

COMPARING THE CONCEPTS OF MEDIA LITERACY AND DIGITAL LITERACY: AN OVERVIEW

Tuvshintur Bayarsaikhan*, Zoljargal Dembereldorj**

*Lecturer, MSc, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, National University of Mongolia

**Associate Professor, Ph.D, Department of Educational Studies, National University of Mongolia

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Introduction. The concepts of media literacy and digital literacy have gained significant academic and practical interest in recent years due to the growing complexity of the media and digital landscapes. Both literacies are often discussed in the context of empowering individuals to critically engage with information. However, there remains considerable debate regarding the distinctions and overlaps between the two, as well as the necessary competencies each encompasses. This review seeks to explore existing literature, focusing on the definitions, historical evolution and core

skills associated with media literacy and digital literacy.

Media literacy has roots in traditional literacy studies and emerged as a response to the proliferation of mass media in the mid-20th century (Masterman, 1985). Early media literacy advocates focused on protecting individuals, particularly children, from the potentially manipulative influences of media. By the 1990s, media literacy expanded to include more proactive skills, such as message creation and participation in media (Aufderheide, 1993).

Digital literacy, however, gained prominence with the advent of the internet in the 1990s and has evolved in response to rapid technological changes. Initially, digital literacy was understood in terms of basic computer skills (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004), but as digital technology became ubiquitous, definitions expanded to encompass a wider range of competencies, including critical thinking and digital communication (Hobbs, 2010). In recent years, the emphasis on digital literacy has

grown in parallel with concerns over online misinformation and the need for critical digital competencies (Rheingold, 2012).

The definitions of media literacy and digital literacy are varied across disciplines, reflecting shifts in technological and societal contexts. Media literacy traditionally emphasizes critical analysis and understanding of media messages, as well as recognizing underlying biases and purposes (Potter, 2004; Livingstone, 2004). Scholars argue that media literacy primarily aims to enable individuals to deconstruct media texts and interpret them through a critical lens (Silverblatt, 2001).

Digital literacy, on the other hand, generally encompasses a broader range of competencies that include technical skills, the ability to navigate and utilize digital tools, and an understanding of online etiquette and privacy (Gilster, 1997; Buckingham, 2015). Martin (2008) suggests that digital literacy extends beyond media analysis to include the practical skills needed for navigating digital environments. Scholars such as Bawden (2008) emphasize that digital literacy also involves the ability to search, retrieve, and critically evaluate information on digital platforms.

While media literacy focuses on critical thinking, comprehension, and awareness of media bias and influence, digital literacy includes competencies like information search and retrieval, ethical online behavior, and technical fluency. Hobbs (2010) argues that media literacy is primarily analytical, emphasizing critical thinking about media messages. Media literacy

programs often prioritize skills related to identifying biases, analyzing stereotypes, and understanding the influence of media ownership.

Digital literacy, according to Ng (2012), is more skill-oriented, encompassing practical abilities for navigating digital spaces, managing online identities, and understanding the implications of data privacy. Spire and Bartlett (2012) suggest that digital literacy includes the ability to create and share digital content, as well as the technical knowledge required to use digital tools effectively.

Despite these differences, both literacies share a common foundation in critical thinking, suggesting some degree of overlap. Buckingham (2015) highlights this overlap, arguing that media literacy and digital literacy are complementary, each contributing to an individual's ability to critically engage with information in a digital age.

Several theoretical frameworks underpin the study of media and digital literacy. For media literacy, Potter's (2004) Cognitive Theory of Media Literacy posits that individuals process media messages through a series of stages involving attention, filtering, and meaning making. This framework emphasizes the cognitive processes that facilitate critical engagement with media content. Digital literacy, however, is often framed through models that emphasize skill acquisition. For instance, Belshaw's (2012) Eight Elements of Digital Literacy framework includes cultural, cognitive, constructive, and communicative dimensions, suggesting a holistic approach that extends beyond

traditional media analysis to include practical digital skills.

In recent years, some researchers have proposed integrating media and digital literacy within a single framework. Livingstone (2019) suggests that a unified approach can address the holistic demands of modern media use, where critical analysis, content creation, and digital navigation are intertwined. Her framework emphasizes adaptability and lifelong learning, essential in a rapidly changing media landscape.

While media literacy and digital literacy have distinct roots, skills, and theoretical frameworks, the evolution of media in the digital era has blurred the lines between the two. Studies indicate that the competencies associated with each type of literacy are increasingly interconnected. For example, Hobbs (2010) points out that critical evaluation, once predominantly associated with media literacy, is now essential in digital literacy due to issues like misinformation and privacy concerns.

Research also highlights differences in instructional approaches. Media literacy education typically involves analyzing and deconstructing media messages, often through group discussions or projects, while digital literacy programs tend to include technical training in digital tool usage and online etiquette (McDougall, 2017). Despite these distinctions, scholars increasingly argue for an integrative approach that merges the critical thinking aspects of media literacy with the functional skills of digital literacy to meet the demands of

today's media landscape (Pangrazio, 2016).

The literature reveals that while media literacy and digital literacy have distinct origins and competencies, they increasingly intersect in the context of today's media landscape. Media literacy focuses on critical analysis of media messages, while digital literacy encompasses a broader set of technical and navigational skills. As digital media becomes more complex and pervasive, integrating these literacies into a comprehensive educational framework becomes essential. Such integration can enhance individuals' critical and practical skills, empowering them to engage with media responsibly and effectively.

Methods. This study employs a qualitative research approach, synthesizing and analyzing existing scholarly works on media literacy and digital literacy to provide a comparative analysis of both concepts. The methodology involves systematic steps to ensure a comprehensive, unbiased, and rigorous review of relevant literature, which include:

A broad search was conducted across major academic databases, including JSTOR, PubMed, Google Scholar, and ERIC, covering literature from the early development of each concept in the 1980s and 1990s to contemporary studies in the 2020s. Keywords used in the search included combinations such as "media literacy," "digital literacy," "critical media education," "digital competencies," "media analysis skills," and "digital citizenship."

Inclusion criteria were established to focus on peer-reviewed journal

articles, books, policy reports, and educational frameworks that directly address media literacy and digital literacy or explore their integration. Studies that were non-peer-reviewed, opinion pieces, or did not meet scholarly rigor were excluded.

Selected literature was categorized based on thematic relevance:

- (1) definitions and distinctions,
- (2) historical evolution,
- (3) core competencies and skills,
- (4) theoretical frameworks,
- (5) educational applications, and
- (6) policy implications.

This thematic organization allowed for a structured comparative analysis of media literacy and digital literacy (S. Bordac, 2014). Key data points from each study were extracted, including definitions, competencies, theoretical models, educational practices. Each study was reviewed to identify central arguments, supporting evidence, and any noted limitations. Comparative themes were identified by examining the frequency and emphasis placed on particular competencies, educational approaches, or theoretical models within each type of literacy.

We used narrative synthesis and thematic analysis. Narrative synthesis was used to describe the evolution and conceptual distinctions between media and digital literacy. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns in the literature.

To ensure transparency, each conclusion drawn in the synthesis is supported by citations from multiple sources, providing a robust foundation for the study's insights on the comparative analysis of media and digital literacy. Through this systematic review methodology, this study aims to

explore the concept of media literacy and digital literacy thorough, reliable, and structured comparison.

Findings. The analysis of this study revealed the following themes:

- Distinct definitions but increasingly converging goals
- Historical evolution: Different origins, shared trajectories
- Core competencies and skills: Overlapping yet distinct
- Theoretical frameworks: Divergent foundations with common applications
- Educational approaches and curriculum development.

1. Distinct definitions but increasingly converging goals.

Media Literacy is primarily defined as the ability to critically analyze media content, understand media messages' intent and bias, and evaluate the influence of media on individuals and society (Potter, 2004; Hobbs, 2010). Media literacy places strong emphasis on developing critical thinking skills to question and interpret media content. Digital literacy, by contrast, encompasses a wider skill set, including not only critical thinking but also technical skills, online navigation, information retrieval, and understanding privacy and security in digital environments (Gilster, 1997; Buckingham, 2015). Digital literacy aims to equip individuals with the competencies needed to participate effectively and safely in digital environments.

While each literacy has its own distinct objectives, the review highlights a growing convergence in their goals: both seek to empower individuals to be critical and responsible media

consumers and digital citizens. Increasingly, the competencies associated with each are seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

2. Historical evolution: Different origins, shared trajectories.

Media Literacy originated in the mid-20th century as a response to the rise of mass media, initially focusing on protecting individuals from media manipulation (Masterman, 1985). It evolved to emphasize media creation and active participation in media spaces as digital platforms emerged. Digital literacy emerged later, with the rise of the internet in the 1990s, initially focusing on basic technical skills. As technology and digital environments advanced, digital literacy expanded to include critical thinking and digital communication (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004; Rheingold, 2012).

The review reveals that while media literacy and digital literacy emerged in response to different technological advances, both have expanded over time to address the critical evaluation of digital and media content, suggesting a natural progression towards a shared educational focus.

3. Core competencies and skills: Overlapping yet distinct.

Media literacy competencies: Critical analysis of media messages,

understanding media bias, recognizing stereotyping, and identifying the influence of media ownership. These skills are typically associated with analytical and interpretive skills geared towards understanding traditional and digital media content (Silverblatt, 2001; Hobbs, 2010).

Digital literacy competencies: Information search and retrieval, technical fluency in digital tools, online navigation, and understanding privacy and data security.

Digital literacy encompasses practical skills, such as using digital tools effectively, and ethical considerations, like responsible online behavior (Martin, 2008; Ng, 2012).

The results suggest that while media literacy focuses on interpreting media content, digital literacy includes technical skills needed for interacting with digital platforms. How-

ever, both literacies involve critical thinking, particularly in assessing information authenticity and credibility, which has become crucial in addressing issues like misinformation and online safety.

4. Theoretical frameworks: Divergent foundations with common applications.

Media literacy theories: Potter's (2004) Cognitive Theory of Media Literacy emphasizes cognitive processes involved in media interpretation,



The results suggest that while media literacy focuses on interpreting media content, digital literacy includes technical skills needed for interacting with digital platforms. However, both literacies involve critical thinking, particularly in assessing information authenticity and credibility, which has become crucial in addressing issues like misinformation and online safety



such as filtering, meaning-making, and critical analysis.

Digital literacy theories: Frameworks like Belshaw's (2012) Eight Elements of Digital Literacy include elements like cultural understanding, cognitive engagement, and communicative abilities, emphasizing a holistic approach to digital engagement.

The review indicates that while media literacy theories prioritize message analysis, digital literacy theories focus on skill acquisition and online engagement. Despite different theoretical emphases, both frameworks underscore critical thinking as essential for navigating complex media and digital environments. Recent research suggests that integrated models may better address the needs of digital media users by combining critical analysis with practical digital skills (Livingstone, 2019).

5. Educational approaches and curriculum development.

Media Literacy Education: Often involves analyzing media messages, understanding context, and engaging in discussions about media influence. Educational programs typically include activities that encourage students to deconstruct and critique media content (McDougall, 2017).

Digital Literacy Education: Focuses on teaching practical skills, such as navigating digital tools, managing online identities, and understanding data privacy. Programs may include hands-on training in using digital platforms and addressing online safety concerns (Spire & Bartlett, 2012).

The review reveals that combining media literacy and digital literacy in educational curricula can address both

the analytical and practical needs of students. Studies suggest that integrated literacy programs can enhance students' critical thinking, technical skills, and preparedness for digital citizenship, equipping them to navigate a media-saturated digital environment more effectively (UNESCO, 2013; Pangrazio, 2016).

Key findings:

- Distinct Focus Areas: Media literacy emphasizes message analysis and critical evaluation, while digital literacy includes technical skills for digital navigation.
- Converging Goals: Both literacies share a critical thinking foundation, aimed at empowering individuals in media-rich digital environments.
- Educational Integration: Evidence supports the integration of media and digital literacy within educational curricula, highlighting their complementary nature and potential for preparing students for digital citizenship.
- Policy Implications: The convergence of media and digital literacy underscores the need for policies that support integrated literacy education to address issues like misinformation and privacy in digital societies.

The literature review demonstrates that media literacy and digital literacy, though originating from different needs and emphasizing distinct competencies, are increasingly seen as complementary in the modern digital context. Both literacies are critical for developing a citizenry capable of critical analysis, responsible digital engagement, and informed media consumption. The findings suggest that an

integrated approach to media and digital literacy education may offer the most comprehensive preparation for the challenges of a media-driven digital society. Future research could further refine these literacies' intersection, contributing to unified models that address the dynamic demands of digital citizenship.

Conclusions. The findings from this study highlight the evolving relationship between media literacy and digital literacy, shedding light on their individual and collective importance in preparing individuals for a complex, media-saturated digital world. We also found that media literacy and digital literacy are distinct in their origins and competencies, which can be increasingly converging in their goals and applications. Both literacies serve complementary roles in empowering individuals with the skills necessary to navigate, analyze, and engage responsibly with information. This convergence underscores the need for educational and policy frameworks that recognize the value of integrating media literacy's critical analysis focus with digital literacy's practical and technical competencies.

Media and digital literacy are complementary frameworks essential for navigating the modern digital landscape. Media literacy focuses on critical evaluation of content and recognizing bias, while digital literacy emphasizes technical and ethical skills for responsible participation in digital spaces. Both share a foundation in critical thinking, essential for distinguishing credible information and understanding societal implications. Together, they provide a

holistic skill set crucial for informed and responsible digital engagement.

Integrating these literacies into education offers significant benefits. A comprehensive curriculum combining critical analysis, technical proficiency, and ethical awareness equips individuals for digital citizenship. This approach promotes critical consumption of information, responsible content creation, and ethical digital behavior, fostering well-rounded digital citizens.

Educational and policy efforts are pivotal in supporting this integration. Interdisciplinary curricula, unified literacy standards, and investments in educator training can address challenges like misinformation, data privacy, and ethical online conduct. However, barriers such as curriculum adaptation, educator preparation, and disparities in digital resources must be addressed.

Future research should explore best practices for integrating these literacies, assess their long-term impacts on students, and examine the role of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence in shaping future competencies. These efforts will ensure individuals are prepared to navigate an evolving digital society responsibly.

The convergence of media literacy and digital literacy reflects the growing complexity of today's media landscape, where individuals are not only consumers but also creators and participants in digital environments. Integrating these literacies into a unified educational framework offers a path to developing informed, responsible, and active digital citizens. This approach aligns with the broader goal of fostering a society that is critically aware, ethically engaged, and capable of

navigating the digital world's opportunities and challenges. By embracing an integrated approach to media and digital literacy, educational systems and policymakers can provide individuals with the lifelong skills needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving digital society.

The rapidly evolving nature of digital media and the introduction of new technologies may impact the ongoing relevance of the reviewed studies. Future studies may need to address emerging digital trends, such as artificial intelligence and algorithmic literacy, which could further refine the distinctions and overlaps between media and digital literacy.

Limitation of the study. This study is limited by the scope and availability of existing research. The reliance on secondary data means that insights are based on interpretations of prior studies rather than original empirical findings. Additionally, the review is limited by language bias, as only English-language studies were included.

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Summary

The rapid evolution of technology has led to increased emphasis on media literacy and digital literacy as essential skills for people to navigate today's complex information landscape. Even

though these literacies share some overlapping competencies, they present different educational objectives. Media literacy emphasizes critical analysis and understanding of media messages, while digital literacy encompasses a broader range of skills, such as technical navigation and online communication. This overview explores the definitions, historical development, core competencies associated with media and digital literacy.

We aim to compare these two concepts, and propose nuanced differences in their applications, as well as the convergence of their critical thinking goals. This study attempted to use a systematic review method to explore the differences in digital literacy and media literacy.