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Media literacy and mental health awareness: A quantitative study on Bangladeshi university students

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Abstract: This study investigates the relationship between media literacy and mental health awareness among university students in Bangladesh. A quantitative cross-sectional study was conducted among 120 university students of four public universities in Bangladesh. The data has been collected using a structured format of a questionnaire that measures media consumption behaviors, literacy skills, and mental health awareness levels of participants. The findings indicate that students with stronger media literacy skills demonstrate a greater ability to recognize inaccurate information, critically interpret media representations of mental health, and develop more informed attitudes toward mental health issues. The results also reveal a positive association between media literacy competencies and students' awareness of mental health problems as well as their acceptance of non-stigmatizing portrayals of mental illness in media content. In addition, the study highlights that although students frequently engage with digital media platforms, their ability to critically evaluate mental health portrayals in media varies depending on their level of media literacy. These findings contribute to existing literature by providing empirical evidence from the Bangladeshi context, where research examining the relationship between media literacy and mental health awareness remains limited.

INTRODUCTION

Media has emerged as an important influence on individuals' understanding of health-related topics including mental health (Tam et al., 2024). In contemporary digital environment, media platforms have a significant effect on how people think, feel, and know about mental health concerns (Zhang & Firdaus, 2024). In recent years, research has increasingly examined the impact of media on public perceptions, awareness, and attitudes of mental well-being. This issue has become quite significant in Bangladesh, as the rapid proliferation of digital media has transformed how people access and understand information. According to the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC, 2022), internet access and use on social media have dramatically grown in recent years with digital media now becoming the preeminent platform for news and health information. University students are among the most active users of digital media platforms and are therefore the most susceptible to media messaging that can in turn affect perceptions of mental health.

There have been studies indicating the fact that the effect of media depiction of mental illness could have both positive and negative implications. Effective and well-informed depiction could lead to increased public enlightenment, diminished stigma, and increased help-seeking intent (Srivastava et al., 2018). Conversely, inaccurate or sensationalized portrayals may reinforce stereotypes, distort public understanding of mental illness, and discourage individuals from seeking professional support (Klin & Lemish, 2008; Stuart, 2006). The dissemination of misinformation via digital media further muddies this waterscape, especially within a backdrop of existing limitations within their mental health literacy level (Cheng et al., 2021). In Bangladesh, recent studies

have reported increasing levels of anxiety, depression, and psychological stress among young people, while awareness and understanding of mental health issues remain relatively limited (Al Mamun et al., 2021).

Media literacy, which plays a crucial role in the consumption of health information, has also not received adequate attention. This is because media literacy education in Bangladesh has not been integrated into the curricula. The existing educational system primarily emphasizes traditional academic competencies, while media literacy skills receive relatively limited attention (Hossain et al., 2023). As a result, students often depend on digital media sources for information without sufficient training in evaluating the reliability or bias of these sources. In spite of the prevalent usage of social media and news websites among students in Bangladesh, limited studies exist on the relationship between their level of media literacy and their comprehension of mental health concepts.

Media literacy can be defined as the skill to obtain, interpret, evaluate, and create media content in a knowledgeable and critical way (Aufderheide, 2018). This ability provides people with critical thinking skills to handle the complex media environment. According to Murzina (2021), media competence and media literacy are essential for individuals to effectively use media technologies in their professional activities, enhancing their critical thinking and decision-making abilities. Potter (2004) states that media literacy constitutes a wide range of understanding levels from basic to advanced analysis. Ciurel (2022) argues that media Literacy aims to educate individuals to critically consume mediated messages, fostering skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, autonomy, communication and participation. In

current situations, media literacy involves both traditional media such as television and print media, as well as new media such as social media and news website portals. Being able to distinguish between misleading and reliable information stands at the top of media literacy. Media literacy also incorporates both the ethical and production aspects of consuming and creating media and emphasizes the societally assigned responsibilities to both producers and consumers (Hobbs, 2011).

It has been argued that media literacy develops critical thinking capabilities of a person to distinguish credible information from misinformation in complex media environment (Potter, 2004; Livingstone, 2004; Hobbs, 2011). Recent findings indicate that media literacy is also associated with awareness regarding mental issues, as it enables the individual to critically analyze mental health issues depicted in the media and overcome the stigmatizing or misleading narratives (Vissenberg et al., 2022; Schønning et al., 2020). Empirical studies undertaken so far have primarily remained Western or high-income countries; hence, the existing body of knowledge on this topic from developing nations is minimal. Although previous research has examined media use and mental health separately, limited studies have empirically explored how media literacy competencies influence mental health awareness among university students in developing contexts such as Bangladesh. There is a limitation of empirical study that simultaneously assesses media literacy skills and mental health awareness, while investigating how students comprehend mental health material encountered in digital media contexts. It must be addressed to fill this gap because university students frequently rely on online media to get information, but they may not have the critical skills they

require to assess the credibility and implications of the content they consume.

Mental health awareness refers to the knowledge and understanding of mental health conditions, including their symptoms, causes of the concern and possible solutions. Tam et al. (2024) conducted a comprehensive study indicating that media mental health awareness programs generally produce favorable modifications in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors among young people, including less stigma and heightened help-seeking behaviors. According to Jorm et al. (2000), it encompasses reducing the stigma associated with mental health issues and promoting responsible behaviors in seeking assistance. The media acts as an essential aspect in the influence of the levels of understanding in issues concerning mental health too. Srivastava et al. (2018) demonstrate that accurate and empathetic coverage of mental illness has the capacity to educate people, reduce the stigma surrounding mental illnesses, and enhance communicative sensitivity. On the other hand, distorted representation in the media might result in the strengthening of stereotypes, reducing people's inclination towards seeking treatment and increasing the symptoms of mental health (Cheng et al., 2021). Rather, because of cultural stigma and an absent mental health educational system in impoverished countries such as Bangladesh, awareness of mental health in these regions remains limited (Al Mamun et al., 2021). Maltby et al. (2024) states that social media has a predominantly negative impact on young people's mental health, affecting self-identity, social interaction, mental well-being, digital literacy and governance policies.

Jiayuan et al. (2025) demonstrate that problematic social media use and low

mental health literacy significantly increase the risk of depression among nursing students, with their interaction significantly increasing the risk. Studies have indicated that media literacy programs can enhance knowledge, attitudes and behaviors related to mental health (Karaduman, 2015). Media literacy also sensitizes individuals to mental health issues and prepares them to recognize stigmatizing portrayals in the media of people with mental health issues. The Importance of Media Literacy, from the work of Wright et al. in 2024, best highlights the significance of media literacy in today's society.

Research shows there is correlation between media literacy and awareness of mental health. Media literacy assists an individual in analyzing messages portrayed in the media. In 2021, Mamun et al. found the media literacy abilities assist adolescents in giving critical views about the presentation of depression on-line. The effectiveness of media literacy educating has proven positive on teenagers' awareness and ideas about mental health help by Schønning et al. in 2020. Media shapes public attitudes on mental health. The representation in media may be false and exaggerated, leading to stigma and misunderstandings about mental illness (Klin & Lemish, 2008). Bangladeshi university students must understand this relationship due to increasing media use and adolescents struggling with mental health problems.

This research is pertinent as it addresses the current absence in media studies by investigating the correlation between media literacy and mental health awareness among university students in Bangladesh. This study focuses on university students as the principal respondents because of their significant relation to the underlying issue under investigation. University students

frequently encounter many academic, social, and personal challenges that may influence their perceptions and attitudes regarding the concern examined in this study. Focusing on university students ensures the study remains specific and feasible while providing enhanced insight into the viewpoints of the research respondents.

The study is theoretically informed by the uses and gratifications theory and the media literacy framework. The uses and gratifications theory illustrates how individuals proactively interact with media to fulfill their informational and psychological requirements (Katz et al., 1973). In this study, university students utilize media to obtain information related to mental health, social interaction, and emotional support. The media literacy paradigm highlights the significance of crucial competencies, including information verification, disinformation identification, and media intent evaluation, in enhancing individuals' capacity to perceive media messages effectively. These theoretical perspectives together provide a framework for understanding both why students engage with media and how their level of media literacy influences their interpretation of mental health information encountered within these contexts. With this background, this research aims to answer the following questions:

- RQ 1: How do literacy levels and media consumption patterns influence perceptions of students about mental health?
- RQ 2: What is the level of media literacy among university students of Bangladesh?
- RQ 3: What is the level of mental health awareness among university students?
- RQ 4: How is media literacy associated with awareness regarding mental

health issues in Bangladeshi University students?

This study seeks to enhance the emerging study on media literacy and mental health by offering research unique to Bangladesh on these topics. This study defines essential concepts as follows: Media literacy refers to the capacity to critically analyze media content and comprehend its impact on individuals. Mental health awareness encompasses an in-depth understanding of mental health issues and the capacity to identify symptoms. Mental health literacy encompasses the information and abilities required to effectively manage mental health, identify conditions, and appropriately seek assistance. This investigation will improve instructional approaches and policy initiatives focused on advancing media literacy as an essential mental health competence in modern times.

A comprehensive understanding of the current media literacy landscape is essential for formulating specific interventions for students in Bangladeshi universities. It has been revealed in research that incorporating media literacy as an educational element can make people media literate as well as aware of the complicated aspects of issues like mental health (Hobbs, 2011). Although previous research has discussed the importance of media literacy in shaping individuals' understanding of social and health issues (Kožuš & Čakš, 2023; Levin-zamir & Bertschi, 2018; Mutlu et al., 2025; Ziapour et al., 2024), empirical evidence focusing on Bangladeshi university students remains limited. To address this gap, the present study conceptualizes media literacy as the ability of individuals to access, verify, critically analyze, and interpret media messages, particularly those related to health and social issues. In

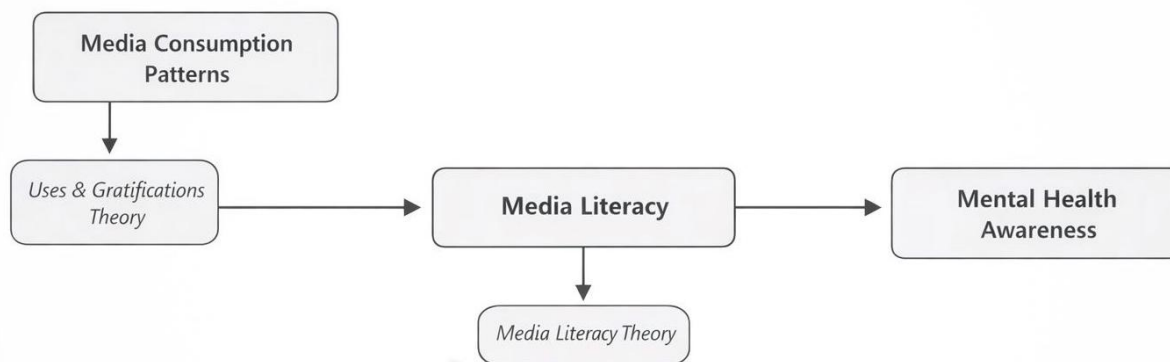
this study, the level of media literacy is operationalized through indicators such as students' information verification practices, ability to detect misinformation, and capacity to critically analyze the purpose and intent of media messages. By operationalizing these concepts, this study provides a clearer framework for examining how media literacy competencies influence students' interpretation of mental health information within the rapidly evolving digital media environment in Bangladesh.

This study proposes that media literacy is a significant determinant affecting university students' comprehension of mental health material as well as their awareness of mental health issues. The study uses and gratifications theory to better understand the reasons for media consumption. This theory states that consumers intentionally choose media channels to satisfy specific needs, such as information gathering, entertainment, and social interaction. University students frequently utilize digital media to acquire knowledge on various topics, including health and well-being. Thus, media consumption patterns influence the extent to which students engage with mental health-related information on media platforms.

Integrating these two perspectives illustrates the indicated link in this study. The uses and gratifications theory explains why students actively engage with media for knowledge acquisition, whereas the media literacy theory outlines how individuals understand and critically evaluate the material they receive. These perspectives suggest that students' interaction with mental health-related media is shaped by their consumption patterns, while their media literacy determines their capacity to deal with this information efficiently. This interaction eventually leads to differences in mental

health understanding among university students.

Figure 1
Framework of the study



Source: Developed by the author based on Media Literacy Theory and Uses & Gratifications Theory

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative cross sectional survey design to investigate the relationship between media literacy and mental health awareness among university students in Bangladesh. In carrying out this study, there is no experimental manipulation or follow-up involved in the approach since it is based on an assessment of conditions at a particular point in time. The study relies on self reported data derived from a structured format in the questionnaire.

The study population consisted of students from four public universities, namely: Dhaka University, Chittagong University, Rajshahi University and Khulna University. These four were purposively selected to reflect both geographic and academic diversity. A total of 120 students participated, of which thirty respondents were drawn from each institution. Stratified random sampling, based on university affiliation and gender was applied to ensure balanced representation of both male and female students

Data collection was conducted online over a specified period. The questionnaire link was distributed to students through university networks and academic groups. Participation was voluntary and respondents were informed about the purpose of the research before completing the survey. The questionnaire consisted of four main sections: Demographic information (gender, university, academic field, educational level), Media consumption patterns (daily media use, preferred platforms, and content types), Media literacy competencies including information verification practices, ability to detect misinformation, critical analysis of media messages and Mental health awareness including recognition of mental health challenges, perceptions of media portrayals of mental illness, attitudes toward the role of media in promoting mental health awareness. The instrument included items that assessed participants in their ability to critically interpret mental health representations in media.

The data was coded and analyzed via Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS

Statistics version 27 software. The descriptive statistics method was employed to summarize demographic characteristics, media consumption patterns, media literacy competencies, and mental health awareness levels while inferential statistical techniques were applied to examine relationships between variables. These included cross-tabulation analysis and chi-square tests to explore associations between media usage patterns, media literacy indicators, and mental health awareness outcomes. Each result mentioned was obtained solely through conducting these analyses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Media Literacy in the Context of Bangladeshi University Students

The Bangladeshi news landscape is witnessing a dramatic shift due to the pervasive use of digital news platforms and the entry of the Internet (BTRC, 2022). The university-going population has a deep inclination towards technology and is vastly affected by the trends on the news platforms. The pervasive use of social networking sites, online news portals, and new forms of news on the Internet signifies the importance of media literacy as an important skill within such a context. Media literacy is absent in Bangladeshi society, though the education system values the traditional form of literacy, and the critical analysis of news is given less

importance (Hossain et al., 2023). Findings by Osman (2025) identifies that high social media use among university students is associated with sleep disturbance, mental exhaustion, social isolation, and anxiety, highlighting the need for responsible usage and guidelines. According to Hossain et al. (2023), there are opportunities and challenges in using media literacy for the Bangladeshi education system. Global study like Nasir et al. (2025) observe that overuse of digital media in undergraduate students in Pakistan is linked to increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress, and reduced self-esteem. This aligns with findings from Lee et al. (2023), Mental health awareness among Malaysian secondary school students is influenced by knowledge on mental health, professional help knowledge, and attitude towards mental health, with media exposure playing a key role.

Survey Results

The study has collected data from 120 participants enrolled in four different public universities in Bangladesh. The data collected represents the study's measurements of media literacy, awareness of mental health issues, and the relation between these two variables. The findings included in this section showcase some important results obtained from data analysis.

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of the Respondents

Category	Subcategory	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	60	50.0%
	Female	60	50.0%
University	Dhaka University	30	25.0%
	Chittagong University	30	25.0%
	Rajshahi University	30	25.0%
	Khulna University	30	25.0%
Field of Study	Social Sciences	25	20.83%
	Arts and Humanities	22	18.33%
	Science	22	18.33%
	Business Studies	22	18.33%
	Biological Sciences	21	17.50%
	Fine Arts	3	2.50%
	Agriculture	2	1.67%
	Law	1	0.83%
	Forestry and Wood Technology	1	0.83%
	Life Sciences	1	0.83%
Educational Level	1st Year	11	9.2%
	2nd Year	18	15.0%
	3rd Year	20	16.7%
	4th Year	55	45.8%
	Master's Level	16	13.3%

Source: Processed by the authors based on questionnaire responses

Media Consumption Patterns

The summaries of the durations, choice of platform, and types of content are in Table 2: Most students use media for between 1-3 hours a day (38.3%), although cumulatively, 55% use it for more than 4 hours. Facebook is at 83.3%, YouTube at 60.8%. Professional networks like LinkedIn, on the other hand, are hardly

used at all, garnering just 1.7% of respondents. Though entertainment emerged as the most significant factor (75%) driving the choice of content consumed by the students, large exposures to news (70%) and educational materials (43.3%) suggest that digital platforms are actually very versatile in their use.

Table 2*Media consumptions patterns of the respondents*

Variables	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Daily Media Usage	Less than 1 hour	8	6.7
	1 – 3 hours	46	38.3
	4 – 6 hours	40	33.3
	More than 6 hours	26	21.7
Platform Preferences	Facebook	100	83.3
	YouTube	73	60.8
	Instagram	41	34.2
	News Websites	21	17.5
	Twitter / Telegram /	4	3.3
	WhatsApp / Pinterest /		
	Canva		
	LinkedIn	2	1.7
	Threads	1	0.8
Primary Content Type	Entertainment	90	75.0
	News and Information	84	70.0
	Educational Content	52	43.3
	Social Interaction	44	36.7
	Others (e.g., cooking, design)	5	4.2

Source: Authors' computation from primary data (questionnaire survey)**Media Literacy Assessment**

Table 3 and 4 depicts the media literacy skills, levels of confidence, and educational attainment of respondents. Although most of the students strongly agree that they often check information (68.3%) and determine misinformation (68.4%), still a high number of them (39.1%) hardly ever or never try to examine the purpose of the media message. In fact, although most of them (55.9%) feel confident about analyzing skills, still most of them (57.5%) have never had any formal media literacy training, indicating that these competencies are largely self acquired rather than academically structured.

Table 3*Media literacy competencies of the respondents*

Variables	Never n (%)	Rarely n (%)	Often n (%)	Always n (%)
Information Verification	7 (5.8)	31 (25.8)	40 (33.3)	42 (35.0)
Misinformation Detection	9 (7.5)	29 (24.2)	53 (44.2)	29 (24.2)
Critical Analysis of Intent	10 (8.3)	37 (30.8)	52 (43.3)	21 (17.5)

Source: Processed by the authors based on questionnaire responses

Table 4*Confidence levels and educational background of the respondents*

Variables	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Self-Perceived Confidence	Not Confident	5	4.2
	Slightly Confident	48	40.0
	Confident	59	49.2
	Very Confident	8	6.7
Formal Media Literacy Training	Received Training (Yes)	51	42.5
	No Training (No)	69	57.5

Source: Processed by the authors based on questionnaire responses**Training and confidence in identifying fake news**

Cross-tabulation of media-literacy training with self-reported confidence in recognizing fake news (Table 5) shows that participants who reported formal training tended to report higher confidence levels:

among trained students, a larger share reported Often/Confident or Always responses compared to untrained students (trained n = 51; untrained n = 69). This pattern suggests that formal training associates with greater self-reported ability to recognize misinformation.

Table 5*Cross-tabulation of Media Literacy Training and Fake News Confidence (SPSS output)*

Media Literacy Training	Never	Rarely	Often/Confident	Always	Total
No Training	5	15	30	19	69
Received Training	4	14	23	10	51
Total	9	29	53	29	120

Source: Processed by the authors based on questionnaire responses

The findings indicate differences in confidence levels when identifying fake news between trained and untrained participants who have been trained compared to those who have not, in that those who have been trained have more confidence than those who have not.

Mental Health Awareness

This section presents the mental health challenges commonly experienced by students, offering a background for understanding the connection that can exist between media literacy and mental health.

Table 6*Mental health challenges faced by the respondents*

Mental Health Indicator	Never (n, %)	Rarely (n, %)	Often (n, %)	Nearly Every Day (n, %)
Depression and Hopelessness	14 (12%)	44 (37%)	46 (38%)	16 (13%)
Anxiety and Nervousness	7 (6%)	46 (38%)	56 (47%)	11 (9%)
Difficulty in Concentrating	10 (8%)	36 (30%)	50 (42%)	24 (20%)
Irritability and Annoyance	13 (11%)	49 (41%)	47 (39%)	11 (9%)
Sleep Difficulties	28 (23%)	37 (31%)	35 (29%)	20 (17%)
Loss of Interest in Activities	18 (15%)	47 (39%)	40 (33%)	15 (13%)
Lack of Energy/Motivation	21 (18%)	40 (33%)	37 (31%)	22 (18%)

Source: Authors' computation from primary data (questionnaire survey)

The findings indicate that a high percentage of the student population in these universities often feel depressed, anxious, have difficulty concentrating, are very irritable, disturbed while sleeping, and show a lack of interest in activities. Such results are important to note for awareness regarding mental health and support mechanisms within educational institutions.

Link Between Media Use and Mental Health

Cross-tabulation of daily media usage with reported depressive symptoms indicated an association, $\chi^2(9, N=120)=21.469$, $p=.011$, suggesting that higher daily media use is linked to higher reported depressive symptoms in this sample (Table 7–8). This relationship is statistically significant at $\alpha=.05$.

Table 7*Cross-tabulation of Daily Media Usage and Reported Depressive Symptoms*

Daily Media Usage	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Total
Less than 1 hour	1	6	0	1	8
1 – 3 hours	8	19	17	2	46
4 – 6 hours	3	15	16	6	40
More than 6 hours	2	3	14	7	26
Total	14	43	47	16	120

Source: SPSS 27 data output processed by the authors**Table 8***Chi-Square Test Results (SPSS output)*

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.469	9	.011*
Likelihood Ratio	25.287	9	.003
N of Valid Cases	120	—	—

Source: SPSS 27 data analysis output processed by the authors

As $p < 0.05$, there is a statistically significant relationship between media use and levels of depression. The result shows

that there is an effect of increased media use on levels of depression. The implications of excessive media use on

levels of mental well-being appear to be revealed in these findings.

Relationship Between Media Literacy and Mental Health Awareness

Media literacy and mental health awareness were explored in relation to each other by understanding student attitudes and behaviors regarding media literacy (Table 9). When asked about media literacy's contribution to mental health awareness, 90.9% agreed or strongly agreed that media literacy improves

understanding of mental health; nevertheless, responses about actual behavior show a gap: 53.3% reported rarely or never critically evaluating mental-health portrayals. Likewise, despite 76.7% agreeing that media was an effective tool in mental health awareness, 48.3% seldom employed it in managing mental health. It was evident that there was a general strong agreement (87.5%) that educational interventions in media literacy were necessary in increasing mental health awareness in university students.

Table 9

Student perceptions and behaviors to investigate link between media literacy and mental health awareness

Variables	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Critical Evaluation of Media Portrayals	Never	13	10.8
	Rarely	51	42.5
	Often	43	35.8
	Always	13	10.8
Media Literacy Improves Understanding	Strongly Disagree	2	1.7
	Disagree	9	7.5
	Agree	95	79.2
	Strongly Agree	14	11.7
Use of Media for Mental Health Management	Never	11	9.2
	Rarely	58	48.3
	Often	43	35.8
	Always	8	6.7
Effectiveness of Media in Raising Awareness	Not effective at all	5	4.2
	Not very effective	23	19.2
	Somewhat effective	66	55.0
	Very effective	26	21.7
Contribution of Literacy to Awareness	Strongly Disagree	1	0.8
	Disagree	14	11.7
	Agree	87	72.5
	Strongly Agree	18	15.0

Source: Processed by the authors based on questionnaire responses

The Role of Media Literacy in Mental Health Awareness

The study on Bangladeshi university students indicates that media literacy is essential for enhancing awareness of mental health. The majority of participants indicated that media literacy had facilitated their finding of legitimate mental health information, enabled them to identify misinformation, and helped them to critically evaluate the portrayal of mental illness in media. Students have been able to raise awareness of mental health concerns, their underlying causes, and possible solutions. The participants acknowledged that media

literacy is beneficial for identifying and addressing stereotypes and stigma related to mental health by fostering more empathy. Social media platforms as well as other media channels were considered crucial for acquiring and spreading awareness regarding media literacy.

The participants recognized that media literacy assists with self-reflection and dealing with emotions related to mental wellness by providing access to motivating and educational content. Several identified limitations when they realized that media literacy is not enough in dealing with negative effects associated with the use of media. Some responders

recommended integrating mental health subjects with media literacy to enhance awareness and applicability. The results indicate that media literacy increases critical thinking and positive responses to mental health information.

Student Perspectives to Enhance Media Literacy and Mental Health Awareness

Students from Bangladesh's universities proposed various strategies to enhance media literacy and raise awareness of mental health. Many believed that media literacy and mental health sessions had to be integrated into university curricula. Students felt that the establishment of accessible counseling facilities and recommendation facilities for psychiatric services was essential. The students highlighted the psychological impacts of social media, indicating that exposure to misinformation, controversial content, and negative news induces anxiety and distress.

It was proposed to teach critical thinking, fact-checking, and responsible social media usage while implementing regulations on social media. Additionally, the involvement of peer-led groups, mental health specialists, and media professionals was also addressed. Minimizing social media usage was proposed to enhance face-to-face interactions and overall well-being. Students articulated a need for institutional assistance, awareness initiatives, educational programs, and community involvement to encourage responsible media usage and strengthen mental health resilience.

The results of this study, as outlined above, indicate that university students are highly engaged with digital media, particularly social networking platforms, which increasingly function as primary sources of information and social

interaction for young adults. However, frequent media exposure does not necessarily correspond with strong critical media competencies. While students demonstrate some ability to recognize misleading information, deeper analytical evaluation of media messages appears less consistent. This suggests a gap between basic verification practices and more advanced critical media literacy skills. This pattern supports the concepts of Media Literacy Theory which indicates that meaningful engagement with media requires both exposure and the developing of critical analytical skills that empower individuals to evaluate mediated messages cautiously.

Students responded that media literacy increased their ability to make a distinction between credible and fabricated knowledge. Due to better critical assessment abilities, many claimed they were aware of mental health issues, stigma and strategies for dealing with it. Media literacy also helped students identify misinformation and negative stereotypes, therefore promoting a more educated and sympathetic view of mental health concerns. These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that indicate that media literacy can function as a cognitive filter that enables individuals to interpret mental health information more critically and reduce the influence of misleading or stigmatizing narratives.

The diversity of media content has contributed to reducing stigma and fostering accessibility in conversations about mental well-being. Many students engaged with mental health-related information, including informative visuals and expert insights which facilitated their ability identify symptoms and pursue suitable assistance. Several individuals also mentioned that understanding media influence enhanced their resilience and emotional regulation. This observation

aligns with media literacy theory which emphasizes that the interpretation of media content is influenced by the audience's ability to critically analyze and interpret the content encountered online.

Differences across academic levels and disciplines suggest that media literacy may develop through educational exposure. Students with greater academic experience tend to demonstrate stronger analytical engagement with media content, while those from social sciences and humanities backgrounds appear more confident in evaluating media messages. This pattern indicates that disciplinary training and critical coursework may contribute to strengthening students' media literacy competencies.

The study also highlights notable psychological challenges among students, including stress, anxiety, and difficulties with concentration. These outcomes align with prior studies suggesting that significant interaction with digital media circumstances might affect psychological well-being. While students acknowledge the media's significance in enhancing awareness of mental health concerns, many have little involvement with digital platforms for mental health information or assistance, indicating that the educational potential of media is unexplored. Analyzed through the framework of Uses and Gratifications Theory, this trend indicates that students primarily utilize digital media for entertainment and social engagement rather than for consciously health information acquisition, despite the abundance of such resources in digital environments.

While most students agreed that media literacy improves understanding of mental health issues, many reported that they rarely critically evaluate mental health portrayals in media. This gap suggests that awareness of media literacy does not necessarily translate into consistent critical

behavior during everyday media consumption. This finding illustrates the distinction between perceived media literacy and actual media literacy practices, highlighting the importance of structured educational interventions that transform conceptual awareness into practical analytical skills.

Students suggested to more seminars, workshops, and courses in university curriculum. Most participants suggested university campuses offer counseling and peer assistance to encourage genuine discourse. Fact-checking, critical thinking and content regulate were suggested to address social media's negative impacts, including disinformation and conflict. Such initiatives may assist transform theoretical knowledge about media literacy into practical competencies that improve engagement with digital media content.

Other participants also suggest limiting unnecessary screen time, encouraging responsible media consumption and utilizing digital platforms for mental health awareness campaigns. Engaging university clubs, reaching out to mental health experts, as well as media professionals were also among the proposed methods to uplift awareness and support mechanisms. Such collaborative approaches could help transform theoretical awareness of media literacy into practical skills for navigating digital information environments.

The study was conducted using self-reported data which might be affected by biases in social desirability. The study was conducted among just four public universities, making it not entirely generalizable to private universities and socio-economically diverse populations. Future studies may explore larger and more diverse samples and examine the long-term impact of media literacy education on students' mental health

awareness and media engagement patterns.

This study demonstrates that students' frequent interaction with media, their analytical skills indicate significant variation. It highlights the necessity of strengthening critical assessment skills by improved media literacy education. Implementing media literacy programs in higher education institutions may enhance informed media interaction and enhance mental health awareness among young individuals. By encouraging critical media engagement, media may function as a tool for developing informed and psychologically resilient students. Overall, the findings suggest that media literacy acts as a key mediating factor influencing how students interpret and response to mental health information in digital environments.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between media literacy and mental health awareness among university students in Bangladesh within the context of an increasingly digital media environment. The findings indicate that students with higher levels of media literacy demonstrate greater awareness and understanding of mental health issues. These results suggest that the ability to critically analyze and interpret media messages plays an important role in shaping how students perceive and understand mental health related information circulating through digital platforms. The study therefore contributes

to existing study by supporting cognitive information processing perspectives that emphasize the role of analytical media competencies in shaping individuals' interpretation of mediated health information. In this regard, media literacy can be understood not merely as a technical skill but as a cognitive interpretative mechanism that influences students' awareness and understanding of mental health issues.

From a practical perspective, the results suggest that higher education institutions may benefit from integrating media literacy education with mental health awareness initiatives. Universities could incorporate media literacy components within general education curricula, organize workshops and awareness programs addressing responsible digital media consumption, and strengthen counseling services that help students critically engage with mental health information encountered online. Overall, the study underscores the importance of developing students' critical media competencies in order to foster more informed and responsible engagement with mental health information in contemporary digital environments. Future research with larger, more diverse samples and mixed methods could provide deeper insights. Universities should integrate media literacy and mental health education into curricula and organize awareness programs, counseling services, and nationwide workshops to strengthen informed and resilient student communities.

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