

SUMMER 2026

“I Learned Something New Today, Thank You!”: TikTok as a Cultural Space for Peer-to-Peer Media Literacy

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ABSTRACT

This research examines TikTok as a cultural space where media literacy is developed and circulated through peer-to-peer teaching among youth. Taking MediaWise's TikTok account (devoted to youth-led media literacy education) as a case study, this research analyzes 50 videos from the account's "media literacy tips" playlist and top-performing videos. Findings show that media literacy accounts, such as MediaWise, are informative and relatable forms of communication that engage youth in current news and events. Particularly, MediaWise leverages TikTok-native editing, relatable content, youth vernacular, and real-life examples to make media literacy practices appealing and accessible. Audience responses indicate both learning and appreciation, as well as resistance and distrust, within an increasingly polarized political landscape. These findings highlight both the potential and the limits of peer-led media literacy on platforms that are playing a gradually central role in how young people encounter and tackle (mis)information. With implications for policymakers, educators, news organizations, caregivers, and nonprofits dealing with media literacy, this study can contribute to a better understanding of youth media literacy education and civic engagement.

Keywords: *media literacy, digital literacy, TikTok, social media, youth, peer-to-peer education, news, misinformation, polarization, political discourse*

SUMMER 2026

INTRODUCTION

TikTok has emerged as more than just a platform for viral dances and trends. As an increasing number of young people obtain news and information from TikTok (Tomasik & Matsa, 2025), it is becoming increasingly important to evaluate the quality of information presented on the platform. Research on digital media literacy highlights that informal learning environments, like social media, allow young people to expand their understanding beyond the formal context of the classroom, fostering civic, cultural, and social participation (Abdullah et al., 2024; Meyers et al., 2013). These spaces encourage experimentation, collaboration, and peer-to-peer learning, offering a uniquely youth-oriented environment for the target demographic to practice and share media/digital literacy skills.

TikTok is a double-edged sword, with its pervasiveness making it both highly beneficial and potentially harmful. With easily shareable and viral content, TikTok makes it easier to spread disinformation yet can also debunk hoaxes and reach an audience in a way that conventional media platforms cannot (Alonso-López et al., 2021; Literat et al., 2021). As teens increasingly rely on peer networks over institutions to make sense of the endless influx of information (Duvekot et al., 2024), peer-to-peer teaching on the platform has the potential to be useful. However, despite informal learning environments being a proven resource for digital literacy education, the connection between informal learning and formal educational outcomes is under-researched regarding media literacy (Meyers et al., 2013). There is still little data on whether involving youth as co-creators or peer educators enhances digital literacy outcomes (Taibi et al., 2023). More research needs to be conducted on grassroots and youth-led initiatives on TikTok (Duvekot et al., 2024), especially since peer dynamics shape how youth engage with media (Alonso-López et al., 2021).

Based on a qualitative content analysis of youth-produced media literacy education videos on TikTok, as well as comments posted on this content, this study asks the following questions: How do young people use TikTok as a cultural space to develop and share media literacy with peers? How do TikTok users respond to this educational media literacy content, and what cultural practices shape these responses?

Background: Media Literacy in Contemporary Contexts

In contemporary scholarship, there is an emerging consensus that youth media literacy must be understood as a dynamic process shaped by the cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions of digital life (Austin & Domgaard, 2024). Research in media literacy suggests that becoming media literate requires both foundational knowledge structures (such as understanding media effects, media content, and how media industries operate) and a set of cognitive skills that allow individuals to actively process, analyze, and evaluate media messages in context (Potter, 2004). Indeed, this research highlights that media literacy is not just about

SUMMER 2026

identifying misinformation but about developing habits of evaluation that can be applied across digital contexts (Adams et al., 2025).

The Challenge: Youth Information Practices in Social Media Environments

This need for evaluative habits is particularly urgent given how young people now seek information. Studies show that young people turn to social media for information-seeking, increasingly relying more on these networks over traditional news outlets (Duvekot et al., 2024). Within such environments, understanding misinformation requires users to not only recognize falsehoods but also critically evaluate information within systems that aren't as regulated as traditional news outlets (Patnaik & Litan, 2023). As a result, evaluating the credibility of information encountered on social media is especially vital for youth (Wineburg et al., 2020).

The dual nature of TikTok in particular – a vehicle for disinformation as well as a tool for debunking hoaxes — illustrates both the opportunities and the challenges of social media, highlighting the tension on participatory platforms when it comes to media literacy (Alonso-López et al., 2021). However, much of the research focuses on social media literacy as a monolith, without closely examining how young people engage with media literacy practices within specific platform contexts (Blakston et al., 2025). Specifically, TikTok provides a valuable lens for understanding media literacy education amongst youth, illuminating how audiences respond to such approaches within a highly participatory, visually driven, short-form video platform.

Institutional Responses: Promise and Precarity

The rise of misinformation has catalyzed new institutional agents to act. Fact-checking organizations, traditionally oriented toward verification, have begun to reimagine themselves as educators. Groups go beyond 'fact-checking' and directly involve media and information literacy education, reflecting a shift toward pre-emptive measures rather than reactive corrective ones (Çömlekçi, 2022). This transition mirrors a broader pedagogical turn from rectification after exposure toward proactive cultivation of critical thinking before exposure occurs.

However, the expansion of fact-checking into educational practice is not without structural tension. Studies report that nearly half of the fact-checking organizations affiliated with the International Fact-Checking Network now conduct digital and information literacy activities, with a 60 percent increase since 2022 (Arribas et al., 2025). Yet, these initiatives “are strongly reliant on externally funded projects and programs, rather than representing an independent and sustainable business model” (Arribas et al., 2025, para. 4). The instability of these crucial efforts underscores a persistent challenge in media literacy: the mismatch between the scale of misinformation and the resources available to counter it through sustained education. Moreover, as informal

learning becomes more central to how young people develop digital literacies, disparities in access, mentorship, and institutional support risk creating inequalities in critical awareness (Çömlekçi, 2022).

The Gap: Peer-to-Peer Media Literacy in Youth Contexts

While existing research highlights that media literacy is an essential skill to navigate the digital landscape, there is little focus on what types of skills existing interventions are specifically addressing, and how sociocultural contexts of social media users play into these interventions (Valle et al., 2024). Additionally, there is a paucity of research that addresses media literacy education regarding the circulation of information amongst youth; that is, traditional media literacy prepares youth to be consumers of information, but not as circulators responsible for the information they pass on to peers (Middaugh, 2018).

Indeed, informal learning has been identified as a key aspect in developing media literacy skills amongst youth (Meyers et al., 2013). While formal media literacy interventions have demonstrated gains in critical thinking and awareness of media representations (Bergstrom et al., 2018), research into informal learning environments suggests that the most durable media literacy skills are developed through peer-led exchanges (Scolari et al., 2018). These ‘transmedia’ skills developed in informal settings are retained at a higher rate because they are embedded in everyday social practices (Scolari et al., 2018).

Based on a systematic literature review of 50 recent studies, Valle et al. (2024) found that there is an emerging consensus to acknowledge that social media literacy must be understood regarding the intertwining of the media and users in these spaces. Thus, the “role of users as agents of change” is underexplored (Valle et al., 2024, para. 7). This gap is particularly pronounced when it comes to younger users: only 2% of social media literacy studies focused on high school students (Valle et al., 2024), and none of the 50 recent studies included in this systematic literature review examined young people’s preferred social media platform, TikTok.

The omission of peer-to-peer approaches is especially significant given what is known about peer influence and trust among adolescents. Research indicates that peer networks are the primary forms of digital socialization and are crucial for media literacy, as they serve as a primary source of information (Šušterič et al., 2024). As young people often turn to peers as trusted information sources, peer recommendations carry significant weight in evaluating content credibility (Jackson & Barnes, 2013). Especially crucial is focusing on informal settings where teens establish peer networks. In these contexts, young people navigate online content by relying on the “interpersonal constructions of expertise and reputation” they have established with their peers (Lawson et al., 2024, para. 41). Because peer networks act as a primary gateway to news and a space for social discussion, they are the most influential environment for shaping how youth view complex socio-political issues (Lawson et al., 2024). Ultimately, peer-to-peer teaching “fosters substantial civic engagement since youth are

SUMMER 2026

learning about issues facing their communities and then actively working to create solutions and inform their peers” (Jackson & Barnes, 2013, p. 3).

What limited research does exist on peer-to-peer media literacy suggests its promise. Studies on student-to-student collaboration on media literacy in a university context emphasize the significance and benefits of peer collaboration and open discourse (Valle et al., 2024), showing that these collaborative strategies support media literacy efforts since more advanced students can share what worked for them with their peers (Bridges, 2012; Yeh and Swinehart, 2020). Some young people are responsibly engaged with online spaces and could serve as peer educators; however, not every young person does this, underscoring both the necessity and the opportunity of peer-based media literacy education (Taibi et al., 2023). Yet, there remains a lack of attention to peer-to-peer media literacy approaches with younger demographics, such as high schoolers, as well as a lack of research on how those efforts may work in digital spaces where youth encounter misinformation.

Meeting users where they are likely to encounter misinformation is crucial to understanding youth media literacy, especially as peer-to-peer teaching becomes more prominent. As a result, there is an urgent need for research that addresses peer-to-peer media literacy on platforms where youth gather. The present study builds on prior work by examining media literacy interventions in informal contexts to better understand peer-to-peer initiatives and approaches to youth media literacy in digital spaces.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to explore youth-led digital literacy initiatives on social media. The research focuses on TikTok as a site of youth media interaction, using the account MediaWise as a case study to investigate how young users engage with media literacy content and how peer-to-peer teaching unfolds in these contexts.

Case Selection

TikTok, as a platform, was chosen due to its young demographics and role in youth culture, which allows for a rich understanding of youth practices. Within TikTok, MediaWise (@mediawise) was selected as the account of interest due to its focus on youth-oriented media literacy, its high engagement among young users, and its active production of content designed to teach critical thinking skills about news, misinformation, and online media practices.

MediaWise is an initiative launched by the Poynter Institute, a global nonprofit that specializes in fact-checking and media literacy. As a reputable project, MediaWise is heavily supported by large media groups

SUMMER 2026

such as Google, TikTok, Meta, and twitch. The MediaWise account on TikTok is particularly a subsidiary of MediaWise known as the Teen Fact-Checking Network, where teens verify viral information on the platform while providing useful media literacy tips. As of June 2026, MediaWise had 159.2k followers and 933.5k likes on TikTok and remains the largest dedicated peer-to-peer media literacy account on the platform. The account's accessibility, clarity, and substantial community interaction make it suitable for analyzing both content dissemination and audience response.

Data Collection

The total data corpus consists of 50 videos. The first 29 were based on MediaWise's "media literacy tips" playlist (a collection of videos posted by this account, sharing best practices for media literacy). A preliminary examination of these first 29 videos was conducted, and it was ascertained that this initial dataset was insufficient to properly answer the research question. Then, in a secondary round of data collection, an additional 21 videos were collected from the profile via sorting by "popularity".

For each of the 50 videos, the following metadata was manually collected into a spreadsheet: video titles, captions, date posted, number of views, number of likes, and the number of comments. A basic summary of each video was also captured for reference. 10,732 comments were also read and analyzed as secondary data.

Taking the utmost care for ethical considerations, usernames and other identifying information were omitted from the collection. In practice, this meant that only publicly accessible content was observed and documented, ensuring that no private information was used at any point in this process. This methodological choice allows the study to focus on naturally occurring discourse and interactions on the platform (Kozinets, 2019).

Data Analysis

A comprehensive thematic analysis was employed to interpret the data. Following a reflexive thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), broad themes and subthemes were formulated after several rounds of data familiarization and evaluation. The first round was a complete sweep of the data to understand the general scope and information that it presented. The second round focused more on the nuances of each video – media literacy content, framing of the videos, and audience reaction. Additionally, more detailed notes were made at this stage, taking into consideration both the content of the video itself and audience reaction in the comments. As a result of this diligent approach, each video was watched several times to not only gain a better understanding of the intentions of the creator but also how each video contributes to the goal of media literacy awareness. Subthemes were developed after the second round. A further sweep of the data consolidated

SUMMER 2026

understanding and generated anchoring evidence. Specific examples of media literacy tips, viral videos, and reactions were collected at this stage.

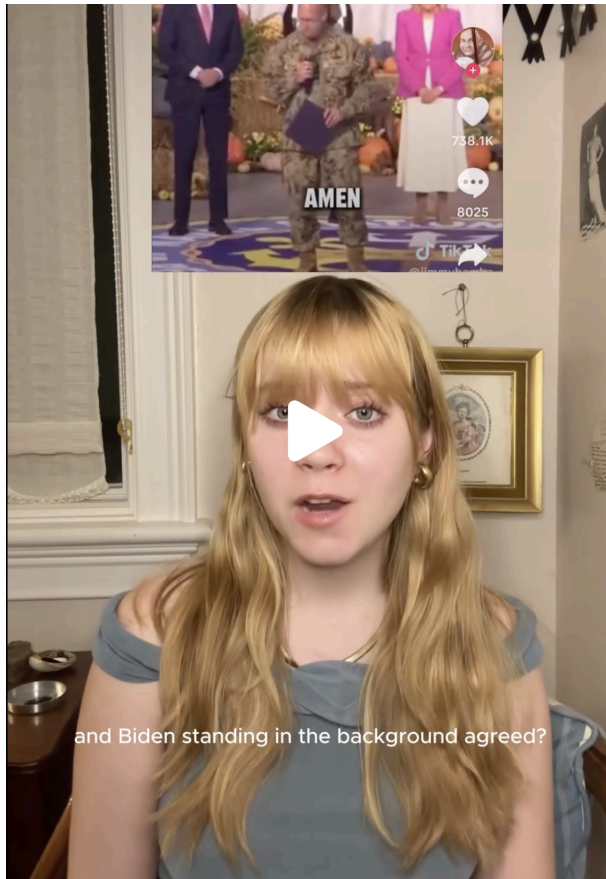
FINDINGS**What They Teach: Media Literacy Tips in Context**

Across the dataset, creators emphasized concrete media literacy practices, espousing useful tips while showing how they apply to real-world videos. Demonstrating media literacy tips through viral videos on TikTok actively showcases how media literacy skills translate into tangible contexts.

For example, one of the account's most popular videos debunked a viral video that showed a soldier praying for President Trump's re-election while President Biden stood in the background, seemingly agreeing (MediaWise, 2024, February 5, 0:06; see Fig. 1). In the MediaWise video, a young creator debunked this footage via an in-depth investigation showcasing media literacy practices in context. The investigation emphasized looking at the surroundings in the video to find the original context. After identifying where the video was filmed, the MediaWise fact-checker then showcased another key media literacy skill: using keyword search terms to locate the original video from a credible source (MediaWise, 2024, February 5, 0:50). The video concluded with another fundamental media literacy tip – to not take anything from social media at face value, especially if there is no source attached – and thus, visually displayed how to debunk a viral video through the incorporation of a real-life example (MediaWise, 2024, February 5, 2:24).

SUMMER 2026

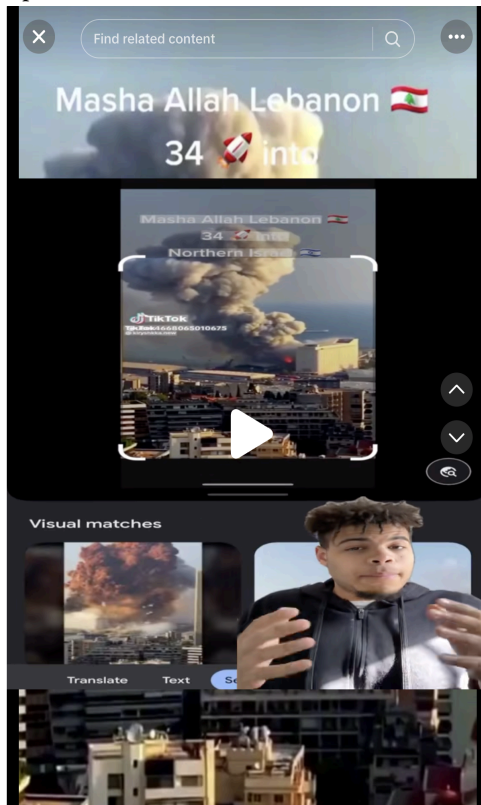
Figure 1. A MediaWise post debunking a viral political video that showed a soldier praying for President Trump (MediaWise, 2024, February 5, 0:06).



Another video (Fig. 2) debunked a viral claim that Lebanon was launching missiles into northern Israel (MediaWise, 2023, April 28, 1:17). The video highlighted using keyword searches with quotation marks for more specific results and utilizing reverse image searching and Google Images to find the original image of the viral post. Moreover, the video raised the important tip that any video with a terrifying explosion and that is cross-posted without any context is a red flag that requires immediate verification (MediaWise, 2023, April 28, 2:09). By interweaving vital media literacy tips with actual viral videos, MediaWise effectively gives audiences a front-row seat to digital verification.

SUMMER 2026

Figure 2. Debunking a viral claim about Lebanese missiles by utilizing a reverse image search (MediaWise, 2023, April 28, 1:17).



Videos repeatedly emphasize common media literacy techniques such as reverse image searching, source tracing, lateral reading, looking at data with context, reading past headlines, practicing click restraint, and using keyword searches. Reinforcement of these skills suggests peer-to-peer teaching is not merely about raising awareness around misinformation but actively teaching skills to combat it. In looking at the repeated skills, reverse image searching comes up in 8 of the videos and is used as a crucial tool for verifying viral videos. Reading past the headline is a skill that crops up 6 times. The repetition of these tips solidifies understanding of key media literacy skills, and the weaving in of the skills in the context of actual viral videos may make the tips more memorable.

SUMMER 2026

How They Teach It: Relatable, Youth-Centered Delivery

Instruction is not delivered through formal and impersonal language; instead, creators use youth vernacular, pop culture references, and TikTok-native pacing to frame source verification as accessible and socially relevant. The integration of humor, meme references, and casual tone reframes learning as peer-to-peer rather than institutional. This suggests that the pedagogical power lies in its delivery as much as in the technique itself. Therefore, relatability is leveraged as an instructional tool.

Modeling verification visually through the depiction of the creator's screen as they open tabs to laterally read, compare headlines, check news outlets, and reverse image search makes media literacy skills more concrete rather than abstract. For example, a video portraying lateral reading shows the MediaWise fact-checkers opening up different tabs to deep-dive into the source sharing a misleading news article (MediaWise, 2023, October 26, 0:46). In other videos, debunking viral claims like flowers blooming in Antarctica (MediaWise, 2023, November 11, 0:11; see Fig. 3), zombie viruses (MediaWise, 2023, January, 9, 0:07), or a trans runner in a marathon (MediaWise, 2023, October 26, 0:46), fact-checkers share a deep dive of their whole process, explaining each step along the way; thus, by visually representing their verification process, MediaWise establishes credibility and gives viewers vivid examples of how exactly to employ media literacy skills in real-life contexts. Moreover, with TikTok pacing and editing, the videos do not seem instructional or formal, but rather more like any other TikTok video across the platform. The use of speed, quick transitions, sound effects, and subtitles matches TikTok-native editing conventions. This particular editing style displays MediaWise's keen approach to tackling media literacy through informational but fun and easily digestible videos.

SUMMER 2026

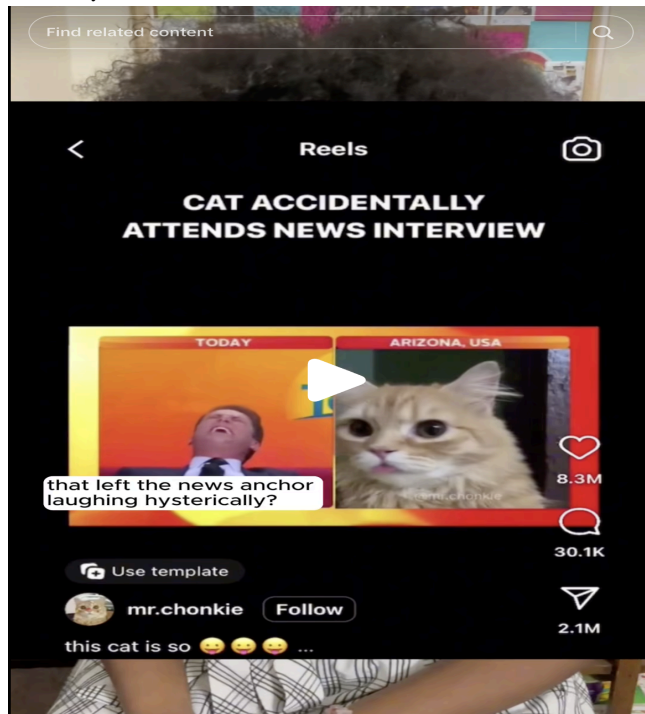
Figure 3. A video that visually demonstrates the process of fact-checking the story of flowers blooming in Antarctica (MediaWise, 2023, November 11, 0:11).



Furthermore, by referencing humor, pop culture, and internet memes in their videos, MediaWise conveys a relatability that captures youth attention, making media literacy seem important and relevant. For example, the inclusion of Mr. Chonkie (MediaWise, 2024, February 19, 0:04; see Figure 4) reflects the account's deliberate incorporation of popular internet and meme culture. Videos also include topics teens would be concerned about, such as the 2020 election (a lot of videos from MediaWise were posted during this period), climate change, LGBTQ+ rights, and COVID-19. These relatable topics appeal to youth viewers, drawing them to the account, as young people can connect more easily with content when the subject matters to them. Specifically, the easy-to-comprehend vernacular utilized by the account relates to young audiences. Terms like "here's a media literacy cookie" and "follow the money," "basically begging to be fact-checked," etc., help to reinforce MediaWise's image of relatable fact-checkers. Emojis, moving emoji GIFs, and catchy music in videos further demonstrate MediaWise's relatability and framing of media literacy as accessible.

SUMMER 2026

Figure 4. Leveraging pop culture references like Mr. Chonkie to display media literacy skills (MediaWise, 2024, February 19, 0:04).



“I Wish More People Could See This”: Positive Viewer Responses

Audience reception indicates that MediaWise’s peer-to-peer media literacy approach is often recognized as useful and actionable. Across the comments, viewers frequently thanked creators (“I learned something new today, thank you!”), claimed they learned new skills (“I never knew how to reverse image search”), and professed loyalty (“you just earned yourself a follower”; “following!”; “followed because of this vid”). Gratitude becomes a measurable indicator of perceived educational value, with positive reactions demonstrating effective content. Requests for additional topics and tagging of peers further portray that learning is social and is disseminated throughout the audience. Tagging peers also shows peer-to-peer teaching happening at the audience level, extending MediaWise’s impact.

Positive comments like “great fact-checking” or “good detective work” showcase not just favorable audience reception but an appreciation for the diligence of the effort in trying to cultivate media literacy understanding. When the video does a good job clarifying a topic, understanding is shown in the audience, with

SUMMER 2026

comments expressing gratitude for finding useful tools (e.g., “Ty! I never knew about InVid!”). Some comments show understanding through sharing disbelief that people would not know these skills or would fall for a hoax (“Sometimes I forget how many people don’t know how to do this”). Some comments express learning as well (e.g., “Nice. I would have totally just accepted it as fact.”; “I’m going to start reverse searching now”; “I wish more people could see this to learn how to read not just the headline.”) The positive viewer reactions demonstrate that TikTok serves as a cultural space where informal learning does indeed occur. By expressing learning, gratitude, and interest in the comments, users are engaging and having open discourse with peers in a way that would not happen in other contexts. For MediaWise, this translates into tangible gains in media literacy education on the very platform where many teens encounter information that requires these skills. Furthermore, this encouraging feedback highlights the possibility for more media literacy education on the platform, as well as informal peer-to-peer learning on other topics.

“Don’t Fall For These Lies”: Negative Responses in a Politically Polarized Climate

While most responses were positive, a distinct antagonism emerged where viewers resisted the fact-checking. Often invoking political distrust, questioning the legitimacy of youth authority, or impugning the intentions of the account, these comments tended to focus less on media literacy practices and more on ideological alignment. These negative, distrustful comments redirected attention away from the media literacy skills taught in the video and deflected it toward the claim being analyzed. For some audiences, fact-checking was perceived as political positioning, leading to opposition toward the creator, like attacking their legitimacy or accusing them of being politically motivated. This highlights a key tension as youth media educators operate within polarized digital landscapes.

Specific examples of MediaWise’s authority being impugned happen mostly in political videos. Some users state, “Why should we trust teens to fact-check?” or “Teenage fact checkers? Respectfully, I’m a teen, and I do not trust a body of my peers to fact-check info.” This shows that even among MediaWise’s teen audience, some of them do not trust the account because of the age of its creators. Some comments accuse MediaWise of having an agenda: “How much money did you get to post this?” “Videos like these are the media’s attempt to discredit info they don’t want out to prevent regular everyday citizens from being informed”, “Fact checkers should be voted and not some left-wing crazy that thinks they have the right to censor Americans”, and “Don’t fall for these lies... who’s behind this video?” Some also express accusations that the account has a “liberal agenda” and “anything from liberals is a lie.” Other comments express that MediaWise reads too deeply into things (e.g., “You didn’t have to do all that; I still believe flowers are growing or gonna grow in Antarctica”)

Moreover, some videos are one-sided, expressing clear favor toward the Right or the Left, whereas others have a mix of both sides. In the latter category of videos, open debate on the topic being debunked (and

SUMMER 2026

not the media literacy skills themselves) occurs in the comments, with name-calling and heated discussion happening. Some users rally to defend others, and some stand by themselves to defend their position amidst a swath of insults and degradation. Discourse on sensitive issues is thus opened in a public forum, allowing youth to air their concerns and stances under the cover of anonymity. The open conversation on topics unrelated to media literacy is crucial to the informal learning space that the platform has nurtured. By allowing youth to talk about topics that deeply matter to them in a free and natural way, the comment section of MediaWise operates as a forum for a sort of cultural exchange – an exchange of ideas. By approaching sensitive topics like politics, climate change, and health, MediaWise is doing the vital job of making sure important information is accurate; however, their videos also serve as a segue to broader conversations that would likely not occur offline. While these heated but open discussions are important, they can also negatively impact users. Inflamed sentiments and the defensiveness of some users in the comments show dogmatic beliefs. Moreover, blistering criticism from both sides contributes to a toxic internet environment where young people could feel discouraged from sharing their ideas out of fear of being insulted.

DISCUSSION

As the findings above illustrate, this study suggests that peer-to-peer media literacy can be effective when it is relatable, grounded in real-world contexts, and centered around youth pop culture. Young people are more inclined to learn from their peers because it feels social, less remote, and resonant. TikTok functions as a significant cultural space for peer-to-peer media literacy education because it is where youth encounter both their peers (known and unknown) and the information they consume, thus making media literacy education embedded in everyday practices. At the same time, while this research demonstrates that youth-led media literacy can be feasible and effective, its impact is often overshadowed by political conflict, polarization, and distrust of youth authority.

Overall, the findings of this research show that MediaWise leverages relatability to address contemporary issues. By meeting users where they are most likely to encounter misinformation, the account encourages young people to critically evaluate the information they encounter daily. With reiteration and the clear explanation of media literacy skills, MediaWise presents a relevant, compelling educational platform within an increasingly digital world. Presented in an accessible and engaging format and further spread through the tagging of peers, media literacy tips have the potential to reach a global audience. Thus, MediaWise and similar peer-to-peer media literacy accounts represent a novel type of educational system that is tailored to youth sensibilities and can be readily accessible from anywhere and at any time. Fostering honest discourse on real-world issues, these accounts lay the groundwork for youth civic thinking and engagement, ultimately leading to more informed and responsible choices for the future.

A quality peer-to-peer media literacy account on a social media platform is immensely valuable because videos will be posted synchronously with current events. This means this type of educational content arises in real time, concurrently with what is happening on the ground. This approach contrasts sharply with school programs that are taught at a specific time and place, where the urgency and timeliness of a particular issue may have waned. This is particularly important in the contemporary media environment, where misinformation can gain ground very quickly and must be countered in real time.

This research builds upon current understandings of peer-to-peer teaching in informal contexts like social media (Bridges, 2012; Yeh and Swinehart, 2020). In alignment with prior research, this study confirmed that informal learning environments can productively engage youth in open discourse online around topics that matter to them, extending their knowledge beyond the classroom (Abdullah et al., 2024; Duvekot et al., 2024). Echoing research by Literat et al. (2021), these findings contribute to a deeper understanding of media literacy efforts on social media and help illuminate the potential of involving youth as central stakeholders in media literacy education. Moreover, this research supports the idea that effective media literacy interventions should be situated where the skills would be needed in practice (McGrew & Kohnen, 2024).

This research presents important implications for media literacy practitioners. Notably, since this study shows that many social media users appreciate peer-to-peer media literacy education, educators could design activities where one student fact-checks a viral video each week and shares their analysis with the class; by encouraging students to take an active participatory approach to media literacy education, these skills can be retained at a higher rate (Freeman et al., 2014).

Additionally, the success of MediaWise on TikTok – as indicated by its high follower count (159.2k), likes (933.5k), and overall engagement – further proves that there is a space for peer-to-peer media literacy accounts on social media. The success of this account may encourage other creators on the platform to promote media literacy or other forms of literacy. For funders, this means it is worth investing in nonprofit media literacy groups like MediaWise’s parent organization, the Poynter Institute. Moreover, policymakers should take note of peer-to-peer media literacy’s effectiveness and success and work toward allocating resources to institutionalize similar initiatives alongside media regulation efforts.

Beyond policymakers and funders, this study presents practical implications for social media platforms like TikTok, which should strive to support such educational, youth-oriented accounts. Indeed, by supporting organizations like MediaWise, social media platforms can solidify their status as the primary cultural space for teens to exchange ideas. In addition, journalists and news organizations – many of which are already using TikTok for creative short-form news content (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2022; Wu, 2025) – can take a page out of MediaWise’s book and devote further resources to engaging with young audiences online. Indeed, extending

SUMMER 2026

their social media presence would allow news organizations to reach younger audiences faster and cultivate their media literacy skills on their home turf. Lastly, parents and caregivers should understand that learning can happen on social media like TikTok. They could make a point to their children that while scrolling can be fun, it is always good practice to fact-check and not take everything at face value. By being on the front lines of youth digital habits, parents play a key role in cultivating media literacy. Therefore, they must address the social media culture that their children interact with.

While this study illuminates peer-to-peer media literacy practices through the MediaWise account, it is crucial to acknowledge that the focus was narrow, and the case study approach centered on only one TikTok account. Additionally, the small-scale nature of the research, focusing on just 50 videos, limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research can expand the scale to include more videos, more accounts, and even a comparative analysis of different accounts and approaches to media literacy. Furthermore, recognizing that comments do not give a full picture or insight into viewers' minds, future studies could analyze viewer behaviors before and after watching MediaWise media literacy videos. As this study focused on comments for examining viewer reactions, it does not account for the people who watched the video but did not comment. Since people who tend to comment on social media posts express extreme emotions – either super positive or super negative – viewers' reactions are thus skewed and not representative of those viewers who watched the video but did not comment (Robertson et al., 2024). By conducting surveys or interviews, researchers can better understand audience perceptions and impact, while also ascertaining viewer demographics.

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SUMMER 2026

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