



Media Literacy and the Youth

Cameron Mostofi
Laguna Beach High School

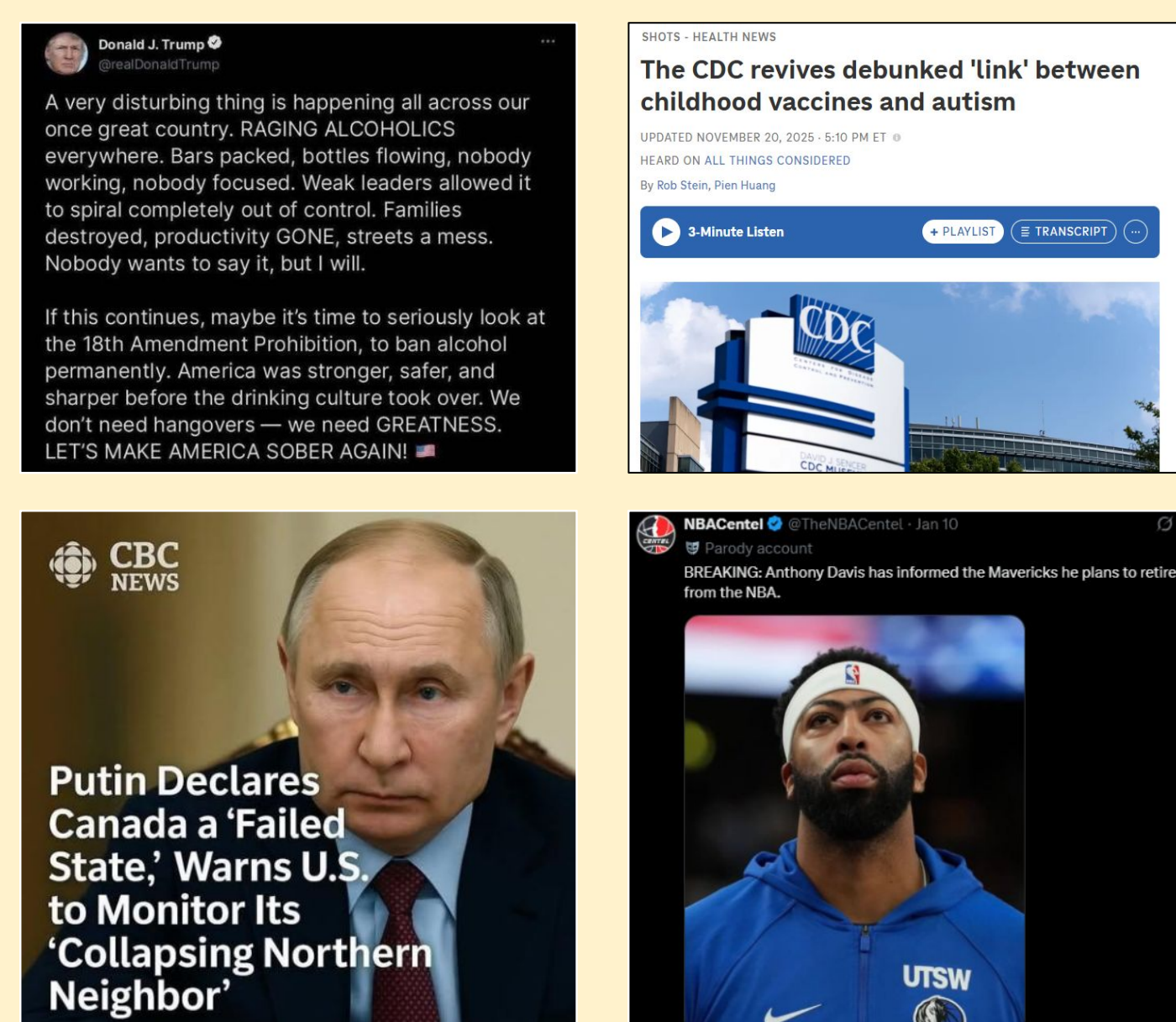


INTRODUCTION

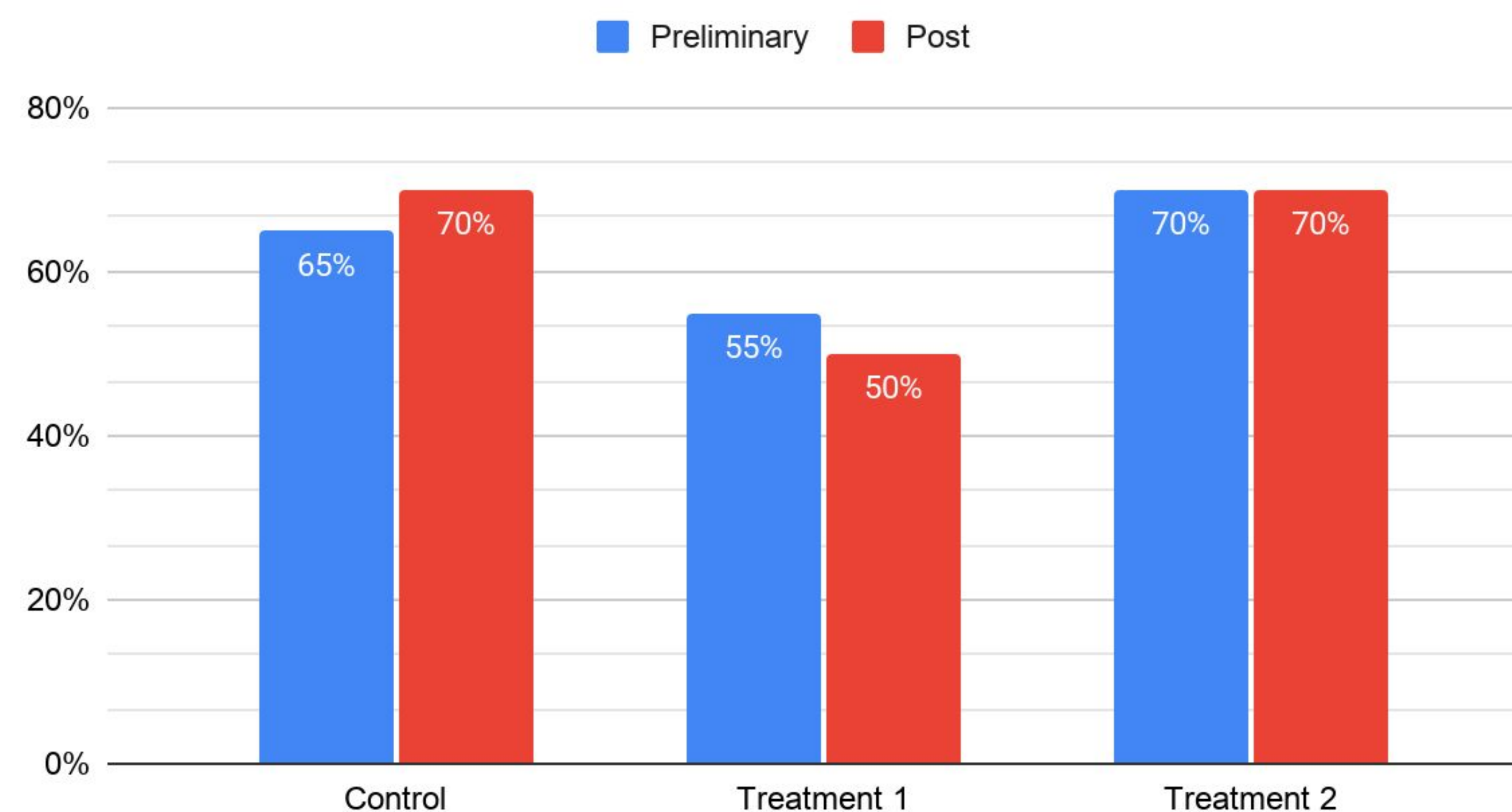
Social media platforms like Snapchat and Instagram have grown rapidly, increasing young people’s exposure to misinformation. This research paper examines whether today’s youth have the media literacy skills needed to navigate the digital age. It focuses on adolescents’ ability to recognize bias and distinguish between AI-generated and human-created content. The study uses surveys and instruction to identify strengths and weaknesses in these skills. The goal is to determine if young people are prepared to make informed decisions in a media-driven world. The study also suggests ways to improve media literacy through education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Students in the Model United Nations course at Laguna Beach High School were used to examine the most effective methods for teaching media literacy. Students initially completed a survey in which they identified whether various sources were real or fake, including content generated by artificial intelligence. Following this initial assessment, students were divided into separate groups and were taught different forms of media literacy instruction, and finally given a post-assessment. The primary objective of the study was to determine which group demonstrated the greatest percentage of improvement based on the type of instructional method they received.



Preliminary and Post Survey Percentages



CONTROL:

Received a typical classroom lesson on media literacy. The lesson was divided into the topics of AI literacy, social media literacy, and bias literacy.

TREATMENT 1:

Completed a hands-on task where they individually found online sources that were trustworthy, biased, AI generated, or misinformation.

TREATMENT 2:

Collaborated to discuss the survey before the post assessment, but opinions were shared among the group where people came to a general agreement.

DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND EVALUATION

The results of this study suggest that traditional classroom instruction was the most effective method for improving media literacy skills among students. Group 1 had a 5% increase in performance, indicating that structured teaching provides students with clear strategies for identifying misinformation online. In contrast, Group 2 experienced a 5% decrease in performance, which suggests that independently searching for sources without guidance may lead to confusion or reinforcement of incorrect assumptions. Finally, Group 3 showed no measurable improvement, indicating that while group discussions may help students feel more confident, they do not necessarily improve actual media literacy skills. One possible explanation is that students may rely on peers rather than critically evaluating information themselves. Without proper media literacy instruction to begin with, Group 3 may have faced a “blind leading the blind” scenario, where the loudest voices in the room convinced people of incorrect assumptions.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND NEXT STEPS

The results of this study indicate that Group 1, which received a traditional classroom-style lesson, demonstrated the greatest improvement in media literacy skills and was therefore the most effective instructional method. It demonstrates that structured, teacher-led instruction provides students with clear guidance and more reliable strategies for identifying misinformation and evaluating sources. Based on these findings, the next step is to develop a more detailed and comprehensive educational plan centered around direct instruction. This plan would include structured lessons, guided practice, and clear criteria for evaluating sources, with the goal of strengthening students’ media literacy skills on a broader scale. School districts could use these lessons to improve media literacy skills in their students as they develop into adulthood and need to be able to understand if what they are consuming online is real or not. Ultimately, expanding this approach could help better prepare students to critically analyze information and make informed decisions in an increasingly digital world.

Thank you Mr. Shen and Dr. Doroudi for helping me make this project possible!

The full paper can be found here:

