

## STRENGTHENING CRITICAL AWAKENING SOCIAL MEDIA LITERACY IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Rahmanita Ginting<sup>\*1</sup>, Faustyna<sup>2</sup>, Leylia Khairani<sup>3</sup>

<sup>\*1,2,3</sup>Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

\*1e-mail: [rahmanita\\_ginting@umsu.ac.id](mailto:rahmanita_ginting@umsu.ac.id)

[faustyna@umsu.ac.id](mailto:faustyna@umsu.ac.id)

[leyliakhairani@umsu.ac.id](mailto:leyliakhairani@umsu.ac.id)

**Abstract:** This study aims to analyze the strengthening critical awakening social media literacy in the digital era. Social media plays an important role in shaping media literacy by disseminating information and creating awareness among users can be both beneficial and disadvantages. It serves as a platform for sharing content that influences public perception, highlighting the importance of media literacy in recognizing the purpose of media information. This research uses a qualitative approach. The informants of this research are Muslim youth in Medan. The results show that social media literacy, which incorporates the features and implications of digital platforms, is the foundation for the awakening critical awareness of social media literacy. People's ability to navigate it safely and successfully largely depends on their social media literacy skills, that has significant implications for individuals and society. The digital platforms are themselves positioned and positioning. The explicate its core content and competencies. The rapid digitalization and globalization have intensified media dissemination, raising critical issues about information authenticity and its societal impacts. While beneficial, it also presents significant challenges such as misinformation, algorithmic biases, and digital divides. Social media literacy empowers individuals to critically analyse media, discern between reliable and unreliable sources, recognize biases, and understand the broader socio-political implications of media messages.

**Keywords:** Strengthening critical awakening, social media literacy, digital literacy, algorithmic awareness.

### Introduction

The way people procure information and interact with the external environment have undergone considerable transformation in the digital epoch. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok have assumed a pivotal role in public dialogue, dissemination of news, and personal articulation. The rapid proliferation of internet connectivity within Indonesia has positioned the country among the foremost users of social media globally, with these platforms exerting a profound influence on cultural and religious practices, particularly among the youth of the Muslim community (Lim, 2017). The industrial era 4.0 has significantly altered people's lives, the rapid advancement of information and technology, as well as the crucial role that social media platforms like Instagram play in the digitalization process. The importance of freedom of expression on these platforms is growing, but so is its complexity. The internet has developed into a platform with nearly infinite potential that enables people to express themselves without regard to physical constraints. Users must use this freedom wisely and responsibly. By obeying the rules, norms and rights of other people, this freedom can be exercised well without harming anyone and still strengthening the social norms that apply in society (Suhaimi et al., 2024).



Source: The Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), 2024

Social media literacy has become an essential skill in the digital era, where misinformation, cyberbullying, and digital divides present significant challenges. This paper explores the critical awakening necessary to understand social media literacy, evaluates the challenges posed by the digital landscape, and proposes strategies to enhance literacy. Focusing on Muslim youth in Medan, this study examines the unique cultural and social factors influencing their engagement with social media. Muslim adolescents in Medan, a city distinguished by its diverse cultural and religious milieu, actively engage with social media to articulate their identities, enhance their religious knowledge, and participate in philanthropic endeavours. Nonetheless, the persistence of challenges such as echo chambers, the spread of misinformation, and cyberbullying prompts critical examination of users' ability to navigate the digital landscape effectively. This study analyze to address the research questions: How strengthening critical awakening social media literacy in the digital era?

### Literature Review

**Media Literacy Theory:** Focuses on the skills required to critically evaluate and create media content. This theory emphasizes the importance of understanding the structure, purpose, and potential biases in media messages, enabling individuals to become informed and responsible media users. **Cognitive Load Theory:** Addresses the mental effort required to process vast amounts of information available online. In the context of social media, this theory underscores the need to balance cognitive resources to critically assess content while avoiding overload from excessive or conflicting information. **Cultural Context Theory:** Highlights the influence of cultural and religious values on media consumption and interpretation. For Muslim youth in Sumatera Utara, their media literacy practices are deeply intertwined with Islamic teachings and local cultural norms, shaping how they perceive and react to online content. Media literacy involves critical thinking, information verification, and source evaluation, which are crucial for responsible digital citizenship. Digital literacy encompasses the ability to identify hoaxes, evaluate information authenticity, and maintain online privacy. Critical media literacy is vital for understanding the impact of media on both social and personal realms, especially in the post-truth era.

For the past ten years, several media literacy initiatives have engaged youth in the production of media as a means of empowering them to feel ownership as creators, and providing dynamic experiences of how content is developed and disseminated. These programs address a range of issues including misinformation, copyright, plagiarism, information credibility, and bullying (Bulger & Davison, 2018). Media and information literacy competencies are essential in the digital age. Education in media literacy can empower against disinformation. Media and information literacy competences are also required in order to enable

citizens to actively participate in democratic society; these competences enable citizens in general to access, understand and deal with the media, and encourage them to become participatory agents. Media and Information Literacy empowers citizens, including children and youth, with competencies related to media, information, information and communication technology (ICT) (Tayia, 2022).

These theories collectively provide a foundation for understanding the interplay between individual behaviours, cultural influences, and the broader digital ecosystem. They guide the development of strategies tailored to enhance social media literacy while respecting the unique cultural and religious context of the target demographic.

Media Literacy is a series of perspectives that we actively use to expose ourselves to media to interpret the meaning of the messages (media) we encounter. We build our perspectives from knowledge structures. To build knowledge structures, we need tools and raw materials. The tools are our skills. Meanwhile, the raw material is the information we get from the media and the real world. Taking control is the essence of media literacy. Becoming media literate gives us a clearer perspective to see the boundaries between the real world and the world produced by the media. Ginting's research results that the ability to explore media message creation systems is also very necessary in accessing information messages in the current digital information era. Good media literacy skills from students will be able to help the public understand the information. The healthy and the development of mass media, both negative and positive, can be applied correctly and well and is beneficial for the public (Ginting, 2020).

In the digital age, social media's explosive growth has drastically changed public debate, communication, and the way information is shared. Navigating the digital ecosystem now requires social media literacy, which is the capacity to critically assess, evaluate, and produce media in a variety of formats. The deluge of false information, echo chambers, and algorithmic prejudice highlights the necessity for social media users to have a critical awakening. This essay examines methods for enhancing social media literacy through the development of critical thinking and awareness, highlighting the significance of giving people the tools they need to interact with the digital world in an appropriate and productive manner.

The structure of media literacy knowledges is 1. Knowledge of media content, specifically knowledge of media content at the level of knowing which programs are good or not 2. Awareness of the media industry's biases, particularly in the political sphere, and the fact that it aims to make material profits in order to grow its business in addition to providing information and entertainment. 3. Understanding and realizing the impact of media on oneself through knowledge of media effects (Ginting & Pratiwi, 2017). Focusing on media literacy education are Importance of Media Literacy, Historical Context, Recommendations for the Future, Engagement with Audience (Bulger et al., 2023). Media literacy equips individuals with the skills to critically analyse information, discern credible sources, and resist misinformation (Gjerazi, 2024). The intensity of family communication consisting of frequency and duration of communication, family communication patterns consisting of atmosphere, communication and flow of communication, communication methods that tended to be persuasive and coercive (Hendra, & Priadi, 2019).

Media literacy theory provides a foundation for understanding how individuals interpret and interact with media messages. Potter's (2018) cognitive theory of media literacy emphasizes the importance of critical thinking and reflective judgment in discerning media content. Recent studies (Livingstone & Helsper, 2020) have expanded this framework to include digital media, highlighting the role of interactivity and user-generated content in shaping media experiences.

Additionally, Concept of critical consciousness has gained renewed relevance in the context of social media. Critical consciousness involves the ability to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and take action against oppressive elements. In the digital era, this

translates to recognizing biases in algorithms, questioning the credibility of sources, and resisting manipulative content.

### Method

This research uses a qualitative approach. Using a qualitative approach, it investigates the perspectives and experiences of young Muslims in navigating digital media while upholding ethical and moral principles rooted in Islam. The data collected involved in-depth interviews and participant observation and document analysis enabling a rich understanding of the attitudes, behaviours, and critical engagement with social media. Interviews conducted with Muslim youth in Medan as informants to analyses the strengthening critical awakening social media literacy in the digital era. Data collection methods include:

1. **In-depth Interviews:** Conducted with Muslim youth aged 18-21, representing diverse educational and socioeconomic backgrounds.
2. **Participant Observation:** Observing youth interactions in online and offline settings, including social media platforms, community events, and religious gatherings.
3. **Document Analysis:** Reviewing educational materials, and existing media literacy programs.

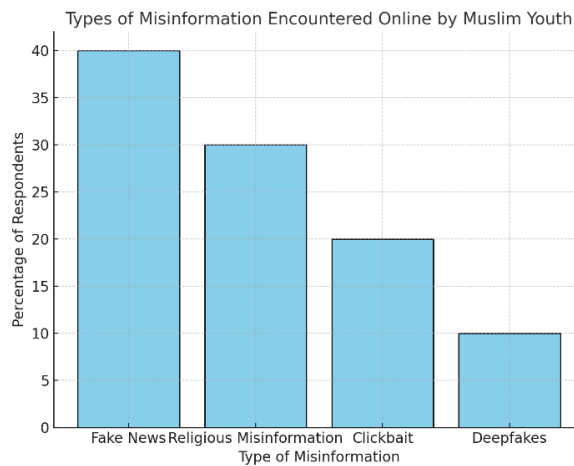
### Result and Discussion

#### Challenges in Social Media Literacy

1. **Proliferation of Misinformation:** The accessibility and speed of social media amplify the spread of false narratives, creating an "infodemic" that undermines trust in information sources (Cinelli et al., 2020).
2. **Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles:** Algorithm-driven content personalization fosters echo chambers, where users are exposed primarily to like-minded perspectives, limiting critical engagement (Pariser, 2020).
3. **Lack of Educational Integration:** Despite the increasing importance of social media literacy, many educational curricula fail to address it comprehensively, leaving individuals ill-equipped to navigate the digital landscape (Livingstone, 2020).

#### Strategies to Enhance Critical Awakening

1. **Promoting Algorithmic Literacy:** Educating users about how algorithms curate content can help them recognize biases and take proactive steps to diversify their information sources.
2. **Encouraging Reflective Practices:** Programs that teach reflective practices, such as fact-checking, cross-referencing sources, and analyzing content creators' motives, can enhance critical thinking.
3. **Leveraging Technology for Education:** Digital tools like fact-checking apps and gamified learning platforms can make social media literacy more engaging and accessible.
4. **Community-Based Initiatives:** Grassroots movements and online communities can play a pivotal role in spreading awareness about responsible social media use and combating misinformation.



**Figure 1: Types of Misinformation Encountered Online by Muslim Youth**  
 Source: Research Result, 2025

This figure illustrates the prevalence of diverse categories of misinformation among Muslim youth residing in Medan. The data elucidates that fake news or fabricated news and religiously oriented misinformation constitute the most frequently encountered manifestations, representing substantial segments of the misinformation ecosystem. Clickbait closely follows, signifying the manipulative characteristics of certain online content designed to enhance user engagement. Deepfakes, although still in the nascent stages, present an escalating concern owing to their capacity to distort perceptions of reality.

**Table 1: Analysis The Strengthening Critical Awakening Social Media Literacy In The Digital Era**

Theme	Key Findings	Supporting Data
Misinformation Awareness	Most informant struggled to distinguish credible sources from misinformation.	"Sometimes, it's hard to know if a post is true or not because it looks real." (Informant 5)
Algorithmic Influence	Informants were unaware of how algorithms influence their social media feeds.	"I often see similar content, but I didn't realize it's because of the app's system." (Informant 10)
Fact-checking Practices	Few informants engaged in fact-checking before sharing content.	"I don't usually check; I just share if it looks interesting." (Informant 8)
Peer Influence	Peer behaviour significantly impacted informants' social media practices.	"If my friends share it, I think it's okay to share too." (Informant 7)
Religious Narratives	Informants were more likely to trust and share content framed in religious contexts.	"If it has Islamic values, I trust it more." (Informant 3)

Source: Research Result, 2025

**1. Perspectives on Social Media Literacy**

**Critical Thinking:** Informants emphasized the importance of verifying information before sharing, influenced by Islamic teachings of truthfulness (şidq).

**Ethical Engagement:** Many informants highlighted that justice (‘adl) guides them to avoid engaging in hate speech or digital slander.

**2. Integration of Islamic Values**

Honesty (Şidq): Youth stressed the significance of sharing credible and truthful content.

Responsibility (Mas'uliyah): informants reflected on their responsibility to promote positivity and avoid harm online.

Community Awareness (Ukhuwwah Islamiyyah): social media is perceived as a tool to strengthen the Islamic community and share beneficial knowledge.

### 3. Challenges Faced

Misinformation: Youth often struggle with distinguishing credible information from fake news. Peer Pressure: Informants expressed challenges in maintaining Islamic ethics amidst trends and peer influence.

In the digital era and current technological developments, there have been changes in human life in various ways, such as communication, especially in obtaining information, so that the negative effects of the digital world cannot be avoided. Therefore, someone needs to have media literacy skills, especially for students so that it can be a tool to reduce the negative influence of the presence of the digital world (Hidayat, et. al, 2021). Social media have high impact on society. Female celebrities in Medan City share more daily moments than their opinions on current issues. These moments are work or college moments, social activity moments, hangout moments, and vacation moments (Harahap, Ginting, & Khairani, 2021)

This study explores the critical awakening and social media literacy of youth Muslims in Medan, Sumatera Utara, through the lens of Islamic values. The findings reveal the nuanced interplay between religious beliefs and media consumption practices, highlighting the challenges and opportunities faced by youth in fostering critical thinking and responsible digital citizenship. Recommendations are provided for educational institutions, policymakers, and community leaders to enhance media literacy programs grounded in Islamic ethics.

Safiya Noble's *Algorithms of Oppression* critically examines how search engines perpetuate systemic racism through algorithmic bias. Noble argues that search engines, particularly Google, do not merely reflect societal norms but actively reinforce them, shaping perceptions and realities about marginalized groups. This work highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the social implications of technology and the biases embedded within algorithmic systems (Noble, 2020).

Media literacy is one strategy to help the public become savvier in the face of media exposure. It also serves as a filter for the information that gets one way to define media literacy is the ability to access, evaluate, and synthesize messages from the media while employing those media as instruments to produce one's own message and the community wants to overthrow the power hegemony on the one hand (Hidayat & Ginting, 2020). The media literacy education should equip individuals with skills development to critically understand media representations and to engage in practices of listening, fostering a more equitable dialogue between mainstream and marginalized voices (Neag et al., 2022). The research by Vosoughi et al. (2018) highlights the significant disparity in the spread of true and false news on social media platforms, revealing that false news diffuses more rapidly and broadly than true news. The novelty of false stories makes them more shareable, as they evoke stronger emotional responses like fear and surprise. This phenomenon is influenced by various factors, including network segregation, psychological motivations, and the nature of the content itself. The following sections elaborate on these key aspects.

### Conclusion

Strengthening critical awakening and social media literacy is imperative in the digital era to combat misinformation, foster informed discourse, and empower individuals to navigate the

complexities of the digital landscape. By integrating media literacy into education systems, promoting algorithmic awareness, and leveraging technology for educational purposes, society can equip individuals with the tools needed to critically engage with social media. Future research should focus on developing scalable interventions and evaluating their long-term impact on social media literacy.

Strategies to enhance critical awakening media are promoting algorithmic literacy, encouraging reflective practices, leveraging technology for education, community-based initiatives, integrating Islamic values/perspectives on social media literacy, misinformation awareness, algorithmic influence, fact-checking practices, peer influence, religious narratives.

### **Bibliography**

- Bulger, M., Baleria, G., Hobbs, R., & Moffitt, K. R. (2023). The promise of media literacy education when “everything is at stake” and “everything is expected. *The Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 15(1), 99–108.
- Bulger, M., & Davison, P. (2018). The Promises, Challenges, and Futures of Media Literacy. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 10(1), 1–21.
- Cinelli, M., Quattrociochi, W., Galeazzi, A., Valensise, C. M., Brugnoli, E., Schmidt, A. L., ... & Scala, A. (2020). The COVID-19 social media infodemic. *Scientific Reports*, 10(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-73510-5>
- Ginting, R. (2020). Kemampuan Literasi Media pada Era Informasi Digital di Kalangan Mahasiswa Kota Medan. *Talenta Conference Series: Local Wisdom, Social, and Arts (LWSA)*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.32734/lwsa.v3i1.816>
- Ginting, R., & Pratiwi, S. (2017). Analisis Literasi Media Televisi dalam Keluarga. *CHANNEL: Jurnal Komunikasi*, 5(2), 109-122.
- Gjerazi, B. (2024). Media Literacy in the Era of Globalization: Innovative Strategies for Decoding Information. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research and Development*.
- Harahap, Y., Ginting, R., & Khairani, L. (2021). Fenomena Keterbukaan Diri Selebgram Perempuan di Kota Medan Sebagai Cermin Budaya Populer di Media Sosial Instagram. *PERSPEKTIF*, 10(2), 754-762.
- Hendra, Y., & Priadi, R. (2019). Family Communication Model in Forming Pious Children. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal)*, 2(1), 28-38.
- Hidayat, F. P., Saleh, A., Adhani, A., & Rudianto, R. (2021). Pendidikan Literasi Media Guru Sekolah Mis Al-Hidayah Dalam Menghadapi Pengaruh Negatif Dunia Digital Pada Siswa. *Martabe: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat*, 4(2), 627-633.
- Hidayat, F. P., & Ginting, R. (2020). Media Literacy of Communication Students in Using Facebook. *Ettisal: Journal of Communication*, 5(1).
- Hendra, Y., & Priadi, R. (2019). Family Communication Model in Forming Pious Children. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal)*, 2(1), 28-38.
- Hobbs, R. (2010). *Digital and Media Literacy: A Plan of Action*. Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute.
- Livingstone, S., & Helsper, E. J. (2020). Gradations in digital inclusion: Children, young people, and the digital divide. *New Media & Society*, 22(7), 1238-1256. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820915085>
- Neag, A., Bozdağ, Ç., & Leurs, K. (2022, July 18). Media Literacy Education for Diverse Societies. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*.
- Noble, S. U. (2020). *Algorithms of oppression: How search engines reinforce racism*. NYU Press.

- Pariser, E. (2020). *The filter bubble: How the new personalized web is changing what we read and how we think*. Penguin Books.
- Suhaimi, N. B. A., Haq, F. H. N., & Sidiq, F. (2024). Challenges and Responsibilities of Freedom of Expression in the Industrial Era 4.0: Analysis of Social Interaction on Instagram Social Media. *International Journal of Linguistics, Communication and Broadcasting*, 2(2), 34–38.
- Tayia, S. A. R. (2022). Media and information literacy to counter disinformation. *Insights into Language, Culture and Communication*, 2(2), 83.
- Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science*, 359(6380), 1146-1151. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559>