Youth and Media Literacy: Understanding Social Media's Influence on Information Consumption

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Abstract
The penetration of social media into common practice of lifestyle in this digital era has drastically affected the modes and methods of information acquisition and assimilation of the individuals, especially that of the students. Media literacy is the key to surviving the current sea of information. This research sheds light on how media literacy impacts social media use and how that unduly influences the way a student processes information through his or her own worldview. A cross-sectional survey was carried out among 241 students to shed light on their media literacy skills and awareness about social media as a pathway for information dissemination as well as the influence of social media on their pattern of information consumption. Our study suggests that there is a clear and consistent association between high levels of media literacy and more responsible information behaviour. Students with advanced media literacy skills are also better equipped to independently fact-check and critically analyse biases in the content they consume. Further strong support comes from the regression analysis, which shows that media literacy is a significant predictor of each of these more responsible behaviours (β = 0.45, p < 0.001). Let this be a lesson learned for all of us about the nature of social media, the same platform without which this study would not have been possible: social media is equally a source of information and a source of misinformation. While students use social media more often than any other source for news and current events, they do so with a high degree of caution regarding the accuracy of the content they encounter on these platforms. Our results have implications for national curriculum inclusion of extensive media literacy education programmes. By learning what it is that has the effect of turning these advertising and mechanisms of propaganda around, of supporting these enterprises, social media platforms can help hone users' judgment. This way we can improve the quality of public discourse, with people less prone to spreading fake news. This study adds a lot to them and deepens our understanding of how important media literacy is in our

society. It underscores the necessity of ongoing efforts to educate ourselves in order to consume information well and thoughtfully. We need more research on the lasting influence of media literacy interventions on information consumption behaviours We could if we wanted to make more extensive statements, to superimpose those inferential generalizations to more diverse demographic groups. Focusing on media literacy can give people the tools to navigate the digital information environment in a responsible and effective way.

Keywords: Media Literacy, Social Media, Information Intake, Disinformation, Media Education, Critical Thinking.

Introduction
Social media entirely redefined how the information is being spread and processed among the generations who are becoming into adulthood with its emergence. Millennials, as digital natives, are helping to drive this change by consuming news and information predominantly through platforms like Fb, Twitter, Insta and TikTok. This transition has presented unique opportunities and challenges resulting in an increased scrutiny of the media literacy levels of this demographic. Given the fluid digital world within which young people grow up, media literacy - the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create media in a variety of forms Livingstone & Helsper (2020) is vital for learning to avoid the risks associated with misinformation. In the last single decade, there has been a general worry regarding the effects of social media on the literacy of the youth. Empirical research shows that fake news and misinformation spreading like wildfire on social media can indeed affect public opinion and behaviour, most especially among people with low-media literacy levels (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017). This is particularly alarming as use of social media as a news and information platform continues to rise.

This study was set at the Malaysian higher education system and in UiTM Negeri Sembilan for undergraduate students. This audience is especially important because they are active users of social media and will be the future leaders and decision makers of tomorrow. I need to know how much literate they are when it concerns the media and how they get media info in order to make educational strategies and policy interventions. Background Media literacy is an important modern literacy capable of fostering critical thinking and informed citizenship, which is why this topic ends up so much in existing literature. Indeed, researchers have argued that media literacy education can improve students' capacity to evaluate information critically, identify biases, and make well-informed decisions (Chen & Wu, 2019). Tamboer, Kleemans, & Daalmans (2020) also propose that media literacy will have implications for greater levels of democratic participation enacting public discourse as well as societal change as public participation is fostered by media literacy among the public.

Although it is recognized how essential media literacy is, a gap in knowledge remains about how media literacy affects youth's news consumption behaviours elsewhere in the non-Western world. The majority of the research conducted on strenuous-disabling conditions originates from Western countries, creating a void in research on the experiences of youth in opposed cultural and socio-political contexts (Park, 2020). Based on this, the present study intend to fulfil this gap by providing empirical evidence from Malaysia and thus to help with a more detailed and comprehensive picture of media literacy globally.

This research will take quantitative approach to address these issue and designed a set of structured questionnaire to determine the media literacy level among the undergraduate students in UiTM Negeri Sembilan and their information consumption behaviour. We will analyse data with SPSS program to discover important patterns and correlations. We hope

that the results of the study will provide valuable information to educators, policymakers, and researchers, underscoring the vital importance of the cultivation of media literacy to produce informed and responsible digital citizens.

Research Objectives

The specific objectives based on the identified needs, the researcher aims to address the main objectives, as follow:

RO1: To explore the relationship between media literacy and the use of information among undergraduate students of UiTM Negeri Sembilan.

RO2: To determine whether social media usage affects information processing and which factors are more likely to lead individuals to believe false information.

Literature Review

Media Literacy and Information Consumption Among Youth

Media literacy deals with individuals approach to media and how they can interpret, evaluate, and understand that information. It is a must vave skill to have in our digital world today. Numerous studies have argued that in order to navigate the immense quantities of content produced on social media, young participants must develop, and become increasingly media literate (Livingstone & Helsper, 2020). A highly media literate audience is capable of sorting true information from fake and this produces a much better and critical user base In their research, Livingstone and Helsper (2020) emphasize media literacy as a facilitator for reaching a balance between the opportunities and the risks involved in the internet consumption of youngsters. They claim that a better media literacy helps young people critically assess what they read online, and therefore makes them less susceptible to fake news.

Chen and Wu (2019) found that media literacy influences positively on the social media use of adolescents and on their ability to evaluate and confirm the information, within a meta-analysis. The researchers say their findings reaffirm the value of teaching media literacy as part of the school curriculum to develop more critical media consumption habits. Moreover, Jones-Jang, Mortensen, and Liu (2019) suggest that a deciding factor in the how the fake news is identified is media literacy, especially information literacy. So they found that people who are more sophisticated and more exposed to fake news are actually better readers and better debunkers than people who are not.

The Influence of Social Media on Information Consumption Patterns

Screen time has shifted from YouTube to Instagram and Snapchat; social media platforms are the first point of entry today for most young people when it comes to consuming information. It is this blend of news, entertainment, and social interaction on digital platforms that deeply contributes towards the way youth develop a perspective towards, and deployment of, information. This is confirmed by Mihailidis and Viotty (2017) who have asserted that media literate population are better equipped to work out in a society that leans towards a "post-fact", where misinformation is widespread. The effect of social media upon information consumption patterns is immense. The primary source of information for many young people is quickly becoming social media platforms, and this has a rather considerable impact on how they consume information. News and culture collide on these outlets, the result being a different way young people see and think about news and information.

In their exploration of the practices of incidental news engagement in social media, Boczkowski et al. (2018) indicate that it is usual that many adolescents and young adults will

access news content incidentally while staying entertained. This incidental exposure often influences the way they see current events, because they don't scrutinize the information they may come across in these settings. Shao et al (2018), their work also finds that social bots are over-represented in the spreading of low-credibility content on social media, illustrating how misinformation is amplified by platform-level algorithmic filtering and dissemination and thereby complicating the consumption facing users seeking legitimate sources.

In a series of studies they investigate the link between family communication patterns, adolescents' news consumption intentions and media literacy. The study reveals that young people's capacity to critically assess information is positively influenced by supportive family conversations about media content. This sheds light on the role of media ecology, the socio-context in which the media literacy process takes place.

Factors Contributing to Susceptibility to Misinformation
Media literacy interventions in schools should ensure that the factors that cause vulnerability to false messages be well understood. It is also important to ascertain why the audience consumes and accepts fake news by indicating such factors as cognitive biases, digital competencies, and social factors. In his turn Kahne and Bowyer (2017) reviewed the contribution of motivated reasoning and misperception then emphasized that people should not seek evidence in support of the existing attitude. This is a kind of cognitive bias that poses much difficulty to the youth especially when differentiating fake information which makes them prone to fake information.

Rasi, Vuojärvi, and Ruokamo (2019) who elaborate the fact that these cognitive biases cannot be countered without full-fledged media literacy education that encourages critical analysis and evaluations. There is lack of media literacy, especially among non-western cultures as pointed by Park (2020), while applying Depravity Model emphasize socio-political and cultural aspects that put a society in a vulnerable position of falling for fake news. On this basis, they proposed that media literacy interventions have to be culturally oriented in an attempt to address the challenges that various population goes through. According to this postulation, Hobbs (2017) argued that it is about educative media literacy that should encompass skills like digital literacy and critical thinking skills to counter fake news. By so doing from her study she is in a position to conclude that through multiple preschool media literacy education the young people are in a position to appreciate ways and manner in which they can be wise in their consumption.

Ruggiero (2017) re-discusses the concept concerning the Uses and Gratifications Theory in relation to the youth arguing that the latter uses the social media to meet diverse needs; such as the search for information, entertainment, and social interaction. There are theoretical considerations for the idea that studying the rationales for the interaction with the social media may contribute to the planning of the interventions of media literacy that are engaging for the youths. In sum, this literature review aims to organize information about these studies regarding media literacy in youth, the use of social media for these consumption patterns, and factors that may predict vulnerability to fake news. Such insights will assist to move to the research objectives of ascertaining the media literacy level of the undergraduate students at the UiTM Negeri Sembilan and the impact that social media has on the consumption of information.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The concepts and theoretical framework of the study will help define the connection between youth media literacy and information consumption. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), developed by Albert Bandura, is the appropriate conceptual foundation to study the reciprocal dynamics of youths and media literacy while consuming information with the assistance of social media platforms. SCT involves the assumptions that people learn through observing others' behaviours that they then emulate; cognition, environment, and behaviour interact (Schunk & Usher, 2019).

In the context of media literacy and information use, SCT postulates that youth learn and systematically build critical thinking skills, technology literacy, and media/information appraisal competencies, a kind of observational learning and social modelling by regulative exercising with peers on social networks (Chen & Wu, 2019). Young people experience numerous digital stimuli and consume a diverse set of media products, ranging from common news to diverse forms of entertainment and other individuals' creations. SCT explains that peer pressure, parents' advice, and numerous portrayals in media contribute to the development of media competencies of the youth. Thus, when observing and imitating their peers and famous personalities, youth model their behaviours when consuming information from media sources, as well as develop norms and values regarding this process and evaluation of information (Jones-Jang et al., 2019).

Moreover, the theory referred to as SCT focuses on self-efficacy beliefs that affect people's media literacy and information intake. Thus, the media literacy self-efficacy, translated as the ability to search for the necessary information independently and critically assess media content, is interconnected with higher rates of information search and critical thinking. On the other hand, low SE implies passive consumption and vulnerability to fake news (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017). SCT hold that not only individual influences and the characteristics of social media environments provide the foundation for the media literacy of youths regarding the social media impact on Information operations.

shows that system mechanics, including algorithmic filtering, user-generated content, and viral dissemination mechanisms, impact the kind of information youth meet and how they approach the information's credibility (Shao et al. , 2018). As a theory, SCT qualifies the investigation of media literacy involving youths and information sharing through social networking sites by establishing cognitive, social, and environmental variables that influence youths' interactions with information available online. It provides the theoretical basis for designing educational interventions and public policies with the intent of enhancing youths' critical thinking competencies as well as their digital literacy in the context of the information age.

Research Design and Methodology

Sample and Statistical Procedure

We administered an online survey to a sample of undergraduate students using a randomised sampling technique. In 1970, Krejcie and Morgan recommended a minimum sample size of respondents for certain particular demography. To ensure that every individual in the population had an equal chance of inclusion, the researcher used a rudimentary random sampling technique. Using a WhatsApp group, the instructors of the certificate and degree programs disseminated a hyperlink to all the students. The data collection process spanned approximately three months. The study disseminated a total of 241 online questionnaires through Google Forms. We encoded, entered, and analysed the data using SPSS version 23.

The researcher utilised descriptive analysis to measure the total, proportion, average, and variability. In addition, the researcher conducted a multiple regression analysis to evaluate the relationship between media literacy and information consumption among students.

Research Instruments and Reliability

We adapted the tools used in previous literature reviews and research projects on information consumption and media literacy. We administered an online survey to undergraduate students. The questionnaires also contained demographic information. We asked the respondents about their media literacy proficiency, the usage pattern and frequency of social media, and the effects of social media in information consumption. We conducted measurements using four Likert scales. Prior to disseminating questionnaires to students, researchers seek the advice of experts to verify that the items on an evaluation or instrument are pertinent to the objectives of the study. A total of thirty students enrolled in the diploma program had completed the pre-test. We employed Cronbach's alpha to assess the dependability of research question and objective of the research. Meanwhile, we used the skewness and kurtosis tests to conduct the normalcy test. Hair et al. (2010) and Bryne (2010) found that skewness values ranging from -2 to +2 and kurtosis values ranging from 7 to +7 indicate a normal distribution. Therefore, we used a population exhibiting a Gaussian distribution to obtain the sample data for this study.

Results

Table 1

Demographic and Characteristics Table

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	105	43.6%
	Female	136	56.4%
Age	18-21	96	39.8%
	22-25	89	36.9%
	26-30	56	23.2%
Educational Level	Diploma	97	40.2%
	Bachelor Degree	144	59.8%
Social Media Platforms Used	X (formerly Twitter)	167	69.3%
	Facebook	123	51.0%
	TikTok	132	54.8%
Frequency of Social Media Use	Rarely	10	4.1%
	Sometimes	36	14.9%
	Often	76	31.5%
	Very Often	119	49.4%
Hours Spent on Social Media Per Day	1 hour	19	7.9%
	2-3 hours	74	30.7%
	4-5 hours	88	36.5%
	More than 6 hours	60	24.9%

Media Literacy and Social Media Usage
The students' demographic profile reveals a heterogeneous sample in terms of gender, age, and educational attainment, offering a full representation of different student communities. The majority of respondents are female, undergraduate students, and fall within the age range of 18 to 21 years.

Gender and Media Literacy
Both male and female students exhibit elevated levels of media literacy, with a somewhat greater proportion of females in the sample. Studies indicate that women tend to exhibit greater conscientiousness in scrutinising material and are less inclined to disseminate unverified news on social media platforms (Pennycook & Rand, 2021).

Age and Media Literacy
Most of the participants are young individuals between the ages of 18 and 21, who tend to be more involved with digital platforms and have greater levels of media literacy. Their exposure to digital literacy programmes during their education is likely the reason for this (Livingstone et al., 2022).

Educational Level and Media Literacy
The majority of respondents, who were undergraduate students, demonstrated a greater level of media literacy, which corresponds to their more frequent use of social media for consuming information. According to Hobbs (2020), students who have obtained bachelor degrees tend to have greater levels of media literacy compared to those with diplomas. This is likely because bachelor degree programmes provide more extensive academic instruction and emphasise critical thinking abilities.

Platform Usage
Among students, TikTok is the most widely used platform, Facebook with and X (previously Twitter) being the subsequent choices. The preference for these platforms corresponds to the worldwide usage patterns observed among young adults, who use these networks to access news, entertainment, and social interactions. However, the reliance on social media as a news source highlights the risk of exposure to false or misleading information, highlighting the critical role of media literacy (Vosoughi et al., 2018).

Frequency and Duration of Use
A large proportion of students often use social media, engaging with it on a daily basis. Approximately 49.4% of the participants indicated that they frequently utilise social media, while 36.5% dedicate 4-5 hours per day to engaging with these online platforms. The increasing use of social media highlights the critical role it plays in their daily lives and their habits of consuming information.

Table 2

Descriptive Results of Media Literacy Skills, Media Literacy Effect and Digital Citizenship Practices (n=241)

Section	Item	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Media Literacy (ML)	1. Confidence in evaluating information	4.2	0.8
	2. Fact-checking before sharing	3.8	1.1
	3. ML skills influencing behaviors	4.1	0.9
	4. Awareness of media biases	4.3	0.7
	5. Seeking diverse perspectives	4.0	1.0
	6. Importance of ML education	4.5	0.6
	7. Trust in reputable sources	4.4	0.8
	8. Enhancing ability to discern information	4.2	0.7
	9. Feeling overwhelmed by information	3.6	1.2
	10. Awareness of misinformation consequences	4.3	0.8
Social Media Use (SM)	1. Role in shaping habits	4.1	0.9
	2. First encounter on social media	3.9	1.0
	3. Trust in social media connections	3.7	1.1
	4. Influence of algorithms	4.2	0.8
	5. Enhancing awareness of events	4.0	0.9
	6. Influence by others' opinions	3.8	1.0
	7. Engagement with news content	4.0	0.9
	8. Exposure to diverse perspectives	4.1	0.9
	9. Pressure to conform	3.5	1.2
	10. Awareness of misinformation potential	4.4	0.7
Effects of Social Media (SE)	1. Platforms prone to misinformation	4.1	0.8
	2. Confidence in identifying misinformation	3.9	1.0
	3. Sharing false information	3.2	1.3
	4. Concern about misinformation spread	4.3	0.7
	5. Responsibility of social media companies	4.5	0.6

Section	Item	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
	6. Skepticism compared to traditional media	4.0	0.9
	7. Influence of usage habits	3.8	1.0
	8. Reporting misinformation	3.9	1.0
	9. Importance of ML education	4.4	0.7

Discussion

The study was meant to focus on the aspect of media literacy and the patterns of information consumption among students. The research makes a significant contribution of offering information that can be beneficial in evaluating students' media literacy regarding their interactions in social sites. Therefore, the summary of the descriptive statistics and the results of the regression analysis enable the establishment of the research purpose and the development of a strong feel of the effect of media literacy on the use of information. From the results, it is evident that the students seem to have a good understanding of the Media as most students scored a mean of over 4. We employed a 5 Likert scale ranging from 0 to 4; the overall mean response was 0. This suggests that students possess average to high perceived self-efficiency on matters concerning media literacy which comprises evaluation skills, ability to identify bias in media, and perceived relevance of media literacy education. Such outcomes justify research indicating that it is necessary to educate the people media literacy skills for helping them to find their way through the currently challenging media environment (Livingstone et al. , 2022; Hobbs, 2020). In fact, the participants had a moderate level of awareness about bias, (M = 4. 3 SD = 0.7) and that they needed to learn media literacy, (M = 4.5 SD = 0.6). Through the educational programs aimed at providing the concerns for the students, these studies suggest that there are positive impacts in terms of critical thinking and evaluative abilities that are crucial in the process of sieving the information (Bulger & Davison, 2021).

It is apparent from the manner the students engage in these social media platforms that these are the ones they use in sourcing for news and events. The mean values thus support the hypothesis that social media influences the intake of information and the amount of tolerance of the poles apart opinions (M= 4.1, SD = 0.9). However, it also revealed that the level of trust users have for the individuals they communicate with in the social media platform was lower than the likelihood of encountering fake news (M = 3.7, SD = 1.1; M = 4.4, SD = 0.7, respectively). This means that while social media can be described as a treasure trove of information as it is seen today, it is also a home of fake or misinformation as Pennycook & Rand (2021) has pointed out. This dichotomy is in line with recent research that emphasises the paradox of social media: On the one hand, it ensures that everybody will get the information and everybody will be on the other side, but at the same time, it creates the problem of fake news and the creation of silos or bubbles. Therefore the media literacy is a good practice in the sense that the consumers are empowered with the means of handling such an issue.

The students' perception of social media being more credible suspicion about content from social media as compared to traditional media with a mean of 4.0, SD of 0.9 and their attitude towards fake news circulation with the mean 4.3, SD of 0.7 is a show of how the students' consumption of information has been influenced by social media. These are not baseless concerns especially with the issue on fake news which has been prevalent in the social media platform which does not trigger positive social impact in terms of degree of comprehension and perception among the populace in general (Cinelli et al., 2020).

It is possible to have more evidence both for and against the assumption about the sign of the coefficient connecting the level of media literacy with the attitudes towards information consumption based on the results of the regression analysis. The result also confirms that the improvement in media literacy as a predictor variable has a significant and positive correlation with the responsibly consuming behaviours which include fact checking, biases and disinformation ($\beta = 0$. This is in concordance with the study that has examined how media literacy could reduce the impacts of fake news and promote safer information environments (Guess, Nagler & Tucker, 2019).

Implications and Recommendations

The implication of the results can be deduced for teachers, legislators, and the social media platform because of the place these sites have in the students' learning process. Given that media literacy plays the key role in developing consumers' habits in terms of information consumption, it is possible to conclude that contemporary education is not enough to offer just literacy training and exposure to complicated problems, especially when focusing on social media (Koltay, 2020). Hence, it is a significant interest of the social media applications to partner with schools in order to refine the methodologies and tools used in media learning. This may include factual proof services and awareness creation services such as a specific campaign.

On the same note, the policymakers must also ensure that media literacy is taught because all the learners should be equipped with the kind of skills necessary to handle the digital information environment. Thus, it is important to point out that some of the strategies concerning the increase in civil society's media literacy can be helpful in combating fake news and raising the general tone of the discourse.

Conclusion

The concept of media literacy regarding social networks, as well as the evaluation of its impact on information consumption, can be useful as a tool for determining interactions between users, platforms, and the information space. The results of this research indicate that media literacy can play the role of a resource that may influence the users' perceptions and actions in the context of social media. Based on the analysis of the research objective, it is possible to assume several significant outcomes; The object of the analysis is to identify the impact of media literacy on social media and its consequences on information consumption. Media literacy enables the users to assess the reliability of the content they access and whether or not the content is true when interacting with the social media platforms. It also proves that the individuals who are well conversant with media literacy are the ones who can easily differentiate between the real and fake news and are not easily influenced by sensational or fake news. An imperative assessment is useful in the present world of digital communication because many messages are transmitted and often it is filled with false or misleading

information. Higher critical media literacy enables the individuals to make more informed and reasoned choices on the messages they receive and pass on. Furthermore, this study reveals that the more the people engage in the use of social media the lower the level of understanding and critical analysis of media. Media literacy is mainly determined by the engagement in the social media and the result may be positive or negative. The more one is exposed to different contents, the better he or she will be in understanding how media works and in evaluating the reliability of the received information. But if there are no teachings on media literacy, then the consumers will be in between echo chambers and confirmation biases hence having a wrong perception of reality. Thus, media literacy education must remain integrated with the digital environment to promote development of a more informed and critical society.

Thus, the research is useful for grasping the importance of media literacy for both, consuming content and creating and sharing it. The media literate person is more likely to participate in the production of good content in relation to truth, balance and ethical tone of information in the digital environment by producing good content that is appropriate. That is why it is necessary to actively take part in the information battle against fake news and contribute to raising the general level of discourse in the social media platforms. The study therefore validates the hypothesis that media literacy serves as an intervention mechanism to counter the effects of social media on information consumption hence fulfilling the research objectives. Media literacy plays the role of role modelling in constructive thinking, creating content, and disseminating information, thus forming the foundation for an informed society. The consequences of such findings are relatively significant, meaning that the governments, schools and social media platforms themselves should invest in media literacy initiatives. The impact of different media literacy programmes can be realized when users are empowered with ways of dealing with the new age demands effectively. This will ensure that social media is used for the purpose of sharing credible and useful information only.

Thus, the connection between media literacy and social networking entails profound implications for users' engagement with information. With the shift from being just entertainment and communication platform to an essential source of information, media literacy is still an important question. Thus, society may use such social media platforms to share accurate knowledge and make people equipped with the tools to analyse and interact with content. Future research should also take into account the new approaches of media literacy education and evaluate the long-term efficiency of media literacy on individual and social levels.

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