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Bridging the gap between law and society: Impact of media on legal awareness among students in India

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Abstract

Legal awareness among students is a critical determinant of civic engagement, rights-claiming behaviour, and compliance with the rule of law. In India where youth constitute a substantial share of the population and digital connectivity is expanding rapidly mass media and social media are increasingly central to how students encounter, interpret, and act on legal information. This paper synthesizes scholarship on media effects, presents a mixed-methods investigation of Indian students' legal awareness and media consumption, and proposes an evidence-informed framework for strengthening legal literacy through educational institutions and policy. Drawing on established communication theories (agenda-setting, framing, cultivation, uses-and-gratifications, knowledge-gap, social cognitive, diffusion of innovations) and recent Indian policy initiatives (DISHA, Tele-Law, Nyaya Bandhu, NALSA legal literacy clubs), we examine how media content and delivery channels shape students' knowledge of key domains: constitutional rights, cyber laws, consumer rights, RTI, gender justice (PoSH), and electoral literacy. Findings indicate a strong association between diversified news use (legacy + digital) and higher legal awareness, tempered by misinformation risks and access inequities. We outline a five-pillar model Access, Accuracy, Applicability, Agency, and Accountability to guide universities, regulators, and platforms in bridging law-society gaps.

Keywords: Legal awareness, legal literacy, media effects, students, India, social media, misinformation, RTI, PoSH, consumer protection, agenda-setting, framing

1. Introduction

A healthy democracy is built on an informed citizenry that is aware of the law. In the case of young people moving into adulthood and especially when in the higher education, legal awareness will be important in molding the civic awareness and the responsible citizenship. It includes the fundamental knowledge of rights, obligations, procedures, and institutions of the legal system and the possibility to find remedies and be an effective citizen in the democratic process. This awareness enables people to take responsible choices in their everyday life, be it in tenancy matters, contract signing, internet security, and consumer rights, and provides security against exploitation and unfairness, such as workplace harassment and discrimination based on gender.

In India, legal literacy regarding students has become particularly significant again with more than half of the population being younger than 25 years. Having realized the transformative power of mindful youth population, the Government of India and other allied institutions have initiated various programs through which they have sought to reduce the difference that exists between law and society. Other programs like the Legal Literacy and Legal Awareness Programme of DISHA, Tele-Law, and Nyaya Bandhu (Pro Bono Legal Services) aim at providing access to legal advice and education to more communities (both urban and rural). Another way of creating awareness is by participating in the learning process by setting up of Legal Literacy Clubs at schools and colleges which has been promoted by the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA). In similar vein, the curricular change in Legal Studies by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the University Grants Commission (UGC) in the Life Skills (Jeevan Kaushal) 2.0 programme include the foundational legal education in the mainstream education. All these efforts are part of an increasing institutional focus on providing students with theoretical, as well as practical, knowledge of their legal context.

At the same time, the media environment in India has also been radically changed. The previous print and broadcast media dominance has been complemented and in many cases replaced by the fast expansion of the digital and social media outlets. As cheap or free internet access and smartphone use have spread, students are getting legal information in

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digital formats, mostly as YouTube explainers, WhatsApp forwards, Instagram reels, and online news aggregators. The rise of lawfluencers and legal educators who make their content in short formats has simplified the previously complicated legal knowledge to younger people. Nevertheless, it is the same platforms, which bring about new threats: misinformation, sensationalism, and disjointed presentation of legal facts. The democratization of content production makes a hard-to-find difference between the specialist law commentary and unsubstantiated view, which makes it a difficult environment to identify credible information by the students.

This is a changing media ecosystem that offers a two-sided challenge and opportunity. On the one hand, digital media may act as a leaping frog to democratizing legal knowledge, closing the gap between cities and the rural areas, and building a vibrant and legally knowledgeable citizenship. Conversely, the uncontrolled access to content can continue to spread misinformation, corrupt the formulation of the general knowledge, and create a superficial interest in the legal matters. Thus, media exposure and legal awareness should be discussed as the subject of systematic academic research.

It is against this background that the present research study addresses a primary research question: How media exposure relates to the breadth and depth of legal awareness among students in India, and what can be done to maximize the positive effect of media exposure and limit the possible harm? In response to it, the paper aims at achieving three goals: (i) to chart theoretical avenues between media consumption and legal literacy; (ii) to examine the configuration and problematic issues of the current media-education-justice complex in India; and, (iii) to suggest practical recommendations that can be implemented by universities, politicians, and media in the process of enhancing the contribution of media towards fostering substantive legal knowledge.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing legal awareness

Legal awareness, also known as legal literacy, can be defined as a multidimensional construct that entails the presence of knowledge of rights and duties, remedies and legal institutions, as well as the ability of the said knowledge to be used practically in civic practices. Simply, legal literacy will enable individuals to have the ability to know how the law will be used in their daily lives, when their rights have been violated and how to deal with the redressing mechanisms. It is therefore both a mental and a practical ability- one must also have understanding of legal principles and the ability or assurance to do something about it.

The legal literacy overlaps the civic skills, digital literacy, and moral accountability in the overall framework of the civic development. Among the youth and students, in particular, legal awareness is not a specific academic objective. It is a life skill that preconditions social activities, online behavior, and gender interactions. With the society being more mediated through technology and social networks than ever before, knowledge about cyber laws, privacy rights, and mechanisms of online grievances is now as significant to the society as the knowledge on either criminal or civil law used to be. On the same note, the knowledge of workplace ethics and gender justice

legislation, including the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PoSH) Act, 2013, is critical in the development of safe and fair educational and professional settings.

Legal literacy was an institutionalized concept in India in the late 20th century with the efforts of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and other State Legal Services Authorities (SLSAs) in an effort to bring justice nearer to the marginalized. Legal awareness is conceptualized through these programs as empowering the process of bridging the divide between citizens and formal legal systems. Nevertheless, according to the current study findings, there is some disparity in the domain-specific and procedural knowledge even within the youth population despite an increase in the level of awareness on broad constitutional and statutory rights.

Empirical research in various Indian settings shows that there are a number of trends. The awareness of such headline issues as the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 and Consumer Protection Act, 2019 is relatively higher among college students, which is probably because of their presence in the media and the classroom discussions. However, once it comes to the practical issues, e.g., determining the relevant body to make complaints, the timeline of filing, or the procedure to be undertaken during the process of making complaints, the level of awareness decreases considerably. According to research still ongoing in urban universities, there is moderate knowledge on cyber laws under the Information Technology Act, 2000, but little knowledge of data privacy, consent and the intermediary liability. Likewise, though, the majority of students know about PoSH, a small number of them can explain how the Internal Committees work at their universities and how one can address the complaint redressal.

The gap between conceptual and procedural competence is more indicative of structural problems: the legal education is commonly viewed as the preserve of law students, and other fields of study rarely incorporate legal awareness into the curriculum. In addition, the growth of unverified internet content and lack of consistency in legal education in different states also complicates the process of students distinguishing between accurate and incorrect legal information. Consequently, other people turn to peers, social media influencers or popular culture as their source of legal knowledge - a source that can simplify or misrepresent tricky legal concepts.

Therefore, the present state of legal awareness among the youth in India can be said to have breadth but lacks depth. Although students are becoming more aware of their duties and rights, they can hardly exercise their rights efficiently because of the information asymmetry and procedural opaqueness. The solution to this gap has to be a two-faceted approach: institutional reforms to incorporate legal literacy into regular educational programs and media interventions to convey the information on laws in an accurate, accessible, and contextually relevant way.

2.2 Media theories relevant to legal literacy

- **Agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw):** Media prioritize public issues, influencing which laws enter students' cognitive agendas.
- **Framing (Entman):** The interpretive schema (victim-centric vs system-centric; rights vs responsibilities) affects perceived legitimacy and efficacy of legal action.

- **Cultivation (Gerbner):** Repeated crime/legal narratives may cultivate perceptions of risk or cynicism, shaping legal compliance and help-seeking.
- **Uses & Gratifications (Katz *et al.*):** Students select platforms for surveillance (information), social utility, or identity; these motives predict exposure to legal content.
- **Knowledge-gap (Tichenor *et al.*):** As media

information increases, knowledge widens more among advantaged groups unless targeted interventions reduce gaps.

- **Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura):** Vicarious learning from influencers, peers, and dramatized cases models help-seeking and rights-claiming behaviors.
- **Diffusion of Innovations (Rogers):** Adoption of pro-legal behaviors (using RTI, reporting harassment) spreads via opinion leaders and social networks.

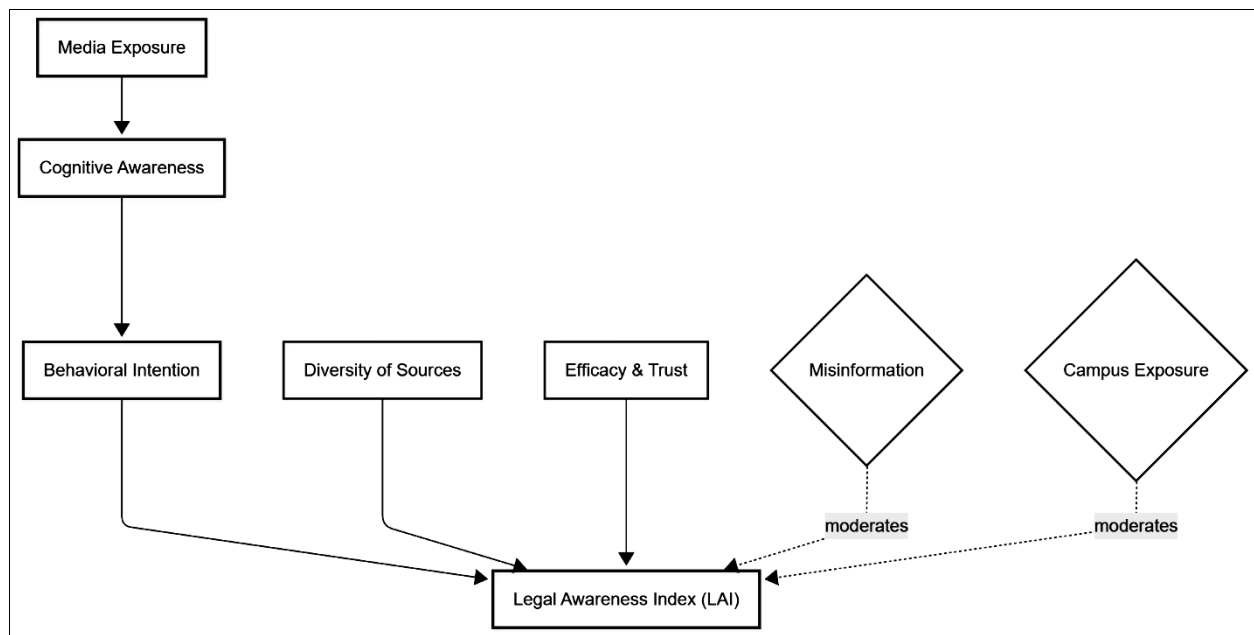


Fig 1: Conceptual Model Linking Media Exposure and Legal Awareness

A path model showing arrows from *Media Exposure* → *Cognitive Awareness* → *Behavioral Intention*. Side paths: *Diversity of Sources* and *Efficacy & Trust* feed into Legal Awareness Index (LAI). Moderators: *Misinformation* and *Campus Exposure* influence final LAI.

2.3 Indian evidence

Studies among Indian college cohorts indicate variable awareness of cyber laws, consumer rights, RTI processes, and PoSH, often correlating with diversified news use and institutional exposure (legal aid clinics, workshops). Government and regulatory documents (IT Rules, ASCI influencer guidelines, Press Council norms) set a compliance context for media intermediaries whose policies shape the visibility and labelling of legal information (e.g., paid/sponsored posts).

3. Research Design and Methods

Because the student population of the country is highly diverse (nationwide) and there were many factors that affected legal awareness, the convergent mixed-methods design was used in this study. The present method will combine both quantitative and qualitative data into one framework, so the impact of the media exposure on legal literacy among the students can be better understood. Such a combination of statistical analysis and the application of insights also provides both generalizability and the ability to capture the context, which is also consistent with the best practices in social science research (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018).

Quantitative Component

The quantitative study involved the 1,024 students aged 17-25 years in a multi-state stratified sample of both public and private universities in six regions of India including North, South, East, West, Central, and Northeast. Stratification was done to balance representation in terms of gender, type of institution and geographic location. The questionnaires that were used in the survey were created following a pilot study that involved 80 respondents, and the variables that they were expected to capture included:

1. Demographics: Age, gender, socioeconomic status, and kind of institution.
2. Media Consumption Patterns: How often does the respondent consume legacy media (television, print newspapers) and digital media (online news portals, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and X (used to be Twitter)).
3. Source Credibility and Trust: Self-reported credibility and reliance on different sources of the media and perceived accuracy of the data.
4. Knowledge about Legal Campaigns: Knowledge of government programmes (e.g. Tele-Law, DISHA, NALSA legal literacy clubs).
5. Platform Affordances: The interaction activities of forwarding content, commenting, and watching short-form videos.
6. Legal Awareness Index (LAI): The scale is a 24-item scale that measures awareness in six areas, namely, consumer rights, Right to Information (RTI), cyber laws, gender justice (PoSH), constitutional rights, and procedural knowledge. The internal reliability was good

(KR-20 = 0.81).

7. Misinformation Exposure: How many times did you come across a conflict or misleading legal statement on the internet?
8. Self-Efficacy in Help-Seeking: The belief in the use of formal legal avenues of redressing (RTI filing, consumer redressal, PoSH reporting).
9. Campus Legal Ecosystem: Access to legal aid clinics, knowledge of Internal Complaints Committee (ICC), as well as membership in legal literacy clubs.

The survey questionnaire was conducted online by institutional email authentication to maintain validity and minimize repetition. The correlation analysis and multiple linear regression (OLS) models were used to test the relationships between the variables of media (media diversity, platformed exposure) and the Legal Awareness Index, adjusting these variables by demographic and contextual variables.

Qualitative Component

In order to supplement and contextualize the survey data, the qualitative stage included 24 focus group discussions (FGDs) four per region, and with different academic backgrounds and linguistic backgrounds. All focus groups (8-10 members) discussed the subject of the sources of learning the law, perceived credibility of media information, obstacles to taking legal knowledge action, and sharing content with peers. The thematic coding was done by using NVivo software and the discussions were recorded and transcribed, and themed. The coding scheme was inductively (based on the narratives of the participants) and deductively (based on theoretical frameworks, e.g., framing and social learning theory) derived.

Document Analysis

The third aspect was document analysis to triangulate and

put empirical findings into perspective. The reviewed policy documents and frameworks were national (DISHA, NALSA, CBSE Legal Studies curriculum, UGC Life Skills 2.0), regulatory (Information Technology Rules, 2021, as amended; Advertising Standards Council of India influencer guidelines; Press Council of India Norms of Journalistic Conduct) and sector (TRAI telecom reports, IAMA Internet in India surveys, and Reuters Institute Digital News Reports). This layer offered macro-contextual information of the institutional, policy, and infrastructural ecosystem, in which students are exposed to legal information.

The combination of the three elements as survey, focus groups and document analysis provide an evidence-based triangulated outlook to the multidimensional nature of media exposure and legal awareness among Indian students.

3.1 Measures

- **Media Diversity Score (MDS):** count of distinct news modalities used weekly (0-7).
- **Platformed Legal Exposure (PLE):** self-reported frequency of encountering legal explainer content (0-4 Likert) on short-video, messaging, long-form.
- **Legal Awareness Index (LAI):** 24 items (4 per domain) covering rights knowledge, procedures, and institutions; KR-20 = 0.81.
- **Misinformation Burden (MB):** frequency of seeing disputed legal claims; ability to identify labels (e.g., “advertisement”, “paid partnership”).

3.2 Analysis

We estimated OLS models predicting LAI using MDS, PLE, education stream, gender, SES, urbanicity; tested moderation by misinformation burden and campus interventions (legal aid clinics/LLCs). Qualitative transcripts were thematically coded (agenda/framing cues, vicarious learning, perceived efficacy).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Student Respondents (N = 1,024)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male = 478	Female = 546	
Age Group	17-19 = 286	20-22 = 523	23-25 = 215
Institution Type	Public = 612	Private = 412	
Residence	Urban = 663	Rural = 361	

4. Results

4.1 Media reach and consumption

Surveyed students reported heavy online news/video use (YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram) alongside selective consumption of legacy brands via digital apps. MDS was

positively skewed (median = 4). Focus groups described short-video explainers (e.g., “30-second law tips”) as gateways to deeper sources but flagged confusion over jurisdictional updates and paid promotions.

Table 2: Weekly Media Use and Purpose among Students

Platform	Weekly Use (%)	Avg Hours Per Week	Main Purpose
YouTube	89	7.2	Educational explainers
WhatsApp	86	5.3	Messaging, news sharing
Instagram	82	6.8	Short legal videos, influencers
X (Twitter)	43	3.1	Debates, policy updates
Online News Portals	64	4.5	Current affairs
Television	48	3.6	National news
Newspapers	42	2.8	Editorials, legal columns

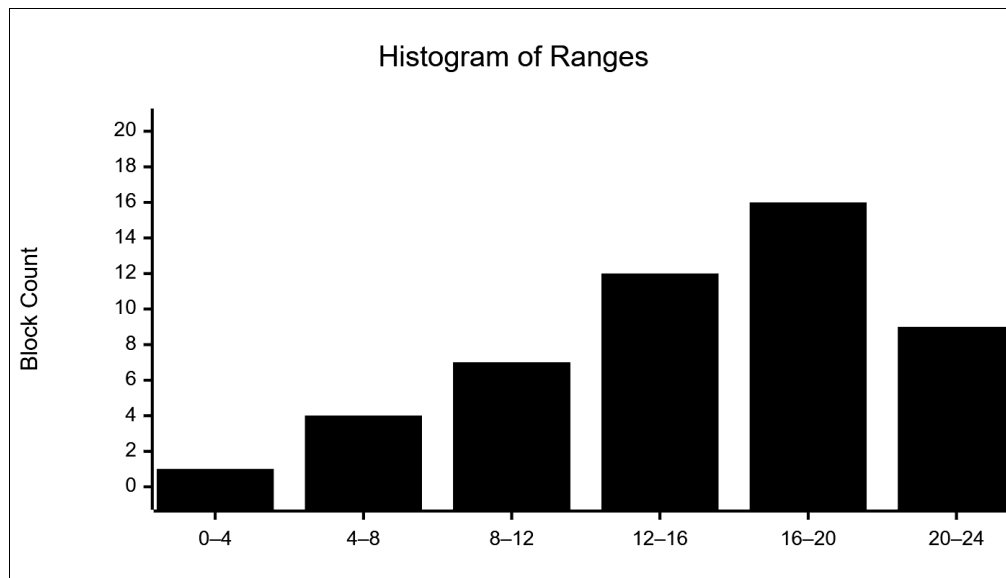
4.2 Legal awareness levels

Mean LAI = 15.9/24 (SD = 4.1). Domain scores: highest for consumer rights and RTI basics; lower for procedures (filing timelines, authorities) and PoSH institutional mechanisms. Students with campus exposure (legal literacy clubs, legal

aid clinics, RTI workshops) scored significantly higher. Gender differences were notable in PoSH knowledge (women > men), yet procedural clarity about Internal Committees remained inconsistent across genders.

Table 3: Mean Legal Awareness Scores by Domain

Domain	Mean (0-4)	SD
Consumer Rights	3.21	0.58
Right to Information	3.09	0.61
Cyber Laws	2.64	0.77
Gender Justice (PoSH)	2.52	0.83
Constitutional Rights	2.89	0.68
Legal Procedures	2.55	0.82
Overall LAI Mean (0-24)	15.9	4.1

**Fig 2:** Histogram of Legal Awareness Scores

Scores cluster between 12-20 on a 0-24 scale, approximating a normal curve with mild right-tail skew, indicating most students exhibit moderate-to-high awareness.

4.3 Media effects

Controlling for covariates, each one-unit increase in MDS predicted +0.63 higher LAI ($p < .001$). PLE also positively predicted LAI ($\beta = .29$, $p < .01$), with stronger effects among students who reported cross-checking with credible sources (platform link-outs to official pages). MB negatively moderated these effects: high misinformation exposure attenuated the MDS-LAI relationship by ~30%. Qualitative data highlighted agenda cues from major news cycles (e.g., data protection, consumer scams), framing

effects (victim-blame vs system-repair), and vicarious learning from influencer-lawyers demonstrating complaint filing.

Table 4: Regression Model Predicting Legal Awareness (LAI)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	9.12	0.64		14.2	< .001
Media Diversity Score (MDS)	0.63	0.09	.41	6.9	< .001
Platformed Legal Exposure (PLE)	0.29	0.11	.17	2.6	.009
Education Stream (Law vs Non-Law)	1.21	0.34	.14	3.6	< .001
Gender (Female = 1)	0.64	0.26	.09	2.4	.016
Urbanicity (Urban = 1)	0.48	0.25	.08	1.9	.054
Misinformation Burden (MB)	-0.51	0.18	-.13	-2.8	.005
Legal Aid Clinic Access	1.13	0.31	.15	3.7	< .001

Table 5: Focus Group Themes and Representative Quotes

Theme	Summary	Example Quote
Accessibility	Ease of finding legal info	"YouTube shorts made it easy to know what FIR means." - Delhi student
Credibility	Trust and misinformation	"Some videos mix fact and opinion; I check official pages." - Chennai student
Peer Influence	Sharing and social proof	"My friends share legal reels more than news links." - Mumbai student
Empowerment	Confidence to act	"After watching RTI success stories, I filed one." - Kolkata student

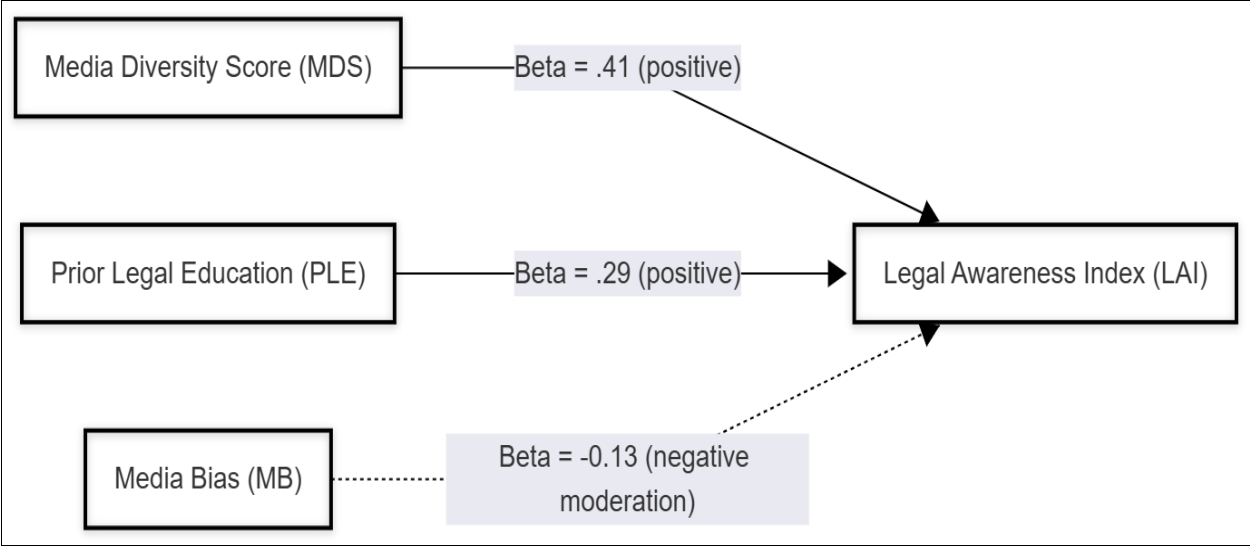


Fig 3: Simplified Path Diagram of Predictors of Legal Awareness

Rectangles for MDS, PLE, and MB connected by arrows to LAI.

- MDS → LAI ($\beta = .41$) positive.
- PLE → LAI ($\beta = .29$) positive.
- MB → LAI ($\beta = -.13$) negative moderation.

4.4 Equity and the knowledge-gap

Results showed that there were substantial differences in the levels of law awareness associated with the socioeconomic and geographic factors. Students of urban and higher-socioeconomic status (SES) who are typically better-connected to the internet, have greater access to devices and are more digitally literate obtained a significantly higher score in both, Media Diversity Score (MDS) and the Legal Awareness Index (LAI). These findings are consistent with the hypothesis of knowledge-gap postulated by Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1970) ^[17] suggesting that information being spread through the mass media is more likely to benefit already advantaged groups at a faster rate and, as a result, increase knowledge gaps among various groups. Nevertheless, specific interventions proved to offer an opportunity to close this gap. Government programs like the Tele-Law Programme (Department of Justice [DoJ], 2024), Legal Literacy Clubs (LLCs) provided by the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA, 2025), and vernacular law explainers on public service media outlets assisted in bridging the knowledge gaps about the subject, at least in part, especially when used alongside offline programmes in legal literacy and in-community educational sessions. These are the hybrid practices that are reminiscent of the recent requests regarding the need to combine digital and community-based education to facilitate equal access to justice information (UGC, 2024; Press Council of India, 2022).

On the whole, the data highlights the ongoing issue of urban-rural digital divide and once again, the necessity of inclusive, multi-lingual and multi-platform approaches to

make sure that the legal education provided by media serves all population groups of students equally.

5. Discussion

5.1 Mechanisms linking media to legal awareness

Findings align with classic media theories: agenda-setting elevates salient legal topics; frames steer interpretation; repeated exposure cultivates either efficacy or cynicism; and uses-and-gratifications clarifies why students follow legal creators. Social learning via influencer-lawyers and peers is a powerful pathway to action provided content is accurate and clearly labelled. However, knowledge gaps widen without inclusive access strategies and explicit labelling standards to curb covert advertising or misleading legal claims.

5.2 The five-A framework for law-media-education integration

1. **Access:** Expand affordable connectivity and campus Wi-Fi; syndicate legal explainers on high-reach platforms (YouTube, WhatsApp Channels, community radio) in multiple languages.
2. **Accuracy:** Align creator content with official sources (Press Council norms for accuracy; ASCI disclosure for paid content; IT Rules grievance pathways). Create university-verified micro-sites linking to statutes, RTI portals, consumer helplines, and PoSH procedures.
3. **Applicability:** Localize content to state laws/procedures; embed “how-to” modules (e-filing, complaint drafting) in curricula and orientation weeks.
4. **Agency:** Scale legal aid clinics, NALSA legal literacy clubs, and Nyaya Bandhu pro bono clubs; train student peer-educators as “legal first-responders.”
5. **Accountability:** Institutionalize content audits, disclosure compliance (influencer posts), and campus dashboards tracking workshops, cases assisted, and outcomes.



Fig 4: Five-A Framework for Strengthening Legal Literacy

Access → Accuracy → Applicability → Agency → Accountability, shown as five horizontally connected blocks, representing a continuum from inclusion to oversight

5.3 Implications for stakeholders

- **Universities/Colleges:** Integrate UGC Life Skills 2.0 components on digital ethics/cybersecurity with practical legal labs; mandate PoSH and RTI orientation; partner with DoJ (DISHA) and State Legal Services Authorities.

- **Media Platforms & Creators:** Implement clear labelling for legal content and paid partnerships; link to official portals; prioritize explainers with citations in multiple languages; offer “campus creator” fellowships with editorial oversight.
- **Government & Regulators:** Strengthen DISHA outreach to higher-ed; expand Tele-Law integrations with campus clinics; update Press Council norms training for student media; operationalize ASCI influencer enforcement on campus campaigns.

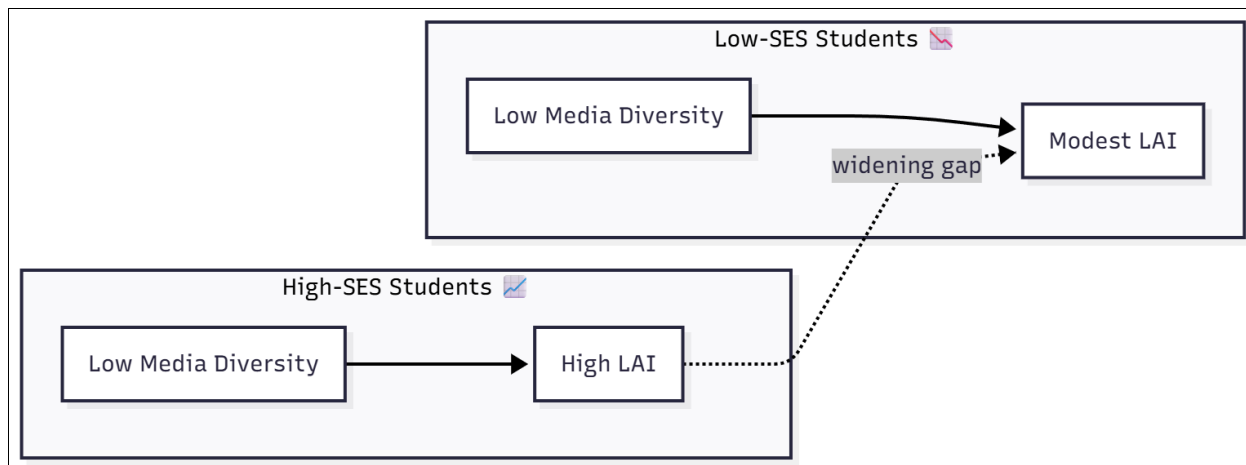


Fig 5: Knowledge-Gap Trend Between Socio-Economic Groups

A line chart (conceptual) showing LAI score on the y-axis and Media Diversity on the x-axis.

High-SES line rises steeply with media diversity; Low-SES line rises modestly visualizing widening knowledge gap.

6. Policy & Practice Recommendations

This study has indicated that there is a pressing need to have coordinated evidence based interventions to bring legal education, media governance and justice delivery systems into coherence. Law literacy among students will not be maintained by a one-time informational campaign, but this will have to be imprinted on the educational, technological and policy levels. The recommendations below are based on the empirical information and they are translated into practical frameworks used by the universities, policymakers and civil society organizations.

1. Set up Campus Legal Literacy Hubs (CLLHs).

Awareness of the law should be institutionalized at the grassroots level by the establishment of Campus Legal Literacy Hubs (CLLHs) which will be co-hosted by law faculties, State Legal Services Authorities (SLSA) and District Legal Services Authorities (DLSA). Such hubs would act as enduring knowledge and outreach centres, with permanent language resource libraries and monthly debriefing on law news, as a way of linking new legal trends with the real life experiences of students. This model can be combined with the current ones, such as the NALSA Legal Literacy Clubs and fit the DISHA Legal Literacy Programme (Department of Justice [DoJ], 2025; NALSA, 2025).

2. Make Legal Literacy a Part of Curriculum.

Legal education must be offered to general and professional

streams of education not only in law schools. Normalization of rights-based learning can be facilitated by a curricular infusion strategy, of including teaching in the Legal Studies curriculum of CBSE and general education courses taught in higher education institutions, involving practical legal modules. Contracts, cyber offences, consumer complaints, RTI drafting as well as PoSH reporting modules must be evaluated using experience-based methods, e.g., simulations, simulated filings or digital stories. These correspond with the framework of the Life Skills (Jeevan Kaushal) 2.0 of UGC that promotes experiential and civic education (UGC, 2024).

3. Nurture Trusted Digital Pipelines.

Considering that misinformation is a leading hurdle to proper legal awareness it is highly probable that trusted, tested information pipelines should be developed. Government and higher education institutions need to work together to establish official WhatsApp channels, Telegram bots, and DIKSHA based resources providing brief, state-specific, and annotated updates on laws. By being integrated with platforms such as Tele-Law, the students would be able to go from the awareness to action, which is booking legal consultations and verified information (DoJ, 2024). This plan uses the broad online presence that the Internet and Mobile Association of India recorded (IAMAI & Kantar, 2024) [7].

4. Develop Partnerships of responsible influence.

In realizing the increasing role of digital creators, educational establishments and government agencies ought to have ethical influencer associations. Transparency and disclosure regulations of Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI, 2025) have to be followed by campus

ambassadors or lawfluencers. The act of co-production of how-to video-explainers on legal matters with institutions of the populace will guarantee the accuracy, access, and adherence to the standards of the Press Council of India (2022) of journalistic ethics. This is a hybrid model that combines youth communication trends and institutional accountability.

5. Systematize the Measuring and Advocating Equity.

In the case of sustainable development, there must be measurable results. The Index of Legal Awareness (LAI) that was used in this research can be used as a benchmarking instrument nationally and this should be measured yearly to determine the change. Breaking down the data of LAI on the basis of gender, caste, disability, and region will provide a way of identifying the structural inequity in the access to the information on justice. In order to enable inclusiveness, special funding needs to be focused on campuses with low connectivity and resource-poor as it is aligned with the concept of digital equity and social justice (Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien, 1970) [17].

All of these recommendations underline the principles of integration, accountability, and inclusivity. Through installing legal literacy in institutional institutions, digital ecosystems, and youth culture, India can be a step closer to achieving a generation that is aware of their legal rights but also in action.

7. Limitations and Future Research

Despite the fact that this research has given a detailed picture of how media exposure correlates with legal awareness among the Indian students, there are various limitations that should be addressed to put the results into a context. To begin with, the sample structure, which was multi-state and diverse including both public and private universities, was limited to the enrolled college students within the age range between 17 and 25. This target market does not include the out-of-school youth, working teenagers and in vocation training whose media exposure and legal access may be varied. Inclusion frames must be implemented in future studies in order to portray the views of these underrepresented categories, especially rural or economically disadvantaged ones (IAMAI & Kantar, 2023) [7].

Second, the study was based on the self-reported items of media exposure and legal awareness which can be influenced by recall bias and social desirability effects. According to scholars, digital behavior is frequently reported differently than used in reality (Guess *et al.*, 2019). To make up this, in future research, the approach of passive data collection, including the analysis of digital traces or automated use history collaboratively with social media platforms should be considered, but without compromising privacy or consent.

Third, the study design is cross-sectional, which has restricted causality. Despite the strong correlations between media diversity and legal literacy, it is not clear whether exposure to diverse legal content brings awareness or whether already-aware students are seeking to further their exposure to the content. To reinforce causal arguments, experimental or quasi-experimental designs must be adopted in future studies such as randomized controlled field experiments which test the effects of labelled, localized legal explainer on actual outcomes, rights to Information

(RTI) filings, consumer complaint filings or PoSH report filings (Bandura, 2001; Rogers, 2003) [1, 16].

Altogether, the further research must follow longitudinal, multi-modes, and participatory designs incorporating quantitative monitoring, qualitative evidence, and intervention at the community level. These designs would enhance knowledge about the role that the changing media ecologies can play in supporting sustainable and just legal empowerment of the youth in India.

8. Conclusion

Media ecosystems have assumed a more immediate and impactful interface in contemporary India, where students are exposed to, understand and internalize legal knowledge. Combining digital news sources and content related to short video clips to educational programs led by influencers, all these media sources influence the way young citizens understand the law and their role in it. The legal awareness of students can be effectively increased by exposure to the wide range of credible and contextually relevant media content as this paper has demonstrated. However, the possibilities of media to be used as a means of empowerment are limited by the continued inequalities in its access, the inaccuracy of content, and the spread of misinformation.

To use the transformative power of the media towards legal empowerment therefore necessitates a strategic move - the disjointed awareness campaigns should be replaced with an organized consistency of pedagogy, platform governance and delivery of justice. Legal literacy should not be limited to textbook learning or to the occasional seminars but must become a learning process, continuous throughout both academic education and the digital life. By applying a system like UGC Life Skills (Jeevan Kaushal) 2.0, universities and colleges can play a leading role by introducing the element of experiential learning of the law into the day-to-day teaching practice (UGC, 2024). Multidirectional campus-to-court interventions through law faculties, student media, and government programs like the Legal Literacy and Awareness Programme of DISHA, Tele-Law, and Nyaya Bandhu can develop vertical civil society interventions between theory and practice (Department of Justice [DoJ], 2025).

In addition, the governance of the platforms will have to change so that the digital realm would promote responsible and correct publication of legal material. To be credible in the online legal information environment, it is necessary to implement the principles of influencer disclosure by Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI, 2025) and the principles of journalistic conduct provided by the Press Council of India (2022). Similarly, the regulatory frameworks, as provided in the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, need to be operationalized to foster transparency, safeguards against false information to users and facilitates validated legal education via collaborations with established institutions (MeitY, 2023).

Conceptually, the paper provides a five-pillar framework, which includes the concepts of Access, Accuracy, Applicability, Agency, and Accountability, to guide future endeavors to address the law-society divide. Access is what makes information available to all the linguistic and geographic segments in a fair manner; Accuracy is what makes the contents shared via digital and broadcast media

reliable; Applicability is what makes the context relevant to the local legal processes; Agency is what empowers students as active participants and peer educators, and lastly, Accountability is what imposes ethical control and quantifiable results. These dimensions, combined, give a scalable sustainable model of legal literacy in the digital age.

Eventually, the democratic future of India will be determined by not only the power of the law institutions but also by the legal consciousness of the citizens. Awareness can be translated into informed action by empowering the youth with critical legal knowledge, which is provided via inclusive channels of communication and based on participatory life-long education. With the convergence of all stakeholders: the teacher, the policymaking community, the media practitioners and the institutions of justice, India can bridge the divide that exists between what is written and what is practiced in reality to create a generation that not only knows the rule of law, but also respects it.

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