





# THE IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA LITERACY IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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In this fast-paced digital era, information and news can be easily disseminated. Dependence on social media is also increasing for obtaining news, information about issues or matters, communication and interaction, and much more. According to statistics released by Data Reportal, the number of social media users in Malaysia until January 2023 is estimated at 26.8 million. This situation clearly indicates that social media has a significant influence on contemporary society and serves as the main reference for daily life. To prevent negative outcomes, social media users must have the ability to critically analyze, evaluate, and understand all acquired media content. This is where media literacy takes responsibility for educating the public, especially social media users, to navigate the digital landscape responsibly and exhibit a professional attitude.

Media literacy and information overload According to Livingstone (2003), media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate in various forms of media. Therefore, in general, media literacy can be summarized as the ability to understand, interpret, and critically assess various forms of media content, including news articles, videos, images, advertisements, and live broadcasts or streaming on social media. Thus, for an individual to possess media literacy, they must be capable of creating media content, conveying messages, distinguishing between facts and opinions, and identifying inaccurate information and propaganda. In the current digital era, people worldwide seem to be immersed in a sea of information. The constant flow of information from various sources creates a significant challenge in differentiating accurate and reliable information from false ones. The inundation of social media

platforms also increases the reach of information, urging us to be more media-savvy. Media literacy undoubtedly empowers individuals with the skills to research sources, cross-reference obtained information, and critically assess the credibility of information sources.

Misinformation and fake news are now rampant. Despite the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) implementing the "Uncertain, Don't Share" practice to curb the spread of fake news, inaccurate and controversial information easily spreads rapidly on social media platforms, leading to unrest and unease. Hence, with the skills of media literacy, it is hoped that individuals can recognize common tactics used to manipulate information, such as sensational headlines, selective editing, and out-of-context quotes. By educating the public on fact-checking and verifying information, media literacy is seen as a shield against the harmful effects of spreading false information. Media literacy also fosters critical thinking skills by encouraging individuals to question, analyze, and seek various perspectives when encountering information. People are educated not only to read headlines but to cultivate the habit of reading articles and understanding news comprehensively. This indirectly creates a more informed, analytical, and knowledgeable society. As responsible digital citizens, our awareness of the importance of mastering media literacy is crucial to shaping a community that is attentive to its surroundings. Rapid technological advancement must be accompanied by a healthier and more responsible digital ecosystem. This will undoubtedly create a virtual community that is more harmonious and successful.