



Role of Media Literacy in Academic and Social Use of Facebook among Master's Students of Social Sciences at Kabul University

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Abstract: The rapid enlargement of social networking platforms has significantly influenced how university students communicate, information, and engage in academic and social activities. This study examines how media literacy relates to the effective use of Facebook among master's students of Social Sciences at Kabul University in 2025. Applying a quantitative definitive-survey approach, data were gathered from 221 master's students using an organized questionnaire based on media literacy. The instrument's reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.79$), and the data were analysed using SPSS version 27. Media literacy was examined across four domains: knowledge of media messages, recognition of hidden purposes, attentive selection of content, and analytical evaluation. The findings show that students demonstrate strong abilities in understanding media messages and in deliberately selecting Facebook contexts, suggesting an active and ambitious pattern of use. In contrast, lower levels were perceived in recognizing hidden motives and critically analysing content, marking ongoing obstacles in recognizing implicit intentions and possible biases within social media messages. Throughout, the results suggest that higher levels of media literacy are connected with more purposeful, reflective, and effective use of Facebook for academic and social purposes within the specific context of student at Kabul University. This research emphasizes the importance of integrating media literacy education into Kabul University curricula to support the development of informed, critical, and responsible digital engagement among Kabul University students.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two centuries, the rapid growth of globalization has fundamentally altered how people express themselves, learn, and participate in day-to-day life. Media used to be confined to the sending of information; rather, it is a force that shapes perceptions, treasures,

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and models of engagement within societies (Kangari & Halloo, 2023). In this evolving environment, global platforms have become primary spaces where meanings are being formed, identities are being discussed, and information is continually changing. This transformation has been significant for university students, who rely on modern platforms for both academic and social purposes (Karimi et al., 2023). Among the platforms mentioned throughout this research, Facebook continues to play a significant role, especially among students, not least those studying at Kabul University. Unlike purely entertainment-oriented gadgets, Facebook brings together interpersonal communication, news dissemination, learning content, and public debate into a single modern space. Therefore, students do not solely consume information on Facebook; they actively select, expound, translate, share, and seek feedback on content. The usefulness of such interaction, however, centers mainly on users' capacity to critically assess Facebook messages—a capacity commonly referred to as media literacy (Tesha, 2025).

In Afghanistan, the importance of this issue becomes even more profound. Over the last century, increased access to smartphones and mobile internet has led to a swift increase in Facebook usage among teenagers, including at Kabul University. For many students in Afghanistan, Facebook is the fastest and easiest platform for sharing news, academic resources, engaging in social interaction, and participating in public discourse. At the same time, this reliance presented users with a wide range of challenges, including misinformation and disinformation, politically or ideologically biased content, privacy breaches, and unproven sources (Mirtabar & Ayoozi, 2022). The above-mentioned challenges are compounded by restricted digital education and uneven access to credible information.

Media literacy offers a critical foundation for understanding how Kabul University students approach such obstacles. Commonly identified as the ability to access, observe, evaluate, and produce Facebook messages, media literacy enables users to move beyond surface-level consumption and develop a reflective and considered relationship with media content (Buckingham, 2003; Potter, 2013). Restricted media literacy, together with a lack of social, political, and cultural awareness, can lead to passive consumption, increased vulnerability to manipulation, and an ineffective use of modern platforms, especially Facebook (Nabil, 2012). However, Kabul University students are perhaps better equipped to recognize implicit meanings, uncover hidden motives, question credibility, and make comparatively better-informed choices about what content to rely on, share, or ignore than the general population.

Previous studies conducted across different cultural and educational settings show that media literacy is closely linked to critical thinking, responsible media use, and more purposeful engagement with digital content. This research indicates that Kabul University students who are knowledgeable about media literacy are critically analyzing political and Facebook messages, withstanding misinformation, and using social media, particularly Facebook for viable academic and informational goals (Ebrahimpour & Habibzadeh, 2021). On top of that, media literacy education has been proven to reduce problematic internet use

and motivate more conscious patterns of media consumption (Golestani, Razavi, & Karimi, 2020).

From a logical standpoint, the Uses and Gratifications Theory provides a valuable tool for examining students' engagement with Facebook. UGT presumes that media users are active agents who intentionally select media to satisfy and pursue specific needs, such as research, social interaction, identity credible formation, or entertainment (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). Media literacy empowers this active role by allowing University students to critically evaluate available content on Facebook and align their media choices with personal and academic goals. Based on this research, Kabul University students appear to recognize media literacy as a key feature in enhancing the quality and effectiveness of the gratifications derived from social media use (Nightingale & Ross, 2012; Potter, 2014).

Despite the growing recognition of media literacy in digital societies worldwide, empirical research on this topic in Afghanistan remains limited. Current studies have mainly focused on the Facebook platform and its use among undergraduate students, often overlooking the analytical dimensions of media engagement and the experiences of postgraduate students. Master's students of Social Sciences, particularly those at Kabul University, constitute a critical group, as their academic training emphasizes analysis, exposition, and critical engagement with social phenomena. Understanding how this group actively uses Facebook can therefore provide valuable insights into educational needs (Raadi, 2022).

In response to this gap, the practical research examines the role of media literacy in the academic and social use of Facebook among Master's Students of Social Sciences at Kabul University. Notably, it questions students' media literacy across key dimensions—understanding Facebook messages, awareness of concealed motives, alert selection of content, and critical evaluation—and finds out how these competencies relate to more productive and responsible use of Facebook (Saee et al. 2019; Organization for Educational Research and Planning, 2023). By situating the analysis within the specific socio-educational context of Kabul University, this study provides context-sensitive evidence to inform media literacy education, curriculum development, and policy initiatives in Afghanistan's higher education sector.

The main objective of this study is to examine the role of media literacy in the academic and social use of Facebook among master's students of social sciences at Kabul University. Specifically, this research seeks to clarify how media literacy influences students' purposeful and responsible use of Facebook. Additionally, the study examines how students encounter Facebook content, how they interpret messages, and, to an extent, whether they apply critical thinking when evaluating the information disseminated on Facebook.

Based on these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the level of media literacy among master's students of Social Sciences at Kabul University?
2. How does media literacy affect the efficient academic and social use of Facebook?

3. How do students understand, expound, and judgmentally evaluate Facebook messages?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative, detailed research design to examine the role of media literacy in effective Facebook use among master's students in Social Sciences at Kabul University. The quantitative encounter was chosen because it allows for the systematic measurement of media literacy levels and the statistical analysis of effective Facebook use (Khaki, 2016). The detailed design was selected to provide a clear snapshot of students' current skills, behaviors, and practices without manipulating variables, which goes with the study's objective of assessing existing competencies (Oranga & Matere, 2025).

Structured questionnaires were used as the primary data collection tool to obtain systematic, measurable, and comparable responses from the study population. The researcher developed the questionnaire, drawing on the study's theoretical framework and informed by established media literacy tools, particularly the standardized questionnaire proposed by Falsafi (2014). To ensure content validity, the initial questionnaire version was reviewed and refined based on feedback from three professors of communication studies of Kabul University. On top of that, a pilot test was conducted with 30 master's students in social science at Kabul University, and the credibility of the instrument was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.79$), indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Following data collection, responses were entered into SPSS 27 and analysed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequency distributions and mean scores, to identify patterns in students' media literacy competencies. This research method approach ensures the collection of objective, reliable, and generalizable data, allowing the identification of patterns and relationships between media literacy components and effective Facebook use. It also provides empirical evidence to inform curriculum design, educational policy, and interventions aimed at enhancing media literacy and promoting responsible social media use among students in higher education in Afghanistan, especially at Kabul University.

Population of the Study

A population of 511 master's students enrolled in Social Sciences at Kabul University during the 2025 academic year was targeted. To obtain a representative sample, 221 students were selected using Cochran's formula. Ordinary sampling material was used, giving each student an equal opportunity to participate and minimizing potential bias. This approach enhanced both the internal and external validity of the findings, allowing the insights to be carefully generalized to similar academic environments in Afghanistan. During fieldwork, care was taken to consider the students' class programs and availability, reflecting the real challenges of directing research in a dynamic university setting.

Research Instrument

The researcher collected the data using a questionnaire, informed by prior validated instruments and the standardized media literacy. The questionnaire comprised two main sections:

1. *Demographic Information*: The contributor provided age and gender details.
2. *Media Literacy Competencies*: Twenty items of the questionnaire measured four key dimensions; the first is content comprehension, which considers students' ability to accurately capture, expound, and summarize meaningful insights from textual, visual, and audiovisual Facebook content. The second key dimension is awareness of hidden agendas, which evaluated sensitivity to implicit motives, influence, and persuasive strategies in Facebook messages. The third key dimension is the conscious selection of messages, which calculates students' intentional interaction with content based on concern, credibility, availability, and personal informational needs. The fourth key dimension is the critical evaluation of messages, which assesses students' capacity to analyze, question, and evaluate the reliability and quality of Facebook content, fostering higher-order critical thinking skills.

All parts were rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," allowing for a nuanced assessment of students' proficiency in each competency. The questionnaire underwent content review by three professors of Communication Studies at Kabul University. Their feedback guided the purge of items to ensure clarity, cultural appropriateness, and queuing with the study's objectives. Moreover, a pilot test with 30 students confirmed the instrument's reliability (Cronbach's alpha of 0.79), indicating stable measurement of media literacy skills.

Data Collection Procedure

Questionnaires were handed in person, allowing contributors to seek clarification on any item, thereby reducing misunderstandings. Before completing the questionnaire, students were informed about the study's target, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without any errors. Informed consent was obtained from all contributors, and ethical considerations, including secrecy and anonymity, were rigorously observed. Conducting data collection in the students' classrooms enabled a feasible match with their schedules while maintaining ethical research standards. Fortunately, 221 master's students in Social Sciences at Kabul University participated in the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Responses were coded and analysed using SPSS 27. Descriptive statistics—including mean, median, standard deviation, variance, skewness, and kurtosis—were calculated for all four dimensions of media literacy. These analyses provided insights into overall patterns of capacity, highlighted areas for improvement, and helped explain how students' media literacy skills influenced their academic and social engagement on Facebook. The combination of

field-informed data collection and statistical analysis provided a robust foundation for drawing evidence-based conclusions and proposing practical recommendations for media literacy education within the Kabul University curriculum system.

FINDINGS

The current study investigates how media literacy shapes the academic and social uses of Facebook among master's students in Social Sciences at Kabul University. The analysis focused on four key aspects of media literacy: comprehension of Facebook messages, awareness of hidden motives, conscious selection of content, and critical evaluation of media messages. These dimensions collectively reflect how students approach Facebook cognitively and behaviourally, influencing the effectiveness and purposefulness of their online interactions. The results suggest that students have relatively strong skills in message comprehension. Many contributors were able to accurately expound on information, distinguish between factual and opinion-based content, and identify persuasive elements in Facebook posts. This competency appears to help students navigate the large volume of online information more intentionally, reducing misunderstandings and supporting intentional learning and social engagement.

Awareness of concealed motives was another dimension in which students demonstrated moderate to high professionalism. Respondents often identified underlying motives in posts, such as commercial promotion, political posts, or ideological persuasion. This skill is particularly vital in the Afghan digital environment, where online platforms are sometimes used to influence public opinion or propagate selective narratives. Conscious message selection showed notable stability among the contributors. Students reported applying intentional criteria when opting which posts to engage with, prioritizing content that aligned with their academic objectives, personal interests, or informational needs. This reflects a movement away from passive scrolling toward a more purposeful, mindful use of Facebook, which is necessary for master's students of Social Science at Kabul University.

While media content was generally positive, critical evaluation showed greater variation among students. This finding indicates that although media literacy is developing, additional support and targeted education could further improve students' critical thinking and verification skills. Illustrative statistical analyses—including means, medians, standard deviations, and quartile repartitions—were used to catch both central tendencies and variability in students' media literacy levels. Demographic factors, such as age, were also considered by the study to contextualize differences in digital engagement across the student population. While all contributors were male master's students in Social Sciences at Kabul University, the findings provide valuable insights into the competencies this specific group faces in navigating social media for educational and social purposes.

In conclusion, the findings clarify a nuanced image of media literacy among master's students at Kabul University. Robust conception and selective engagement with content imply that students can use Facebook intentionally, while variability in acute evaluation

highlights areas for further development. These insights emphasise the importance of integrating media literacy training into the faculties in Kabul University.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Contributor (N=221)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Percent
25-29	103	46.6	46.6
30-34	76	34.4	81.0
35-39	34	15.4	96.4
Above 40	7	3.2	100
Total	221	100.0	

All attendants' contributors were male; the age distribution shows that the most significant proportion of responders (46.6%) were aged 25–29 years, followed by 34.4% in the 30–34 age range. The 35–39 age group accounted for 15.4%, and only 3.2% were aged 40 or older. The exact age of the sample, based on coded age groups (1 = 25–29, 2 = 30–34, 3 = 35–39, 4 = 40+), was 1.76 with a standard deviation of 0.857. This shows that most contributors were concentrated in the younger to middle-aged groups.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Comprehension of Facebook Messages

Statistic	Value
Valid	221
Missing	0
Mean	20.5656
Median	21.0000
Std. Deviation	3.46823
Variance	12.029
Skewness	-1.561
Std. Error of Skewness	.164
Kurtosis	3.904
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.326
Minimum	5.00
Maximum	25.00
25th Proportion	19.0000
50th Proportion	21.0000
75th Proportion	23.0000

An analysis of responses from 221 master's students of Social Science at Kabul University showed that the mean score for the first component—comprehension of Facebook messages—was 20.56 out of 25, while the median was 21. This finding indicates that most participants demonstrated a relatively high ability to understand and expound Facebook content. The standard scale of 3.46 indicates limited variability among contributors, suggesting that most students shared similar levels of comprehension. In addition, the skewness value of -1.56 indicates a left-skewed distribution, implying that higher scores were more common. In contrast, the kurtosis value of 3.90 indicates a slightly peaked distribution around the mean. These statistical patterns collectively demonstrate that comprehension of Facebook messages was consistently firm across the study sample.

These results indicate that students are not only passive recipients of modern information but also possess the analytical ability to identify the meaning, aim, and credibility of the messages they encounter. Their understanding extends to recognizing distinctions between factual content, opinion segments, and commercial or promotional material, enabling more effective and informed media engagement. Such comprehension is a foundational element of media literacy, as it equips individuals to critically process digital messages and avoid massive exploitation or manipulation in social media environments. In light of the Uses and Gratifications Theory, this finding aligns with the principle that audiences actively seek information and elaborate on media messages in line with personal motives and active engagement (McQuail, 2010). The high comprehension levels observed in this study suggest that Facebook users among Kabul University students employ the platform purposefully—to satisfy informational, educational, and social needs—therefore transforming Facebook from a space of passive exposure into one of active learning and critical participation.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Awareness of Hidden Agendas in Facebook Messages

Statistic	Value
Valid	221
Missing	0
Mean	20.9140
Median	21.0000
Std. Deviation	3.04912
Variance	9.297
Skewness	-1.633
Std. Error of Skewness	.164
Kurtosis	5.099
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.326
Minimum	5.00
Maximum	25.00
25th Proportion	20.0000
50th Proportion	21.0000
75th Proportion	23.0000

The analysis revealed that the mean score for the second component—awareness of hidden motives in Facebook messages—was 20.91 out of 25, with a median of 21. This implies that students generally possess a satisfactory understanding of the cogent motives, ideological framing, and underlying intentions that are combined in Facebook content. The scores ranged from 5 to 25, with a standard deviation of 3.04, reflecting low variability among contributors and suggesting a consistent pattern of awareness across the sample. The skewness value of -1.63 indicates that most participants achieved scores above the mean. In contrast, the kurtosis value of 5.09 indicates that responses were densely concentrated at higher scores, suggesting relatively uniform awareness levels among master's students in Social Science at Kabul University.

From a rational perspective, this finding demonstrates that students are increasingly good at recognizing that Facebook messages often contain tacit agendas—such as commercial cheer, or emotional manipulation. This ability to decode hidden intentions is a crucial dimension of media literacy, enabling users to question the authenticity of messages and detect propaganda and misinformation. In our media context—where the Facebook platform is often used for ideological and commercial promotion—such awareness signifies a critical advancement, as master's students at Kabul University demonstrated merit and analytical maturity.

In relation to the Uses and Gratifications Theory, these findings suggest that Kabul University students are not passive recipients of media messages but relatively active, self-aware consumers who actively engage with Facebook content. Their awareness of hidden agendas enables them to engage with Facebook more mindfully and purposefully, aligning media use with their informational and awareness needs while maintaining independence from manipulative influences. This awareness thus shapes a vital bridge between critical thinking and responsible digital participation among emerging media audiences in Afghanistan.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Conscious Selection of Facebook Messages

Statistic	Value
Valid	221
Missing	0
Mean	20.9910
Median	22.0000
Std. Deviation	3.20226
Variance	10.254
Skewness	-1.380
Std. Error of Skewness	.164
Kurtosis	2.775
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.326
Minimum	8.00
Maximum	25.00
25th Proportion	20.0000
50th Proportion	22.0000
75th Proportion	23.0000

The analysis of 221 valid responses to the alert selection for Facebook Messages had a mean score of 20.99 out of 25 and a median of 22. These measures of central tendency represent that, on average, master's students of Social Science at Kabul University show a relatively high level of conscious selection when engaging with Facebook content. Such scores show that most students are intentional in opting for which messages to encounter, reflecting an essential component of media literacy.

The standard deviation of 3.20 and variance of 10.25 indicate moderate dispersion, indicating that, while most students at Kabul University who were part of this research exhibit

awareness and evaluative skills, a small amount of variation exists within the group. Scores ranged from 8 to 25, indicating that a handful of contributors have considerably lower levels of conscious selection, suggesting individual differences in media literacy competencies. The skewness value of -1.38 indicates negative skew, suggesting that many students scored above the mean. In contrast, the kurtosis value of 2.77 indicates a slight concentration of scores around the average, with relatively few extreme values.

These statistics are directly related to the study's aim of analyzing students' ability to identify and evaluate Facebook messages alertly. The research shows that most learners engage in a deliberate, thoughtful process when browsing online content, allowing them to filter, prioritize, and evaluate information based on academic relevance and personal preferences. This conscious selection behavior helps reduce susceptibility to misinformation and supports more purposeful media use. The observed variability also suggests that fewer students may benefit from targeted interventions to improve their evaluative and selective skills, underscoring the educational significance of promoting media literacy competencies at Kabul University.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Critical Evaluation of Media Messages

Statistic	Value
Valid	221
Missing	0
Mean	19.7059
Median	20.0000
Std. Deviation	3.05695
Variance	9.345
Skewness	-.902
Std. Error of Skewness	.164
Kurtosis	2.106
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.326
Minimum	7.00
Maximum	25.00
25th Proportion	18.0000
50th Proportion	20.0000
75th Proportion	22.0000

The 221 legitimate participants' answers for the Critical Evaluation of Facebook messages dimension revealed a mean score of 19.71 out of 25 and a median of 20. These main tendency measures show that, on average, students have a satisfactory level of ability to assess Facebook messages critically. The mean and median values suggest that most students are capable of questioning the trustworthiness of content, detecting bias, and evaluating the intentions behind shared information, which directly aligns with the study's objective of analyzing students' evaluative and reflective thinking skills.

The standard deviation of 3.06 and variance of 9.34 indicate a low to moderate dispersion of scores, meaning that while most students demonstrate consistent performance

near the average, some contributors have lower levels of critical evaluation. This variability highlights individual differences in students' analytical skills, while recognizing the need for embedded educational interventions to strengthen weaker competencies. The skewness value of -0.90 indicates slight negative skew, suggesting that a large proportion of students scored above the mean, reflecting a general tendency toward above-average critical engagement. Meantime, the kurtosis value of 2.10 indicates a moderate concentration of scores around the mean, suggesting that extreme scores are not particularly common. Altogether, these statistical indicators provide a nuanced understanding of the distribution of crucial evaluation skills among master's students in Social Science at Kabul University.

The findings indicate that while most master's students at Kabul University engage thoughtfully with Facebook content, demonstrating the essential components of media literacy, the slightly lower mean score for this dimension compared to other components suggests areas for improvement, particularly in beyond analytical judgment and skepticism toward online information. By combining descriptive statistics with the research objectives, this analysis not only reports patterns but also justifies the educational significance of promoting critical evaluation skills, guiding curriculum design, and targeting interventions to strengthen students' media literacy and responsible Facebook use.

DISCUSSION

This research has a particular significance in examining the role of media literacy in the academic and social use of Facebook among master's students of Social Science at Kabul University. In the social context of Afghanistan, where students are daily exposed to a vast volume of data on Facebook, the way they engage with and respond to messages is critical. The findings indicate that master's students in Social Science at Kabul University use Facebook content actively rather than passively, selecting messages that align with their entertainment, social, and informational needs. However, the results also reveal that students' awareness of the hidden purposes of Facebook messages and their level of critical evaluation are lower than those for other dimensions of media literacy. This suggests that media literacy should not have been confined to understanding and selecting Facebook content; rather, it must also encompass critical evaluation and systematic approaches to identifying the elemental intentions behind Facebook messages.

In response to the research questions, the first question examined students' media literacy levels. The findings show that participants demonstrated moderate to high competence across all four components: message comprehension, awareness of hidden objectives, conscious selection, and critical evaluation. Among the mentioned dimensions, message comprehension and conscious selection were noteworthy, whereas awareness of hidden objectives and critical evaluation were relatively weaker. The second research question, which examined the impact of media literacy on the academic and social use of Facebook, indicates that higher levels of media literacy were associated with more responsible, goal-oriented use of Facebook. Master's students of Social Science at Kabul

University with strong media literacy skills are better able to filter misleading content, prioritize credible information, and engage in educational and social activities rather than merely passively browse and consume. The third research question, focusing on the interpretation of Facebook messages, shows that students actively interpret and assess Facebook content; however, their critical analysis remains incomplete. This finding suggests that a crucial mindset is in development and can be further strengthened through targeted education and the enhancement of evaluative skills.

The findings of this research are, in many respects, consistent with previous research on media literacy. Specifically, Ebrahimpour and Habibzadeh (2021) and Golestani et al. (2020) have demonstrated that media literacy enhances individuals' ability to understand and interpret media messages. This pattern is also evident in the present study, as students scored at a moderate to high level in message comprehension and the interpretation of Facebook content. Such consistency suggests that university students generally possess a reasonable capacity to understand media messages; however, this ability is often limited to basic comprehension and requires deeper development to reach more advanced levels of critical engagement.

Similarly, the findings related to the effective use of social media align with those reported by Bahrami and Bayat (2023), who emphasized that media literacy education promotes purposeful interaction with media while reducing passive consumption. This study found that students with higher media literacy levels were more capable of filtering misleading content, prioritizing reliable information, and participating in educational and social activities rather than engaging solely in entertainment-oriented use. This alignment indicates that media literacy not only strengthens message comprehension but also contributes to meaningful changes in media-related behavior and enhances purposeful engagement with social media platforms. In this regard, the present study advances prior research by moving beyond a general examination of media literacy and directly analyzing its relationship with the effective use of a specific platform, namely Facebook.

With respect to the dimension of conscious selection, the findings are consistent with Bigdeli and Nasiri's (2014) argument that selective content consumption can prevent excessive dependence on media. Students at Kabul University demonstrated a relatively careful approach to content selection, distancing themselves from unfocused and indiscriminate consumption. This suggests that even in contexts characterized by educational and media-related constraints, users can develop conscious selection skills to a certain extent. Nevertheless, by offering a more detailed analysis of content selection processes and examining their impact on Facebook consumption behavior, this study goes beyond previous research. It demonstrates that conscious selection is not merely a cognitive skill but also a critical factor in reducing non-purposeful consumption and increasing the productive use of social media. Accordingly, while aligning with earlier studies, this research addresses existing gaps by focusing on multiple dimensions of media literacy and their influence on effective Facebook use, underscoring the need to strengthen deeper media literacy skills—particularly

critical analysis and the identification of hidden objectives—among students at Kabul University.

Despite the significance of its findings, this study has several limitations. First, the sample consisted exclusively of male students, which limits the generalizability of the results to female students. Second, the study was confined to master's students in social sciences at Kabul University, thereby restricting inter-university and interdisciplinary comparisons. Third, data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire, which may be subject to social desirability bias or an overestimation of positive behaviors. Fourth, the study focused solely on Facebook. In contrast, other platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Telegram, and WhatsApp also play a substantial role in shaping students' media behaviors and require distinct sets of media literacy skills.

Future research should address these limitations by including students from diverse disciplines and universities across Afghanistan. Comparative studies across multiple platforms could provide a more comprehensive understanding of digital media literacy and user engagement. Employing qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups would offer more profound insights into students' motivations, cognitive processes, and decision-making patterns. Longitudinal or experimental studies could further examine the long-term effects of media literacy education and identify which educational interventions are most effective in enhancing critical evaluation skills. Additionally, cross-cultural studies comparing Afghan students with those from other countries could illuminate how cultural and political contexts influence the development of media literacy.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature on media literacy and digital engagement in Afghanistan, particularly within the university context, by demonstrating that media literacy functions as a vital resource for effective social media use, especially in resource-constrained environments. The findings support the Uses and Gratifications Theory, as they show that students actively select and interpret media based on their needs and motivations. From a practical standpoint, the results suggest that Kabul University should integrate media literacy into its curricula, offer training workshops focused on critical evaluation and the identification of accurate versus misleading information, and expand access to credible information resources. Strengthening media literacy can enable students to become informed, responsible, and resilient citizens capable of navigating Afghanistan's complex media environment.

CONCLUSION

The present research confirmed that media literacy plays a key role in promoting academic and social use of Facebook among master's students of Social Sciences at Kabul University. The findings show that students with higher levels of media literacy—particularly in understanding media messages, recognizing hidden intentions, making conscious content choices, and applying critical evaluation—are better able to distinguish reliable information from misleading content and use Facebook more purposefully for academic and social

purposes. These results indicate that media literacy enables students to move beyond passive consumption and engage more thoughtfully with social media content. Within the Afghan context, where misinformation and manipulative messages are widespread, media literacy emerges as an essential skill for safe and critical participation in digital spaces. Beyond individual benefits, improved media literacy contributes to broader social outcomes, including ethical communication, informed civic engagement, and the development of responsible citizenship. In this sense, media literacy can be regarded as a soft but influential factor in shaping students' awareness, attitudes, and online behavior.

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations, including reliance on self-reported data and a sample drawn from a single university, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research is therefore recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples, examine other social media platforms, and apply longitudinal designs to better understand the long-term impact of media literacy on digital engagement. Overall, strengthening media literacy within Kabul University can play a significant role in preparing critically aware and responsible student's, evolving digital environment.

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Zabihullah Merzayee designed the study, gathered and analysed the data, and drafted the record. Zabehullah Bashardost directed the research, provided admonition on study design, and critically run through and revised the manuscript.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author (ZM) upon reasonable request.

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