaviour change. Better government policy, education, and public campaigns can help spread climate change awareness through photography. [8]

In the context of digital photography, this refers to the highest level of correspondence between the digital image and its real-world object, where the pixels accurately represent the facts, without any modifications or alterations during the initial processing. This is in contrast to intentional editing or manipulation, which can be considered separately based on the user's intentions.

Photographs are often used to embody abstract concepts, such as climate change, by linking them to their concrete manifestations. For example, a photograph of a melting polar ice cap can represent climate change, with the embodied representation not being the concept itself, but rather a symbol of it. The photograph's representational quality evokes a general concept of an iceberg, and when assigned a conceptual object, it becomes a symbolic representation of the concept, allowing viewers to adopt interpretations and associate with emotions such as anger, indifference, or sadness. [9]

Photographs can be a valuable resource for developing reading and writing skills in the classroom, as they provide a visual representation of concepts and themes. By teaching students to analyze and interpret photographs, educators can support the development of technical skills, such as learning to explore and understand visual content, while also encouraging students to think creatively and critically about their own experiences and perspectives. [10] Photography is a valuable teaching tool that enhances literacy skills, creates a unique classroom atmosphere, and motivates learners to think creatively. By incorporating photographs into lessons, educators can engage students' attention, encourage new ideas, and bridge academic disciplines, while also introducing children to cultural knowledge.

Photo elicitation was used as a training technique to help teachers guide students in analysing photographs related to religious intolerance and marginalization. It helps in breaking stereotypic norms and social ills. Students learn about diverse identities, fostering understanding and dismantling preconceived notions by engaging with real photographs. [11] When students are encouraged to participate in specialised workshops to learn new digital skills and enhance their knowledge, it changes their perception towards the skill and motivates them to learn further. Mobile photography also helps share local culture and tourism with the world. Mobile photography is emerging as a tool for youth entrepreneurship and self-employment in remote areas, providing new opportunities for economic development and cultural expression. [12]

Another research study discussed the learnings where students engage in a Literacy Through Photography Curriculum (LTP) that combines language arts with photography, drama, art, reading, and writing. The experimental study also supported project-based learning, where students incorporate photography to represent and understand knowledge. The paper explored the outcomes of this integrated curriculum in a third-grade classroom. In this study, a teacher utilized photography as a semiotic resource to enhance student learning in reading and language arts classrooms, aiming to support reflection, critical thinking, and connections to students' lives. [13] By incorporating photographs, teachers can integrate knowledge of students' families, linguistic practices, and cultural backgrounds, making it an effective tool to develop media literacy. Photography

offers a unique opportunity to engage readers and writers, particularly those who may struggle with traditional learning methods, by providing a hands-on approach to exploring images and ideas. Introducing photography to design students can effectively facilitate their transition from sketching to visual storytelling, enhancing their creative skills and broadening their expressive capabilities.[14]

Fostering student authorship is possible by understanding the value of photography in educational institutions, particularly schools. Access to technology enables a child to develop digital literacy skills. Digital photography's shift from viewfinders to displays has made it more convenient, offering new teaching opportunities. There must be guiding principles for teachers to integrate photography and thorough image selection for class engagement effectively. [15]

In teacher training, media literacy and education are often overlooked, despite their importance in teaching students about the potential of media and ICTs. It is essential to include media education in teacher training programs, as teachers will be responsible for teaching media literacy to their students and recognizing the educational potential of media and ICTs. [16]

Media Literacy now emphasizes that being an informed consumer of information is crucial in today's digital age, as it enables individuals to make informed decisions in various aspects of life, such as managing their health, finances, and personal relationships.

Gaps found based on literature review:

No research studies are available in connection with Indian schools where photography has been used as an effective tool to impart media literacy knowledge to students. Most of the research studies focused either on media literacy or solely connected photography with visual literacy, but did not realise the role of photography in developing media literacy skills among school children. One of the research papers even stated that audio-visual devices and computers were not updated for education, while the sole purpose of launching television in India was to promote education and improve the literacy rate of India. Few research papers have only recognised the importance and use of photography in teacher training programs for effective teaching in the classroom.

Theoretical framework:

The framework draws on constructivist learning theory, suggesting that knowledge is developed through experiences and interactions. It proposes that visual storytelling through photography helps teenagers articulate and critique the media they consume. This theoretical framework explores the relationship between photography, visual storytelling, and media literacy development among school students. It suggests that photography serves as a pedagogical tool and imparting its knowledge in schools can enable students to develop not just digital skills but also critical thinking and reflective practices, enhance their ability to discern bias and authenticity in visual media, and become informed consumers and creators of media. Photography as a form of visual communication can significantly contribute to cultivating media literacy skills.

Research methodology:

The study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing focus group discussions and interviews to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and learning outcomes related to photography as a medium for media literacy education.

A purposeful sampling technique has been used to collect data from 146 school students from Manav Rachna International School of Charmwood, Faridabad. These students are active students of Media Shala, a specialized department of the school that imparts media literacy education.

Three different photography projects have been considered for the study. For each project, a separate focus group discussion has been conducted to gather rich qualitative data, allowing participants to share their experiences and insights. Participants submitted their projects created using photography. These artefacts served

as tangible evidence of their learning process and have been analysed to understand their thought processes and skills development.

In addition to focus groups, semi-structured interviews with five active members of the media club at MRIS Charmwood were conducted to get in-depth perspectives on their learning experiences and the impact of photography on their media literacy skills.

Three different projects have been taken into account for the study which are:

1. Miniature photography defining real life storytelling

65 school students, grouped in teams of 3 to 4, participated in miniature photography project after taking regular media literacy and photography classes for five months. The students, who had been attending classes twice a week, were able to develop their own unique ideas and styles for storytelling, inspired by their individual interests. During the project, each group had 45 minutes to set up and decide on the angle and composition of their photographs. Through this project, the students demonstrated their creative vision and technical skills, showcasing their abilities to capture compelling images within a short timeframe.

2. Product and fashion photography

For fashion and product photography project, 70 school students participated and tried to promote a particular product incorporating different creative strategies using power of visual storytelling. Before working on this project, these students attended media literacy and photography classes for about 7 months at regular intervals. Minimal support and guidance were provided by a mentor who had knowledge of photography for setting up the frame and composing the shot. Students divided themselves in groups of 5-7 for executing the project and a total time given to each group was 60 minutes approximately.

3. Photowalk based on heritage and historical architecture

Photowalk is a concept where students step into outdoors and take a walk in a predefined area trying to capture the surroundings in a unique creative perspective. A total of 11 students participated in this project. Heritage theme was decided for conducting this project and total time allotted for this was 2 hours at the location. Lodhi gardens situated in New Delhi was selected for the photowalk. The student participants belonged to a media club where they actively learn about media literacy. They also attended a guided workshop on heritage and architecture photography before heading on to the photowalk. Following the photowalk, students were tasked with selecting their two most outstanding photographs that effectively convey visual storytelling. These images were then submitted for review, allowing to assess the students' ability to craft compelling narratives through their photography.

Ethical Considerations

- All the students who participated in the study are active students of media literacy classes. The projects undertaken for the study are a part of their regular curriculum, and the students' parents were well aware of these photography projects.
- Before conducting the project, participants were educated about their work's ethical implications. It includes avoiding perpetuating stereotypes or exploiting vulnerable subjects in their photography.
- Students were also taught about digital footprints and the potential for images to be misused.

Data analysis:

Sample participants were encouraged to share their creative photography projects who were able to finish the assigned task within the given deadlines by their respective mentors. A total of 13 projects have been collected including 5 from miniature photography and 8 projects product and fashion photography project. Apart from this, all 11 students who participated in heritage photowalk submitted a photo which displays unique perspective according to them for the data analysis. Thematic analysis has been employed here to identify the recurring theme from the collected data.

Project 1



Figure 1. Off-roading

The image titled “off-roading” in figure 1 as a part of miniature photography depicts a real-life scene of a monster truck on offroad racing track. The students shared their experience behind the execution of this image that out of all miniature themed toys available with them, they wanted to recreate an action-packed off-roading scene and do not want to keep it simple so they picked the biggest truck. They brought miniature trees and road signs from a stationary shop to make their photography project better. The addition of mud and plant leaves made and the application of eye level angle made the photograph quite authentic. One of the student further shared that the blue light effect on the top of truck was done with a torch that they borrowed from other group involved in the photography project.



Figure 2. Car ride across the city

The photo in figure 2 represents a boy with a luxurious car with a cityscape in background. During the discussion the students involved in the project shared that they kept 3 key elements of a picture in mind while doing the project which are subject, object and background. All 5 students involved in the project brought different products and compiled them together to prepare the set. The addition of artificial lights to the city background poster and water spray for rainfall effect made their idea unique.

The photo in figure 3 represents a normal day in the life of a girl. The students involved in photography project shared that none of them had many miniature toys available at their home so they come up with an idea of using biscuits to create a TV and sofa and made the toy girl sit and watch TV. The creative aspect in the photo was the use of torch light to add authenticity to tv watching experience. Lastly the use of dutch angle for capturing this image made it overall appealing.



Figure 3. Daily routine in the life of a girl child

The photograph in figure 4 titled as Jungle King by the school students represents a lion taking a walk in jungle. The students involved in the photography project shared that they used simple miniature toys and plants to create the situation of jungle. The application of depth in picture by using maximum aperture settings added a unique perspective to the image. A student also shared that background was created using peel of onion and real plant leaves. The image represents an idea similar to that of a cartoon and movie named lion king.



Figure 4. Jungle King

The image in figure 5 is another example of creativity using simple everyday products. The students involved in this photography project shared the struggle to get a unique idea to execute the project when one of them brought fruits to create a building and placed a ladder as if the toy ranger is climbing up to save the kitty. The idea of photograph represents real life rescue missions taken up by fire fighters and other military officials during the time of natural calamities.



Figure 5. Rescue mission

Project 2

The students involved in the photography project as seen in figure 6 came up with an idea of combining fashion with photography. They opted blue as a primary color and black as secondary, one of the students chose to be the model. The student model shared that she likes to be in front of camera more than behind, so she chooses to highlight the blue color by wearing a light blue colored long coat. Other group members coordinated by controlling extra light through a filter and the picture was clicked using an eye level shot. The students kept the idea and setting simple as per their knowledge. Lastly, they shared that their experience was good as they managed to complete the task within the allotted time, and it turned out good.



Figure 6. Photography project by students blending fashion with blue color

In figure 7, the group of students chose black colored headphones as their primary product for photography. Their photography project highlighted the importance of music in the daily lives of people as they showed a model enjoying music while sipping coffee on a bench. The students shared their passion for both music and photography via the task. A long shot and an extreme close shot of product using flay lay technique made this project stand out.



Figure 7. Photography project by students using black headphones to depict music's daily life companion

Another group of students chose black as the primary color to execute fashion and product photography project. Here, a girl shared that she enjoys dressing up in traditional attire, so she became the model while others shared that they took up the task of clicking her photos and blocking extra light via filter. Two different shots were used to prepare the project i.e. long shot and mid shot as seen in figure 8.



Figure 8. Photography project by students depicting traditional fashion in black

The photography project as seen in figure 9 involves the usage of 2 colors: blue and white. The group of students shared that they wanted to keep the idea simple so that they could finish the assigned task within the given time limit. Here, one student becomes a model to pose with the main product. The group associated the product usage with females pretty well and further gave a clear message that the product is affordable and suitable for every skin via caption.



Figure 9. Photography project by students depicting simple and affordable skincare using a product

The photo shown in figure 10 displays the creative use of green color in product photography. The product chosen by the students has green colored outer and they shared that the product helps in reducing acne from the skin. To highlight the product, they chose to keep the face of model little blur in the background as she holds the product in hand. It displays creative composition as choosing close up shot while keeping focus on the product indicates that the product is meant to be applied on face.



Figure 10. Photography project by students depicting importance of skin care

The photography project conducted by students in figure 11 displays their deep interest in the game of cricket. The students shared that the child working as the model plays cricket for his school team. Thus, they wanted to highlight the role of umpire via photography.

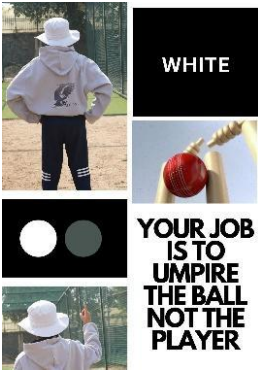


Figure 11. Photography project by students depicting their passion for cricket

The students involved in the photography project shared that none of them was interested in being a model, so they focused only on the color and the product. They used a top angle and ground level shot to display the product precisely outdoors. Overall, the students enjoyed working on this project. They chose white color as all the group members had a common liking for white color in shoes. Figure 12 displays their work.



Figure 12. Photography project by students using white shoes as product

The photo in figure 13 is the only project where 2 girls decided to model along with the product. They shared that they like to be in front of camera and get clicked which is why they chose white color as theme and formal shirt as their main product. They took a long shot displaying their confident look highlighting their fashion.

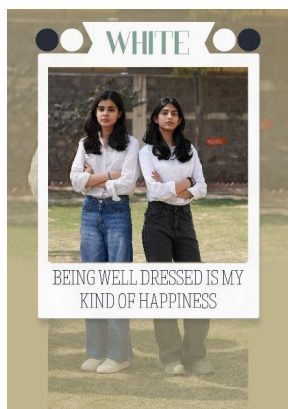


Figure 13. Photography project by students depicting everyday fashion

Project 3

The photowalk organised at Lodhi gardens where 11 school students participated consists of heritage architecture, various species of birds, plants, trees and artificial lake. The students who participated in the photowalk shared their experience. One of them shared that it was a unique experience as she never thought walk and photography can be combined together. Another student shared that such activities enable to test their photography skills as they step into real world trying to find that one picture spot which stands out. Another student shared that such experiences enable them to visit new places and learn about them. Photography can be done by both professional cameras as well mobile, it's all about the perspective and composition, shared a student who clicked pictures with both camera as well as mobile. Post photowalk, all the students shared that

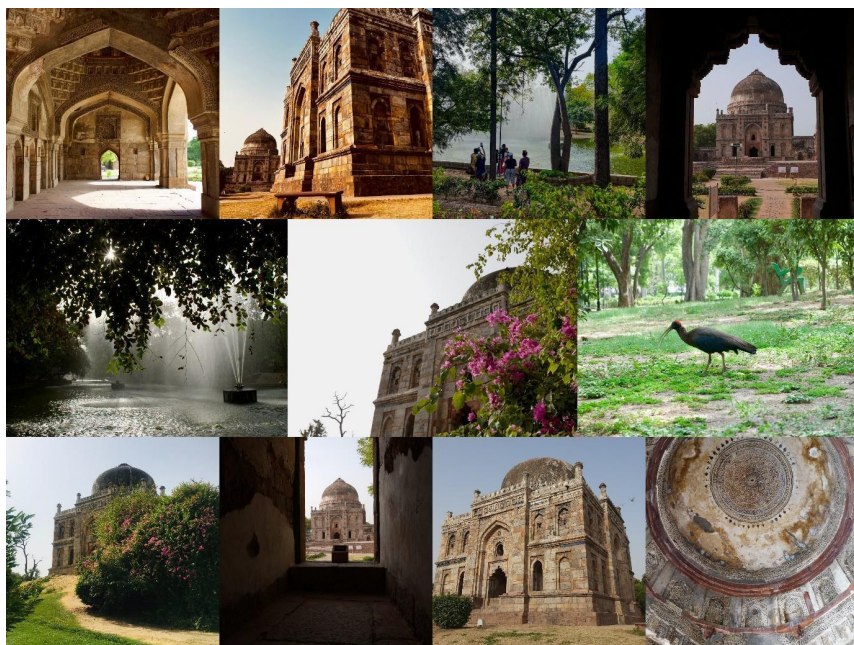


Figure 14. Collage of pictures captured by participants during the Photowalk

they would like to participate again and learn more about this concept. The collage of photos in figure 14 displays the photos taken by students from the photowalk.

Analysis of student interviews:

Five school students in their interview shared their favourite genre of photography that fascinates them and how do they decide on a subject to be photographed. They also shared their journey and an instance that motivated them to learn more about media and role of photography. The following are excerpts from student interviews, offering insights into their experiences.

- *I'm usually drawn to nature photography, especially when it comes to capturing unique, unexpected colors in the environment. I love seeking out those "odd" hues that stand out in natural settings, which often become my focus.*
- *If an object inspires me and is standing out, I choose that as my subject and the genre that fascinates me the most is nature and night sky.*
- *The thing that generally fascinates me is that you can capture the most important, beautiful and amazing things and adventure of your life.*
- *I just shoot whatever looks good in the moment, whatever tells the best story.*
- *Photography is all about the art of noticing. It's about seeing things from a unique angle and sharing that perspective with others. In my everyday life, I'm constantly drawn to different subjects whether it's the beauty of nature, the energy of the streets, or the elegance of architecture.*

Results and Discussion:

- 5 students out of 11 were able to present a unique perspective of the heritage spot through their clicked photograph while other 6 also managed to submit a good quality photograph. The Photowalk enabled

the students to understand the importance of heritage, nature and physical exercise incorporating the art of photography. They learned about the basics of outdoor photography specifically nature and architecture along with various techniques and angles of photography during the Photowalk. The school students gained knowledge about the historical place contributing to the development of media literacy skills. The event changed the perception of few students who thought that outdoor trips only act as a source of entertainment and act a stress buster. Photowalk helped them in identifying a new passion which they would like to continue in future to learn more about new areas and capture them to inform others.

- 8 groups containing 26 students successfully submitted their fashion and product photography project. Each group demonstrated a strong understanding of the assignment, showcasing their media literacy skills through effective composition, camera angles, and creative storytelling. They employed a personalized approach to highlight the product's features, ensuring that their visual message was clear and engaging. By incorporating these techniques, the groups successfully conveyed their message effectively through visual media.
- The miniature photography project, comprising 5 groups with 18 students, demonstrated exceptional creativity and innovative thinking. Each group's project showcased unique idea formulation and impressive visual storytelling skills, highlighting their ability to capture compelling narratives through photography. The submissions displayed a high level of quality, showcasing the students' talent and skill in crafting engaging visual stories.
- The three photography projects developed media literacy skills among school students by encouraging them to research, think critically, and use their creativity to create unique images. Through these projects, students learned about various aspects of photography, including color theory, environment, and the power of photography to influence audiences. They also understood the power of photos to raise awareness about global issues, such as climate change, and developed skills to effectively communicate through visual storytelling.
- Based on thematic data analysis, it has been found that students actively improvised their idea during the setup by adding more elements along with the subject. Most of the projects displayed different passions being followed by students and few shown real life instances via photos. Lastly students worked in micro groups and took different responsibilities as per their skills and displayed the importance of teamwork to complete the task in given time limit.
- Through student interviews, it has been discovered that the shared passion among student photographers is capturing nature and everyday life, each with their own personal story of how they began to appreciate the significance of media and photography. Despite their individual motivations, all students share a common goal: to develop their photography skills and its role to spread the message about the importance of media literacy.

Conclusion:

The photo in figure 2, 7, 8 and some others shows that school students develop media literacy skills quickly when activities are linked with things students are passionate about. Students pay more attention to details such as composition, caption and overall message in such manner. The results from the study helped in establishing that every student can develop their digital skills and contribute towards media literacy by using photography as a tool. Such creative projects enable learning not just about the art form but various aspects of media such as creative writing, basic designing, use of complimentary colours and most importantly teamwork. By linking media literacy skills to students' interests and passions, learning can be made more engaging and effective by educators. When students are invested in a project, they're more likely to pay attention to details such as composition, caption, and overall message leading towards a better understanding of the media literacy skills being taught. It allows students to explore various aspects of media, such as creative writing, designing, and colour theory, while fostering teamwork and collaboration skills.

It is quite evident that photography can contribute to the development of media literacy skills among school students. Schools across India do not have Media literacy as a mandatory formal subject like maths, science and

others. Few international schools which are providing the facility of teaching photography and media literacy have taken up this subject as optional or under co-curricular activity which does not make it that effective. Photography and media literacy classes require transmission of both theory and practical classes which not just requires experienced faculty from the industry but also requires advanced equipment and setup including a lab having professional hardware and software with modern cameras which are quite expensive. School students if not taught about the importance of media literacy may lead to several issues such as lack of awareness, spreading of misinformation and adopting fake news and information.

Introducing media literacy as a subject in formal education is crucial in today's digital age, especially with the widespread use of mobile devices. Photography has the potential to become a powerful tool in teaching media literacy, as it allows students to critically evaluate and create visual content. By integrating photography into the mainstream curriculum, educators can teach students content analysis and understand how media can shape their perceptions and influence their opinions. This hands-on approach can enable a student develop critical thinking skills, become more discerning consumers of media, and ultimately make informed decisions.

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