

Critical Digital Literacy to Confront (Neo)fascism Among Young People in the Platform Era: A Narrative Review

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Abstract

This article argues that the spread of (neo)fascism through digital platforms constitutes a specific educational challenge that conventional media literacy frameworks are ill-equipped to address. Drawing on a narrative review of 23 academic and policy documents published between 2020 and 2025, the article proposes a framework for anti-(neo)fascist critical digital literacy organised around four pedagogical components: ideological reading of content, understanding of sociotechnical systems, counter-narrative creation practices, and attention to affective and community dimensions. The review shows that (neo)fascist actors exploit algorithmic recommendation systems, participatory meme cultures and young people's unmet needs for belonging and recognition to normalise authoritarian, xenophobic and misogynist worldviews through apparently innocuous formats. Conventional media literacy programmes tend to focus on technical skills and individual responsibility, failing to engage with the ideological, structural and affective dimensions that sustain digital fascistisation. By contrast, programmes that combine critical content analysis, platform literacy, collaborative production and community-building show greater effectiveness in reducing tolerance for hate speech and strengthening democratic resilience. The article concludes that confronting digital (neo)fascism requires embedding critical digital literacy at the core of school and community educational projects, integrating it across the curriculum, connecting it with teacher

training, and situating it within a human rights and social justice framework.

Keywords: *digital literacy, youth, (neo)fascism, digital citizenship, human rights education.*

Introduction

The media ecologies in which young people today grow up and are politically socialised have changed profoundly over the past decade. Commercial digital platforms now structure not only young people's communication and entertainment, but also how they access information, participate in public life and construct their identities. In this environment, the boundaries between information, opinion and propaganda are blurred, and information flows are modulated by algorithmic systems that prioritise content capable of generating emotional reactions and maximising time spent on platform, regardless of its veracity or the harms it may cause.

(Neo)fascist actors — movements and currents that combine elements of historical fascism with contemporary forms of digital authoritarianism, exclusionary nationalism and symbolic violence in networked spaces (Griffin, 1991; Mudde, 2019) — have proved adept at exploiting this infrastructure to build communities, spread propaganda and normalise hate speech through formats that are familiar and appealing to young people. Humour, memes, trolling and shitposting function as entry vectors for xenophobic, sexist and LGBTQ+-phobic ideological frameworks whose political charge is not always evident at first contact, yet progressively erodes trust in democratic institutions and degrades the dignity of targeted groups. Against this backdrop, international organisations have identified education as one of the central responses to digital extremism; however, the specialist literature warns that many existing proposals

remain anchored in technicist approaches that fail to address the ideological, structural and affective dimensions that sustain digital fascistisation.

Unlike previous reviews focused on generic media literacy or misinformation detection, this article proposes an explicitly anti-(neo)fascist and anti-capitalist framework. Drawing on Dean's (2009) concept of communicative capitalism and Zuboff's (2019) theory of surveillance capitalism, it argues that (neo)fascist outrage is not an accidental by-product of algorithmic design but an immensely profitable commodity that drives data extraction and corporate accumulation for Big Tech monopolies. This framework thereby contributes to an emerging line of research connecting digital literacy with extremism studies, political economy, social justice and critical pedagogy. The article is guided by three questions: how is (neo)fascism configured today within hybrid media ecologies; what are the contributions and limits of critical digital literacy in confronting this phenomenon; and what curricular and teacher-training implications follow for educational systems seeking to challenge it.

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1. (Neo)fascism: Genealogy and Contemporary Forms

The concept of (neo)fascism used in this article follows the academic tradition that understands fascism as a palingenetic ultranationalist ideology that seeks to create a new political order following a perceived period of national decadence (Griffin, 1991). In its contemporary form, this ideology adopts more fluid shapes adapted to the cultural and media codes of each context: it abandons overt violence and state corporatism without relinquishing xenophobia, racism, misogyny and homophobia as its organising axes (Mudde, 2019). The parentheses around *neo* are deliberate: they signal both the genealogical continuity with historical fascism and its reconfiguration into new forms of digital political communication, avoiding uncritical equations with interwar

regimes while acknowledging the ideological and structural continuities that connect them.

This conceptual precision matters for educational practice. A digital literacy framework that fails to name the specific phenomenon it seeks to confront risks producing generic interventions against 'misinformation' or 'hate speech' that do not identify the particular political and historical character of (neo)fascism, nor its distinctive strategies of youth recruitment and normalisation.

The tradition of critical media literacy understands media education not as training in neutral technical skills, but as a political practice oriented towards understanding and transforming the power relations that traverse the production, circulation and consumption of messages (Kellner and Share, 2020). Every media practice is imbricated in struggles over cultural hegemony and in processes of reproducing or contesting inequalities of class, gender, race and sexuality. Any literacy proposal that aspires to be politically effective must therefore articulate knowledge, ethical judgement and capacity for collective action, rather than confining itself to teaching how to spot fake news or manage online privacy.

Kellner and Share (2020) argue that the media literacy field has historically fragmented between protectionist currents — focused on shielding audiences from the negative effects of media — and empowering currents — oriented towards developing critical agency and production capacity — and that only the latter can contribute to transforming the power relations that sustain disinformation and hate. This theoretical positioning grounds the anti-(neo)fascist critical digital literacy framework proposed in this article.

1.2. Youth Digital Ecologies and Platforms

Barranco and Bryant's (2025) notion of the 'digital crossroads' describes the juncture at which contemporary youth find themselves: platforms that offer genuine possibilities for learning, creativity and organisation coexist with

addictive designs, logics of amplifying harmful content and dynamics of fragmenting public deliberation. Grasping this duality is a precondition for a literacy approach that neither idealises nor demonises digital technologies, but analyses them as sociotechnical artefacts traversed by economic and political interests. From this perspective, recommendation algorithms are not neutral: they prioritise content that maximises time on platform, which can progressively favour the spread of narratives built on outrage, fear or threatened group identity — characteristics that (neo)fascist discourse regularly exploits. This cultural analysis must be grounded in a deeper class analysis: the contemporary drift of youth toward the far right cannot be explained through symbolic violence and cultural codes alone, but must be linked to the material degradation of late capitalism — the dismantling of the welfare state, the rise of the precarious gig economy, and the bleak economic futures facing working-class youth, for whom (neo)fascist narratives offer a compensatory sense of order and belonging that material conditions deny them.

This analysis converges with the ecosystem model of information integrity proposed by the World Economic Forum (2025), which holds that the information ecosystem is configured by the interaction between platforms and their business models, regulatory frameworks, media practices and citizens' competencies. UNESCO's guidelines on platform governance (2023c) reinforce this perspective, noting that civic education must include a basic understanding of how content moderation policies operate.

UNESCO's guides on hate speech and education constitute the most fully articulated international policy framework in this field. They propose a whole-school approach that integrates curriculum, school climate, meaningful student participation, teacher training and community alliances, with the aim of addressing hate not as an individual content problem but as a question of relationships and power structures (UNESCO, 2021; UNESCO, 2024). Human

rights education, intercultural education and media and information literacy are presented as complementary pillars of a systemic educational response.

At European level, Better Internet for Kids (2024) and Safer Internet (2023) have produced specific resources for schools, families and youth organisations that emphasise the need to combine critical analysis with active strategies for responding to hate, rather than relying solely on blocking or silence. The OSCE (2024) addresses media literacy as a specific instrument for preventing violent extremism, with particular attention to gender perspectives and the needs of young people in more vulnerable situations. The Council of Europe (2019) completes this picture with its human rights education manual for countering hate speech online, which foregrounds participatory methodologies grounded in the lived experiences of young people. It must be acknowledged, however, that UNESCO, the World Economic Forum, the OSCE and the Council of Europe are not neutral or external observers of the crisis this article addresses; they are, historically, among the architects of the very neoliberal policies — marketisation, human-capital orientation and the systematic defunding of public education — that stripped schools of their democratic purpose and produced the conditions of precarity on which (neo)fascism feeds. Their guidance, however useful empirically, should therefore be read as offering sanitised solutions designed to stabilise global capital against fascist instability, rather than as a basis for a liberating, transformative pedagogy.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a narrative literature review design, a method suited to integrating empirical findings, theoretical frameworks and policy documents from diverse disciplinary fields — education, media studies, political science and human rights — with a view to elaborating a conceptual proposal applicable to the field of critical digital literacy. Narrative review allows greater

interpretive flexibility than systematic or meta-analytic reviews and is appropriate when the goal is to synthesise a heterogeneous emerging field in order to draw educational and policy implications. The reference period was set between 2020 and 2025, in response to the intensification of both academic production on digital (neo)fascism and institutional guidance on hate speech and platform governance during that interval.

It is important to distinguish between the theoretical framework and the review corpus. The theoretical framework draws on works of conceptual grounding — Griffin (1991), Mudde (2019), Kellner and Share (2020), Barranco and Bryant (2025), the World Economic Forum (2025), Better Internet for Kids (2024), Safer Internet (2023) and the institutional frameworks of UNESCO (2021, 2023c, 2024), the OSCE (2024) and the Council of Europe (2019) — which provide the conceptual and institutional scaffolding that orients the analysis. The review corpus (N = 23) comprises the documents specifically selected to answer the research questions about digital (neo)fascism, the limits of media literacy and effective prevention programmes; these are the documents analysed in the Results section and described in Table 1.

The search was conducted in open-access academic databases — including DOAJ, PLOS, Frontiers and Sage and Taylor & Francis repositories — as well as on the websites of international reference bodies (UNESCO, OSCE, Council of Europe, European Commission). Search terms were combined in English and Spanish: *youth, far-right extremism, neo-fascism, hate speech, media literacy, critical digital literacy, citizenship education* and *platform governance*, together with their Spanish equivalents. Priority was given to peer-reviewed publications and institutional policy documents.

Explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Inclusion criteria were: publications between 2020 and 2025; focus on youth (approximately 12–30 years) and on digital environments or platforms as the primary analytical context; explicit engagement with at least one of the following: (neo)fascism,

right-wing extremism, hate speech, disinformation, radicalisation, digital citizenship or media and information literacy; direct relevance to the design of educational interventions or teacher training policies; and production by internationally recognised bodies or publication in peer-reviewed journals. Exclusion criteria were: publications focused exclusively on media literacy without connection to extremism or radicalisation; studies focused on populations outside the specified age range without implications transferable to youth contexts; works on forms of radicalisation unrelated to (neo)fascism or right-wing authoritarianism unless they offered directly transferable pedagogical frameworks; opinion pieces without verifiable institutional or academic grounding; works not available in open access or lacking complete bibliographic data; and duplicate publications, retaining in such cases the most complete version.

The final corpus comprises 23 references across two main document types (see Table 1). Analysis was carried out through intensive reading and inductive thematic coding, identifying recurrent patterns across four categories that structure the Results section and are detailed in Table 2.

Table 1. Characterisation of the Review Corpus by Document Type (N = 23)

Document type	Reference	Origin	Main theme
Academic documents (n = 6)	Barranco & Bryant (2025)	USA	Youth, digital health, media literacy
	Coopilton et al. (2023)	USA	Race, racism, critical competencies in youth
	Kellner & Share (2020)	USA	Critical media literacy, disinformation
	Lillis et al. (2021)	Europe / International	Digital tools, counter-narrative, hate speech
	Volk (2022)	Europe	Far-right digital activism, pandemic
	Widjanarko et al. (2025)	Indonesia / International	Counter-narrative, former extremists, platforms
Specialised commentary (n = 1)	Soares (2025)	International	Far-right communication, youth
Institutional reports and policy documents (n = 16)	Better Internet for Kids (2024)	Europe	Online hate speech, media literacy

Document type	Reference	Origin	Main theme
	Council of Europe (2019)*	Europe	Hate speech, human rights education
	GNET (2025)	Australia / International	Digital (neo)fascism, youth recruitment
	INJUVE (2023)	Spain	Hate speech, youth
	OSCE (2024)	Europe / International	Violent extremism, media literacy
	Safer Internet / European Commission (2023)	Europe	Media literacy, safer internet
	Tactical Tech (2023)	International	Educator and youth needs in digital literacy
	UNESCO (2021)	International	Hate speech, education, policy-makers
	UNESCO (2023a)	International	Hate speech, education guide
	UNESCO (2023b)	International	Hate speech, education, Spanish version
	UNESCO (2023c)	International	Digital platform governance
	UNESCO (2024)	International	Global citizenship, digital age
	Vision of Humanity (2025)	International	Youth radicalisation, terrorism
	WACC (2023)	International	Media literacy, extremist violence
	World Economic Forum (2025)	International	Information ecosystem, media integrity
	Zeiger & Gyte (2023)	International	Radicalisation, social media, prevention

Note. * The Council of Europe (2019) document is included as a foundational theoretical reference outside the main review period (2020–2025), as declared in the methodology. Compiled by the author.

It is worth noting that 16 of the 23 documents comprising the corpus are institutional reports and policy documents, while only 6 are peer-reviewed academic studies. This imbalance is not incidental: it reflects the extent to which the field of critical digital literacy has been shaped by institutional and policy-driven agendas rather than by independent academic critique, a pattern that itself merits critical scrutiny rather than passive description.

Table 2. *Categories and Subcategories from the Inductive Thematic Analysis*

Category	Subcategory	Operational description
1. How (neo)fascism operates in digital environments	1.1. Recruitment strategies and community-building	Tactics for recruiting in niche spaces (forums, gaming, messaging) and constructing group identity

Category	Subcategory	Operational description
	1.2. Viral aesthetics and formats	Use of humour, memes, irony and shitposting to normalise hate and evade content moderation
	1.3. Online–offline hybridisation	Transfer of communicative repertoires between digital action and in-person mobilisation
	1.4. Algorithmic amplification	Role of recommendation algorithms and platform business models in the spread of (neo)fascism
	2.1. Technicist and politically neutral approaches	Frameworks centred on instrumental skills that avoid ideological and structural analysis
2. Limits of conventional media literacy	2.2. Individualisation of responsibility	Displacing the burden of information integrity onto users, disregarding the role of platforms
	2.3. Absence of affective dimensions	Proposals that omit work with emotions, identities and needs for belonging
	3.1. Whole-school approaches	Articulation of curriculum, school climate, community life and external alliances
3. Characteristics of effective prevention programmes	3.2. Grounding in real experiences	Using concrete cases from young people's digital environments as pedagogical starting points
	3.3. Counter-narrative and active creation	Collaborative production of alternative content by students
	3.4. Diverse actor participation	Involvement of former extremists, grassroots organisations, families and platforms
	4.1. Ideological reading of content	Analysis of frames, rhetoric and emotional appeals linked to hate and authoritarianism
4. Components of anti-(neo)fascist CDL	4.2. Sociotechnical understanding	Study of algorithms, platform governance and the political economy of data
	4.3. Creation and counter-narrative	Designing and circulating content that contests the digital symbolic space
	4.4. Affective and community dimension	Building educational communities that offer belonging, dialogue and meaningful participation

Note. CDL = Critical Digital Literacy. Compiled by the author from the review corpus (N = 23).

3. Results

3.1. How (Neo)fascism Operates in Youth Digital Ecologies

The analysis of the corpus shows that (neo)fascist actors combine a presence on major mainstream platforms with the occupation of niche spaces, developing differentiated communicative strategies according to context and audience. Volk (2022), drawing on a patchwork ethnographic approach applied to far-right activists in Europe during and after the pandemic, documents how these groups intensified their presence in niche platforms during lockdown, exploiting

a general surge in digital consumption to reach younger and less politically engaged audiences. Volk's (2022) central finding is that radicalisation does not occur through a single act of recruitment, but through progressive immersion in digital communities where group identity and a sense of belonging precede the explicit adoption of ideological positions.

The GNET (2025) report, focused on the Australian context, describes in detail the recruitment tactics deployed within popular culture and gaming environments, where the boundary between entertainment and ideology is made deliberately opaque. Memes, dark humour and references to popular culture function as an initiation language that, once normalised within the group, opens a path towards more explicitly xenophobic or racist ideological frameworks. Soares (2025) complements these findings by analysing how far-right movements adapt their digital communication to young people's consumption patterns, using brief, visual and emotionally charged formats that maximise virality and minimise critical deliberation. Taken together, the corpus shows that digital (neo)fascism does not operate at the margins of the internet, but at the heart of the most ordinary spaces of youth socialisation.

3.2. The Limits of Conventional Media Literacy in Confronting (Neo)fascism

A second cluster of findings indicates that the media literacy programmes most widely deployed in formal educational settings have significant limitations in addressing the specificity of digital (neo)fascism. Tactical Tech (2023), drawing on an extensive consultation with educators and young people across multiple national contexts, identifies a significant gap between the complexity of the digital environment and the resources available in schools: most materials focus on fact-checking and safe internet use, without systematically addressing how algorithms shape what people see, how echo chambers operate or what political and economic interests sustain flows of disinformation and hate.

The World Economic Forum (2025) reinforces this diagnosis from a global policy perspective, warning that centring the response to disinformation exclusively on audience training — without holding platforms accountable or reforming regulatory frameworks — represents an inappropriate transfer of responsibility onto users that conceals the structural dimensions of the problem. This observation is particularly salient in the case of digital (neo)fascism, whose spread cannot be attributed solely to individual consumption choices, but also to algorithmic incentives and regulatory gaps that facilitate the amplification of hate.

Coopilton et al.'s (2023) empirical research shows that most adolescents in their sample do not reach advanced levels of critical analysis when confronted with racialised digital content, demonstrating that technological familiarity does not guarantee critical competence and that gaps are especially pronounced among young people with less prior exposure to interpretive frameworks for understanding inequality and discrimination.

3.3. Effective Prevention Programmes and Counter-Narrative

The corpus analysis allows the identification of shared features among hate speech and (neo)fascist radicalisation prevention programmes that show greatest effectiveness. UNESCO's guides (2021, 2023a, 2023b) consistently recommend whole-school approaches that articulate curriculum, school climate, meaningful student participation, teacher training and alliances with families and community organisations. These guides insist that addressing (neo)fascism from an educational standpoint cannot be reduced to inserting a one-off module on hate speech, but requires a transformation of institutional cultures that makes dialogue about power, inequality and democracy a normal part of school life. The digital educational tools described by Lillis et al. (2021) illustrate the value of combining analysis with production. Their proposals integrate the study of real-world hate speech cases with activities involving rewriting and co-

designing alternative materials, so that students not only learn to recognise digital (neo)fascism but develop the capacity to respond actively within their own environments. The World Economic Forum (2025) reviews evaluations of similar programmes — such as "HateLess. Together against Hate" — showing significant improvements in young people's capacity to identify and confront hate speech when cognitive, socio-emotional and participatory components are addressed simultaneously.

Counter-narrative initiatives led by former extremists add a further relevant dimension.

Widjanarko et al. (2025) analyse projects in which former terrorists produce digital content aimed at dissuading young people from joining radical groups, drawing on their credibility and their knowledge of extremist communities' internal codes. Zeiger & Gyte (2023) argue that such programmes are most effective when they combine the cognitive dismantling of (neo)fascist narratives with the construction of genuine alternatives for belonging and purpose, rather than relying on moralising warning messages alone.

3.4. Components of an Anti-(Neo)fascist Critical Digital Literacy

From the synthesis of the analysed documents, four components emerge that together constitute a proposal for anti-(neo)fascist critical digital literacy in formal and non-formal educational settings.

The first is critical reading of content. Coopilton et al. (2023) show that developing critical competencies in the face of racialised and politicised digital content requires connecting the analysis of specific messages with the histories of discrimination, oppression and rights struggles, as well as with the socioeconomic contexts that make certain narratives appear plausible or attractive to specific sectors of youth. Their research identifies significant gaps related to prior access to interpretive frameworks for understanding inequality, underscoring the need to embed this component in the ordinary curriculum

rather than leaving it to one-off interventions. WACC (2023) adds that this work must extend to the genres and formats that digital (neo)fascism deploys most effectively — memes, dark humour and political irony — whose apparently innocuous surface can impede recognition of their ideological function.

The second component is understanding sociotechnical systems. This must move beyond teaching young people how algorithms profile users; it requires demystifying the political economy of data and offering an explicit critique of the imperialistic and monopolistic power structures through which Silicon Valley corporations extract value from user attention and data across the globe. The World Economic Forum (2025) shows that the majority of citizens are unaware of the mechanisms by which recommendation algorithms select and prioritise content, a gap that a merely technical understanding of algorithms cannot close without this structural, political-economic dimension. Tactical Tech (2023) documents that both educators and young people demand materials that enable them to understand how platforms work from the inside: what signals they use to profile users, how business models incentivise the virality of extreme content and what scope exists for modifying these dynamics. UNESCO (2023c) identifies this understanding as a necessary condition for digital citizenship capable of participating informedly in debates about platform regulation and digital governance.

The third component is counter-narrative creation practice. Lillis et al. (2021) and Better Internet for Kids (2024) agree that projects in which young people design and circulate their own content — podcasts, videos, social media campaigns, transmedia projects — from social justice frameworks produce deeper and more lasting learning than exclusively analytical approaches. These projects allow students to contest the symbolic space that digital (neo)fascism has colonised and to develop practical understanding of the languages, formats and circulation dynamics that characterise the digital ecosystem. INJUVE

(2023) reinforces the importance of this component by noting that counter-narratives produced by young people themselves carry greater resonance among peers than messages produced by adults or institutions.

The fourth component is the affective and community dimension. Vision of Humanity (2025) and Soares (2025) show that trajectories of (neo)fascist radicalisation are strongly related to unmet needs for belonging, recognition and meaning in contexts of political disaffection and material precarity. This dimension cannot be reduced to creating a warm, dialogue-friendly classroom space; the ultimate, material antidote to the fascist longing for belonging lies in the cultivation of working-class solidarity and a shared consciousness of collective liberation, rather than in individualised therapeutic approaches to student wellbeing. The corpus consistently signals that no literacy approach can be effective if it does not attend to these needs, building educational communities that offer genuine alternatives for participation and identity. Tactical Tech (2023) documents that adolescents express concrete concerns about trust, the superficiality of online relationships and information overload in digital environments, and that these concerns represent both a vulnerability factor in the face of extremism and a pedagogical entry point. UNESCO (2021, 2024) insist that building inclusive school communities — with clear protocols for addressing hate and real mechanisms for student participation — is the enabling condition for the other three components.

4. Discussion

The findings of this review support the claim that the educational challenge posed by (neo)fascism in digital environments cannot be met with the tools of conventional media literacy or with one-off interventions disconnected from the life of the school and the dynamics of the wider community. The evidence in the corpus points towards systemic, politically explicit approaches that are

attentive to the relational and affective dimensions of young people's platform experiences, in line with what the critical media literacy tradition has been demanding for decades (Kellner and Share, 2020).

Integrating this approach transversally across the curriculum requires simultaneous intervention in multiple subject areas. In Social Sciences and History, comparative analysis of historical fascist propaganda and contemporary (neo)fascist content in online spaces can enable a democratic memory perspective that connects past and present without falling into simplistic analogies, drawing on the conceptual distinction between fascism and (neo)fascism established by Griffin (1991) and Mudde (2019). In Language and Literature, studying the rhetorical resources of political discourse, extended to digital genres — memes, social media threads, video comments — offers opportunities for critical reading and the production of alternative texts. In Technology and Digital Competence, understanding algorithms and platform governance can be integrated with the frameworks set out by UNESCO (2023c) and with the European debate on platform regulation.

Teacher training emerges as a structural precondition for this approach, but training alone is insufficient. The corpus documents that many educators feel ill-equipped to work with explicit hate content or (neo)fascist narratives, whether due to a lack of conceptual grounding, fear of reproducing those messages or uncertainty about the reactions of families and communities (INJUVE, 2023; Tactical Tech, 2023). This insecurity must be understood through the lens of educational labour: in a highly polarised political landscape, an educator who attempts an explicitly anti-(neo)fascist curriculum risks digital doxxing, harassment and even administrative termination. A radical pedagogy of this kind cannot be realised without a simultaneous struggle for stronger teacher unions, collective labour protections and institutional safeguards for academic freedom. This insecurity can lead to the systematic avoidance of the subject, leaving young people without institutional interpretive frameworks

precisely in the spaces where (neo)fascism is most present. The OSCE (2024) and Council of Europe (2019) consistently highlight the importance of providing specific training in extremism, platform analysis and the pedagogy of controversy.

A further tension that the corpus surfaces, though rarely addresses directly, concerns the relationship between individual empowerment and structural transformation. The critical media literacy tradition, following Kellner and Share (2020), insists that literacy education must ultimately aim at changing power relations, not merely equipping individuals to navigate them. Yet the majority of the programmes reviewed — including those with the strongest evidence of impact — operate primarily at the level of individual and group competence, without mechanisms for influencing the platform architectures that sustain the amplification of (neo)fascist content in the first place. The World Economic Forum's (2025) ecosystem model explicitly acknowledges this gap, arguing that audience-level interventions, however well-designed, cannot compensate for the structural incentives that platforms have to maximise engagement with emotionally charged content. This is not an argument against critical digital literacy — it is an argument for situating it within a broader political project that includes regulatory pressure, corporate accountability and civic mobilisation. Educational systems that adopt the framework proposed here should be honest with their students about this structural dimension: teaching young people to recognise and contest (neo)fascist content is necessary but not sufficient if the platforms through which that content travels remain largely unaccountable.

A further dimension deserving attention is what has been termed postmodern corporate capitalism or 'posmocapitalismo' (Zelaia Ulibarri, 2026), a discourse promoted by corporate elites that depoliticises and individualises social problems within social media environments. This framework cautions against a purely binary reading of digital (neo)fascism versus democratic resistance, since

corporate platforms themselves can neutralise political critique by reframing structural inequality as a matter of personal responsibility or lifestyle choice — a dynamic that runs parallel to, and sometimes intersects with, the affective vulnerabilities that (neo)fascist actors exploit.

A related tension concerns the use of counter-narrative strategies. Several documents in the corpus — most notably Widjanarko et al. (2025) and Zeiger & Gyte (2023) — present counter-narrative production as one of the most promising tools for preventing radicalisation, and the evidence they cite is encouraging. However, the counter-narrative literature also carries a risk that is insufficiently theorised in the reviewed documents: the possibility that engaging directly with (neo)fascist narratives — even to refute them — can inadvertently amplify their reach and legitimacy. Research in the field of inoculation theory suggests that pre-emptive exposure to weakened forms of extremist arguments, accompanied by refutation, can build resistance without triggering the Streisand effect of giving fringe ideas wider circulation (Lewandowsky and van der Linden, 2021, cited in World Economic Forum, 2025). However, this approach requires considerable pedagogical skill and contextual judgement that cannot be assumed as a baseline across teaching staff. The implication is that counter-narrative work in classrooms must be carefully scaffolded and cannot be delegated to individual teachers without robust institutional support and professional development.

The divergence between the explicitly political framing of this article and the more neutral language of most institutional frameworks reviewed also merits reflection. This terminological caution is not merely diplomatic pragmatism: UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the WEF are institutions embedded within a neoliberal, globalist governance order whose historical role in promoting marketisation and human-capital models of education has itself contributed to the systemic precarity on which (neo)fascism feeds. Their reluctance to name (neo)fascism, or the capitalist structures that sustain its

digital amplification, therefore reflects institutional interests as much as diplomatic caution. This terminological caution is understandable from a diplomatic standpoint, but it carries a pedagogical cost: framing the problem as 'hate speech' can obscure the specifically political and historical character of the ideologies being addressed, making it harder for students to connect digital phenomena with the longer genealogy of authoritarian movements and their consequences. This article has argued for naming the phenomenon more precisely, in line with Griffin (1991) and Mudde (2019), not out of a desire to be provocative, but because conceptual precision is itself a pedagogical tool. Students who understand that the memes and influencers they encounter online are connected to a political tradition with identifiable historical antecedents are better equipped to evaluate and resist them than those who receive only a generic warning about 'harmful content'.

The question of non-formal education also deserves more attention than the corpus affords it. The evidence reviewed focuses heavily on school-based interventions, with relatively limited engagement with the role of youth work, community organisations, libraries and informal learning spaces. This is a significant gap, given that much of the socialisation through which (neo)fascism recruits young people takes place precisely outside formal educational settings — in gaming communities, online forums and social media spaces that schools have limited reach into (Volk, 2022; GNET, 2025). The Council of Europe's (2019) human rights education manual is one of the few documents reviewed that takes non-formal education seriously as a site of anti-(neo)fascist work, but even there the integration between formal and non-formal approaches remains underdeveloped. Future educational policy in this area should invest in building bridges between school-based literacy programmes and the youth organisations, cultural associations and community spaces where young people at risk of radicalisation spend significant parts of their lives.

Finally, the geographical concentration of the corpus should not be read merely as a passive limitation but interrogated through the lens of digital colonialism. The overwhelming majority of the studies and institutional documents reviewed were produced in North American, Western European or Australian contexts, and this concentration reflects a broader pattern whereby Western capitalist platform architectures are exported globally, destabilising local political terrains and feeding distinct variations of authoritarianism and far-right mobilisation across the Global South, often in service of the same corporate accumulation strategies analysed earlier in this article. In Latin America, for instance, the relationship between digital platforms, authoritarian politics and youth mobilisation has distinctive features shaped by different histories of dictatorship, different patterns of platform use and different configurations of political polarisation. A critical digital literacy framework that takes these differences seriously would need to be adapted rather than simply exported, attending to local genealogies of authoritarianism, local counter-cultures of resistance and the specific platforms and communities through which young people in each context are politically socialised. This is not a limitation that invalidates the framework, but one that calls for the kind of contextualised, participatory research that is almost entirely absent from the current literature. This study has certain limitations that deserve acknowledgement. Narrative review, by its nature, does not guarantee exhaustive coverage of available literature and may introduce bias in source selection. The corpus shows a predominance of studies and documents from Anglo-Saxon and European contexts, which limits the direct transferability of the findings to Latin American or other regions with distinct political and media dynamics. Furthermore, most of the evidence reviewed is propositional or short-term evaluative in character, with limited longitudinal research that would allow assessment of the sustained impact of anti-(neo)fascist critical digital literacy

programmes. Future research should aim to address these gaps through mixed-method designs and contextualised case studies.

5. Conclusions

This article set out to propose a framework for anti-(neo)fascist critical digital literacy, articulated around four pedagogical dimensions, drawing on recent academic literature and international policy documents. The narrative review conducted to that end has allowed us to respond to that objective with a degree of analytical specificity that generic approaches to media literacy do not afford. The evidence assembled shows, first, that (neo)fascism in the platform era is not a marginal or accidental phenomenon but a structured communicative strategy that deliberately exploits algorithmic amplification, participatory meme cultures and the affective vulnerabilities of young people navigating contexts of social precarity and political disaffection. Second, it shows that the dominant models of media literacy education — centred on fact-checking, safe internet use and individual critical competence — are structurally insufficient to confront this challenge, not because they are poorly designed, but because they were not built to address the political and ideological dimensions that define (neo)fascism as a specific historical phenomenon rather than a generic instance of harmful content. Third, and most constructively, the review has identified four components — ideological reading of content, understanding of sociotechnical systems, counter-narrative creation, and the affective and community dimension — that together constitute a more adequate response when integrated in a coherent and sustained educational project.

The framework proposed here does not claim to be a solution. It is more modest and, for that reason, more honest: it is a pedagogical architecture that gives educators, curriculum designers and policy-makers a principled basis from which to build interventions that are politically explicit, theoretically grounded

and attentive to the full complexity of young people's digital lives. Its value lies not in any single component but in their articulation — in the recognition that ideological analysis without affective work produces cynicism, that counter-narrative creation without structural understanding produces naïvety, and that community-building without critical content analysis produces warmth without direction. Education is never politically neutral, and this article closes with an uncompromising assertion: critical digital literacy, understood in this way, is not a mere technical intervention for digital citizenship; it is an active, vital act of democratic defiance and political commitment against the corporate and fascist capture of youth consciousness.

The limitations of this work are real and should be stated plainly. A narrative review is necessarily selective, and the choices made in constructing the corpus — shaped by language, availability and the researcher's own theoretical commitments — carry the risk of reproducing blind spots that a different selection might have corrected. The predominance of European and North American sources in the literature on digital (neo)fascism and media literacy is itself a structural problem that this article inherits rather than resolves: the framework proposed here has been built from evidence generated in specific political and media contexts, and its transferability to other settings — particularly in Latin America, Africa and Southeast Asia, where the intersection of digital platforms, authoritarian politics and youth mobilisation takes distinctive forms — cannot be assumed. These are not minor caveats; they are substantive constraints that any application of this framework must take seriously.

There is also a deeper epistemological limitation that deserves naming. This article has argued for naming the phenomenon of (neo)fascism with political precision, resisting the terminological caution of institutional frameworks that prefer the more neutral language of 'hate speech' or 'violent extremism'. That choice carries its own risks: naming shapes perception, and an educational

practice organised around the explicit confrontation of (neo)fascism will encounter resistance — from parents, administrators and policymakers who read political intent into what the framework intends as analytical clarity. This is not a reason to retreat into neutrality, but it is a reason to be deliberate and transparent about the political stakes of the educational project being proposed. The projections that follow from this work point in three directions. The first is empirical: the field urgently needs longitudinal studies that track the effects of anti-(neo)fascist critical digital literacy programmes over time, across diverse institutional and cultural contexts, and with outcome measures that go beyond self-reported attitudes to examine changes in behaviour, civic participation and resilience to radicalisation. The second is methodological: the design of those studies should be participatory from the outset, positioning young people not as subjects of research but as co-investigators capable of generating knowledge about their own digital experiences that adults — researchers and educators alike — cannot access from the outside. The third direction is political: the research community working in this field has a responsibility to engage not only with school-based interventions but with the policy processes that govern platform design, content moderation and digital regulation, because the educational project of confronting (neo)fascism will remain permanently under-resourced if the infrastructure that amplifies it is left unreformed.

What is ultimately at stake in this article is a question about the purpose of education in a moment when democracy is under sustained pressure from forces that have learned to speak the language of youth culture fluently and without scruple. Critical digital literacy, understood in the way this article has argued for, is one of the responses available to educators who refuse to accept that young people are simply the passive recipients of whatever the algorithm delivers to their screens. That refusal — modest, incremental, institutionally fragile — is nonetheless a meaningful act of democratic commitment.

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