

**Media Literacy in Pakistan:  
A Systematic Review on Current Trends, Challenges, and Future Directions**

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**Abstract:**

Media literacy has become a vital field of study in Pakistan, as swift digital transformation and changing media environments have heightened the necessity for educated public interaction with media content. This systematic literature review analyzes the present status of media literacy studies in Pakistan, with particular attention to its educational, sociopolitical, technological, and linguistic aspects. The review integrates insights from various academic sources, applying a strict methodological approach to achieve thematic consistency and thorough analysis. Findings indicate media literacy education continues to be inadequately developed, frequently hindered by insufficient institutional backing and unequal availability of digital tools. Digital media literacy, while gaining attention, is frequently overshadowed by concerns over misinformation and political polarization. The relationship between media and society is intricate, as research identifies both strengthening and disruptive impacts on public debate. Political communication and health-related misinformation further complicate the media landscape, while language-specific media practices reflect Pakistan's multilingual reality. This review synthesizes current understanding and highlights the pressing need to tackle media literacy as a complex issue in Pakistan's changing digital landscape.

**Keywords:** Pakistan, media literacy, digital literacy, media environment, systematic review, literacy studies, digital media

**INTRODUCTION**

Media literacy has become one of the most important competencies in the digital age, and countries like Pakistan have been moving towards changes in media engagement in line with technological development. Critical analysis and evaluation of media content, as well as the creation of media content have ceased being a luxury but a necessity, due to the omnipresent nature of the media on the opinion of the people, politics and social behavior (Martens & Hobbs, 2015). The media landscape in Pakistan is both traditional and digital and each plays a significant role in the creation of narratives and sharing of information. But due to the absence of systematic media literacy interventions and popularization, misinformation, manipulation of the political agenda, and cultural homogenization have become problematic (Jamil et al., 2022).

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The socio-political situation in Pakistan, the presence of numerous languages, and the disparity in the access to digital resources make media literacy more complex. Though urban centers have a relatively higher level of internet connection and media coverage, rural areas often have significant discrepancies in media coverage and literacy levels (Iftikhar et al., 2023). This dichotomy highlights the necessity of a more suitable view of the functioning of media literacy in various demographic and geographic settings. Additionally, with the emergence of social media, the concept of media consumption has taken on a new dimension, with fake news being disseminated quickly and, in many cases, with widespread effects (Ittefaq et al., 2020).

Media literacy research in Pakistan is still fragmented, although there is an increasing awareness of its significance; the research studies frequently focus on individual facets rather than provide an overall picture. Recent research has tended to study pedagogical organization or media influences on specific social issues, which has led to lack of concentration on the connection between media literacy and broader socio-cultural, political and technological aspects (Livingstone et al., 2005). As an illustration, most of the studies on the role of media in the political process focus more on the role of media in political participation but do not show how the perception of media can lead to less division or better civic participation (Eijaz, 2013). Equally, little attention has been paid to the connection between media literacy and the health of the population, especially during crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic, despite having significant implications on the level of population awareness and behavior (Ittefaq & Iqbal, 2018).

The urgent need to generalize existing knowledge and identify gaps that block the development of effective media literacy programs in Pakistan is what has led to the creation of this systematic literature review. The review is an amalgamation of the findings of multiple scholarly sources aimed at providing an in-depth overview of modern trends, challenges, and opportunities in media literacy research. This work is also significant as it can be used to inform policy development, develop educational curricula, and impact public outreach activities to create a more media literate society that can effectively navigate challenges of modern information spaces.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Review Protocol**

This systematic literature review is based on the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses) framework to attain methodological precision and clarity (Page et al., 2021). A multi database search strategy is employed in the study to cover multiple facets of media literacy in Pakistan. The preference was given to Scopus and Web of Science because of their comprehensive coverage of high-impact research in social sciences and communication. PubMed was used to identify the health-related media literacy studies, and IEEE Xplore and ACM Digital Library provided information about technology. The search was complemented by SpringerLink and ScienceDirect that took an interdisciplinary viewpoint, and arXiv was evaluated as pre-print research. As an auxiliary, Google Scholar was used to confirm the completeness of the search.

The keywords were a combination of Media Literacy and the regional (Pakistan) or Pakistani identifiers and excluded review articles, surveys, meta-analyses to focus on original research. Adaptations to the syntax of the databases were made, including TITLE-ABS-KEY in Scopus and TS=

in Web of Science, to achieve optimal precision. All platforms were consistently used through the use of Boolean logic and exclusion criteria to maintain consistency.

### Thematic Framework for Analysis

The review research findings identify seven areas of investigation related to various dimensions of media literacy in Pakistan. Media Literacy Education investigates structured and unstructured instructional efforts, the inclusion of curricula, and teaching obstacles. Digital Media and Information Literacy focus on the skills needed to work in digital environments. Media and Society dimension examines the effect of media consumption patterns on cultural norms, social cohesion and popular opinion. Political aspects examine how media helps in the electoral process, accountability of government and partisan speech. Aspects that are tied to technology examine barriers in infrastructure, literacies specific to platforms, and new forms of media. Linguistic inquiries take into consideration the influence of multilingualism in Pakistan on the media production and interpretations. Health-based inquiries assess the role of media in influencing health awareness and behavior of people during emergencies.

### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Research works were included when they: (1) directly dealt with the concepts of media literacy in Pakistani settings, (2) provided empirical evidence or theories, (3) were published in English and (4) printed in peer-reviewed journals or other credible conference papers. No time limit was set to take historical developments. Exclusion criteria eliminated those studies that: (1) did not focus mainly on media literacy, (2) were opinion pieces that did not use empirical techniques, (3) had been investigated elsewhere, or (4) were on peripheral topics like overall media impacts without any literacy component.

### Study Selection Process

Initial search resulted in 1,157 records, as compared to 180 after filtering out duplicates and initial screening. Title/abstract screening eliminated 95 irrelevant studies, and 53 full-text articles were evaluated regarding their eligibility. In the full-text assessment, 36 studies were filtered out as they did not sufficiently focus on media literacy (n=22), were non-empirical (n=9), or had quality flaws that were not resolvable (n=5). The end corpus was 17 studies that fulfilled all inclusion criteria.

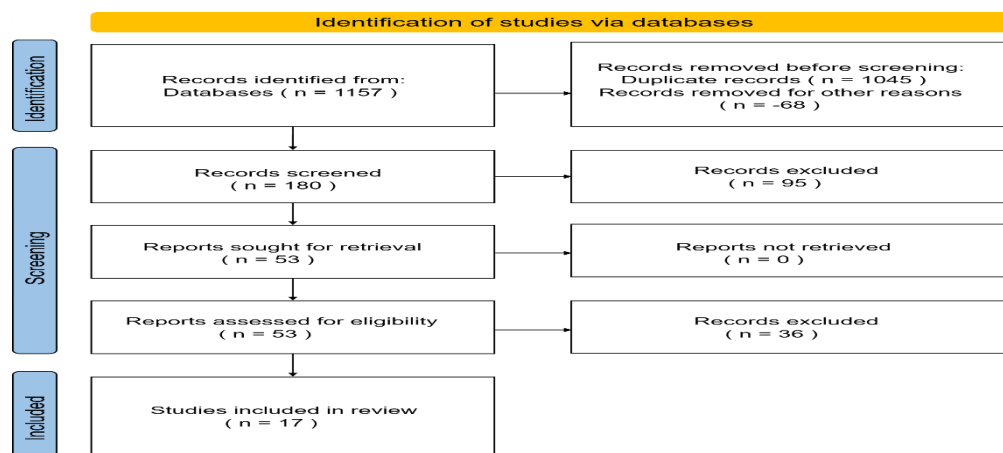
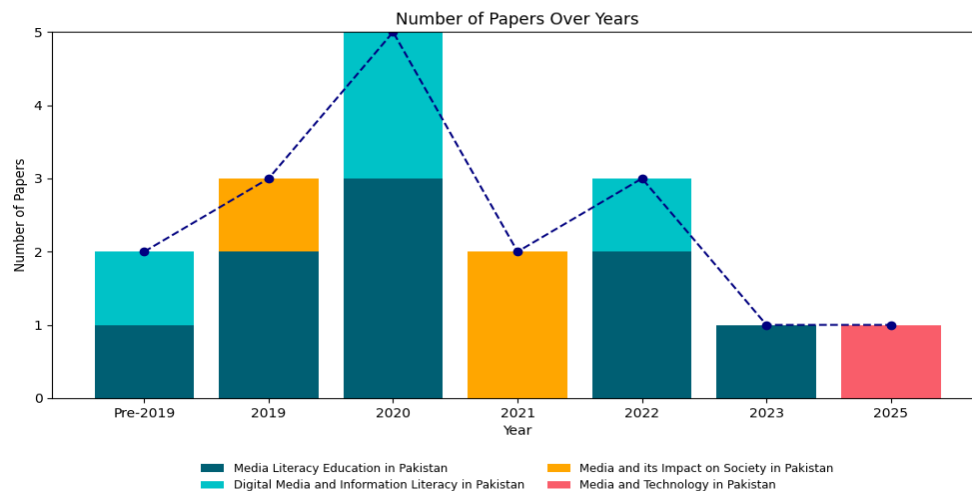


Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart of study selection process

Quality assessment involved methodological rigor, theoretical basis, and contextual adequacy using an adapted CASP (Critical Appraisal Skills Program) tool. The possible biases are database selection bias that favors publications in the English language and the possible exclusion of the grey literature of the Pakistani institutions. The research is dominated by urban-based studies (14/17) and may omit the rural dynamics of media literacy. Nevertheless, the systematic approach minimizes these limitations through the use of precise documentation and validation through a variety of sources.

## RESULTS

### Research Trends



**Figure 2.** Research trends in the domain of Media Literacy in Pakistan

An analysis of the patterns in publications indicates a gradual but uneven growth of media literacy research in Pakistan. There was limited scholarly interest in this field until 2019, when only two studies were documented to provide the basis of the initial knowledge. There was a significant growth between 2019 and 2020 with eight publications, which shows the increased recognition of the importance of media literacy in society in the context of the rapid digital transformation in Pakistan. This was the time when the world had an increased conversation about the issue of misinformation and digital citizenship, and this aspect probably impacted the local research agenda.

The time pattern shows that interest is variable after 2020 since the number of publications per year varies between one and three. The 2025 single entry (where the dataset is anomalous) suggests that there is a developing scholarly expectation of future challenges in media literacy. According to thematic analysis, it is possible to note the lack of balance in the focus on Media Literacy Education, which includes nearly half of the entire publications (9/17), and the ongoing attention to this topic since 2019. This means that there are still concerns as to the mode of teaching and the capacity of the existing learning institutions. The second-largest cluster (4/17) is Digital Media and Information Literacy, but the intensity of research slowed down after 2020, even as the country experienced increasing digital penetration.

The other dimensions, Media and Society, Media and Technology, are mentioned very rarely, which means that these are new or under-researched areas. The lack of any studies on Media and Politics, Media and Language, and Media and Health in the corpus under analysis indicates that there are severe gaps in the knowledge about how media literacy can be applied to the problems of political communication in Pakistan, linguistic diversity, and the issues of public health. These omissions are notably conspicuous in the light of the politically charged media climate in the country, the multilingual character of the population, and recent health disasters, during which the media played central roles.

### **MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN: CURRENT LANDSCAPE AND IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES**

The systematic review shows that media literacy education in Pakistan operates at various levels of education with varying degrees of institutional support. Even though digital literacy programs are common in higher education institutions, school-based programs remain limited in their scope and coverage. The taxonomy in Table 1 shows how the existing interventions can be grouped into three major areas: digital literacy, news literacy and social media literacy, all of which are implemented through the use of various teaching strategies.

**Table 1.** Taxonomy of Media Literacy Education Studies in Pakistan

Focus Area	Educational Level	Implementation Approach	Sources
Digital Literacy	Higher Education	Curriculum Integration	(Raza & Parvez, 2019), (Naseer et al., 2023)
		Workshop-based Training	(Ahmmad, 2022)
	School Level	Teacher Training Programs	(Hafeez & Nauman, 2020)
News Literacy	Higher Education	Critical Analysis Courses	(Muneeb et al., 2020), (Zou'bi, 2022)
	General Public	Community Awareness Campaigns	(Ashraf & Chaudhry, 2013)
Social Media Literacy	University Students	Digital Citizenship Programs	(Alexander & Galina, 2020), (Leaning, 2019)
	Youth	Peer Education Initiatives	(Abbasi & Huang, 2020)

The most common practice in higher education is curriculum blending where universities incorporate elements of media literacy into communication and social science courses (Raza & Parvez, 2019). The programs are oriented towards technical skills like checking information and creating digital content, but the aspects of critical analysis are still underrepresented. Workshop-based methods are more flexible, often tailored to specific skills like fact-checking or responsible online behavior (Ahmmad, 2022). Nevertheless, their effects are usually short-lived and localized because of inconsistent follow-ups.

Media literacy education has structural obstacles at the school level such as crowded school curricula and teacher ill-equippedness. The studies reviewed show the dependence on cascade training models where master trainers prepare classroom teachers with the fundamentals of media literacy (Hafeez & Nauman, 2020). This would be poor scalability and quality control, especially in remote localities where the limitations of digital infrastructure exacerbate educational issues. Locally based initiatives to target the wider segment of the population are promising in filling gaps

in formal education, and local media and local opinion leaders can be used to spread the ideas of literacy (Ashraf & Chaudhry, 2013). These initiatives are, however, still piecemeal and resource starved as compared to institutional programs.

The critique establishes three enduring issues in implementation models: insufficient policy backing, geographical imbalances, and insufficient evaluation systems. Even though urban universities are increasingly considering media literacy as a field of study, the regional education systems lack standardized guidelines on how it can be incorporated into standardized curricula. Furthermore, the existing efforts rarely consider the sociocultural uniqueness of the diverse areas in Pakistan, often using Western-based models without proper adjustment to the local settings. The absence of longitudinal studies in learning outcomes inhibits the evaluation of long-term effectiveness in pedagogical methods which explains the importance of robust monitoring and evaluation systems.

### **Digital Media and Information Literacy in Pakistan: Emerging Challenges and Conceptual Foundations**

The fast pace of digitalization in Pakistan has placed digital media and information literacy on the agenda of academic and policy discourse. The analyzed literature highlights a two-fold paradox: the digital platforms, on the one hand, provide unprecedented access to information, but, on the other hand, they increase threats such as fake news, hate speech, and internet manipulation. A study by (Rao, 2020) has emphasized the poor level of media literacy in Pakistan where people have little knowledge on how to evaluate digital content in a critical way. This intellectual dissonance is especially pronounced in times of political stakes, like an election, when false stories and incendiary language are spread in social media.

Critical examination of available literature reveals that the digital literacy programs in Pakistan often confuse technical capabilities with the capacity to critically utilize the media. Operational knowledge of digital devices and platform navigation do not necessarily correlate with the ability to identify credible information and recognize manipulative content. This differentiation will be important in a media ecosystem where polarized opinions are being bolstered by algorithmic bias and echo chambers. As the analysis in (Rao, 2020) shows, the 2018 general elections demonstrated that digital illiteracy exacerbates social divisions because hate speech propagates freely due to the lack of population capacity to check the sources and context.

**Table 2.** Dimensions of Digital Media and Information Literacy in Pakistan

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Key Challenges</b>	<b>Representative Studies</b>
Conceptual Understanding	Lack of standardized definitions, low institutional recognition	(Rao, 2020)
Political Communication	Hate speech, electoral misinformation, partisan echo chambers	(Rao, 2020)
Critical Evaluation	Limited public skills in source verification, bias detection	(Rao, 2020)
Digital Safety	Privacy concerns, cyber harassment, lack of protective measures	-

Research on digital safety and privacy literacy (as shown in Table 2) presents a significant gap in the literature and is particularly important given the increasing cybersecurity threats and the

widespread online harassment in Pakistan. The issue is further complicated by urban-rural disparities, with urban residents having more access to digital literacy tools than the outskirts, where connectivity and educational infrastructure are not yet available. This disparity indicates advancing digital media literacy necessitates not only instructional measures but also concurrent progress in policies promoting digital equity.

The discussed studies all point to a need to have frameworks that are context specific, which reflect the linguistic diversity, political sensibilities, and unfair technological development in Pakistan. The existing strategies tend to be borrowed models of the West that overlook local sociocultural forces. As an example, fact-checking initiatives that are based on international models often fail to recognize vernacular content, where fake news is most commonly propagated among non-English speakers. Future research ought to address these contextual gaps as it explores the relationships between digital literacy, democratic participation, and social solidarity in the evolving media landscape in Pakistan.

### Media and Its Impact on Society in Pakistan

The media and society relationship in Pakistan is a complicated one which has empowering and destabilizing impacts on the societal discussion. Studies have shown that media literacy plays a critical role in shaping the opinion of the people, particularly in regard to the legitimacy of news and the manner in which gender is depicted. Table 3 classification scheme categorizes the included studies based on their main research areas, with a focus on key outcomes and more general social implications.

**Table 3.** Taxonomy of Media's Societal Impact in Pakistan

Media Focus	Key Findings	Societal Implications	Sources
<b>News Media Perception</b>	Public concerns over biased reporting and declining trust in electronic news media.	Highlights the need for media literacy to foster critical engagement with news content.	(Saeed et al., 2021)
<b>Gender Representation</b>	Increased visibility of female politicians in print media, though often framed through traditional gender roles.	Reflects evolving gender dynamics but also persistent stereotypes in media portrayals.	(Naza et al., 2021)
<b>Journalism and Technology</b>	Mobile technology has altered news production, contributing to fake news proliferation due to inadequate media literacy training.	Underscores the urgency of institutional reforms to combat misinformation.	(Jamil & Appiah-Adjei, 2019)

In Pakistan, the distrust of digital news sources is increasing among the population because of the perceived biases and overstatement of news coverage (Saeed et al., 2021). This doubt highlights the need for educational initiatives in media literacy, arming audiences with skills to assess news content critically. Media literacy, as (Saeed et al., 2021) states, decreases skepticism by promoting an awareness of ethical norms in journalism and practices in factchecking. Nonetheless, the lack of organized media literacy campaigns exposes a large number of consumers to manipulative discourses, especially when dealing with politically charged spaces.

The issue of gender representation in media in Pakistan is a paradox. Though women politicians are increasingly featured in print media, the portrayal is often based on traditional stereotypes rather than challenging them (Naza et al., 2021). This is a trend of the larger society straining in terms of progressive political engagement and conservative gender ideals. Media literacy might be instrumental in this change as it will provoke audiences to take a critical approach to the gendered images and insist on more balanced reporting. A study by (Naza et al., 2021) reveals that the increased media literacy of consumers correlates with a better assessment of biased information, which may lead to a transformation of society through the educated use of the media.

The convergence of journalism and technology poses new challenges, particularly in regard to news production and distribution via mobile devices and the proliferation of misinformation (Jamil and Appiah-Adjei, 2019). One of the main reasons of misinformation dissemination, Pakistani journalists who took part in the research note the lack of systematic media literacy education. This is particularly worrying in the light of the dramatic embrace of mobile technology in the consumption of news, in which news that has not been verified can go viral. The findings suggest that media literacy ought to be incorporated not only to audiences but also to journalists and maintain ethical principles in an increasingly digital news ecosystem. Without such reforms, the social impact of misinformation that goes beyond political polarization to health threats to the population will continue to grow.

The reviewed studies all indicate that media literacy is not just a learning problem but a social need in Pakistan. Media literacy is a key tool in encouraging informed community discourse, whether in shaping perceptions of news reliability, dealing with gender biases or refuting fake news. Further studies are necessary to understand how local media literacy interventions can be used to address these varying effects on society taking into consideration the specific cultural and political context of Pakistan.

### Media and Political Discourse in Pakistan

The interaction between media and politics in Pakistan presents a complex interplay in which the spread of information, political stories, and the opinion of the masses are closely linked. The reviewed studies show that media acts as a place of democratic discourse and as a tool of political control, influencing the electoral process, government actions, and participation of the citizens.

**Table 4.** Taxonomy of Media-Politics Interactions in Pakistan

Dimension	Key Findings	Political Implications	Sources
<b>Electoral Influence</b>	Social media amplifies political messaging but also facilitates misinformation during elections	Undermines informed voting and exacerbates polarization	(Guess et al., 2020), (Shahid & Aftab, 2025)
<b>Government-Media Relations</b>	Fluctuating between censorship and co-option, with periodic crackdowns on dissent	Creates an unstable environment for press freedom and accountability journalism	(Yousaf et al., 2024)
<b>Partisan Media Ecosystems</b>	Growth of ideologically aligned TV channels and digital news platforms	Reinforces political tribalism and reduces common factual ground	(Khalil, 2024)

The media has become more prominent in the electoral processes because of the advent of digital platforms. Studies indicate that political organizations use social media to organize customized campaign activities, often by going around traditional channels to connect with voters (Guess et al., 2020). This shift has expanded the exposure of political discussions to some extent, and the smaller parties have the ability to address national audiences. However, on the very same platforms, the spread of unverified claims and edited content gains more momentum, during election seasons in particular. A study by (Shahid & Aftab, 2025) records the use of viral misinformation regarding the background and policy positions of the candidates in the 2018 general elections which misled voter perceptions and the fact-checking process could not match the number of false statements.

Balances between the government and media in Pakistan develop the cycles of conflict and cooperation that have repeated themselves over the years, which is the reflection of the hybrid political organization in the country. Periods of relative freedom of press are interspersed with direct censorship, particularly when it comes to issues of national security and civil-military relations (Yousef et al., 2024). A study by (Yousef et al., 2024) indicates that more journalists have been responding to such restrictions by self-censorship, resulting in a reduced number of stories on government failures. Ironically, whereas traditional media have to endure such limitations, online platforms have been avenues of going around official accounts, albeit at the cost of some surveillance and legal consequences.

The emergence of partisan media ecosystems has revolutionized political speech because ideologically affiliated sources promote opposing accounts of events. A work by (Khalil, 2024) analyzes how competing television channels and online news sources establish different realities to their audiences through selective framing and omission to reinforce existing accounts. This phenomenon adds to what scholars refer to as epistemic divides in which citizens are consuming radically different information depending on their political affiliations. These consequences extend beyond the election results, eroding trust in the government institutions, and the possibility of consensus on issues of national significance.

Media literacy-based interventions can be used to alleviate some of these problems by educating people on the ways to identify misleading content and seek a diversity of opinions. However, the reviewed studies show that there are no systematic efforts to create such programs on a large scale, making the media-political environment vulnerable to manipulation. The fact that the role of media literacy in polarizing political communication is yet to be properly researched is a critical omission considering the political crises that have characterized Pakistan in the past. Future studies should focus on how tailor-made literacy interventions may enhance the quality of democratic dialogue without compromising the role of media in oversight.

### **Media and Technology in Pakistan: AI-Driven Journalism and Legal Constraints**

The implementation of the high-tech technologies into the media environment of Pakistan has both revolutionary opportunities and complex challenges. The article by (Raza et al., 2025) examines the emergence of AI-driven journalism in Pakistan and explains how artificial intelligence is changing the way news is produced, shared, and consumed. This technological shift introduces a set of new challenges regarding journalistic ethics, authenticity of content and the law in the media environment of the country.

**Table 5.** AI in Pakistani Media: Key Dimensions and Implications

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Sources</b>
<b>AI-Generated Content</b>	Automated news writing, personalized content delivery	Blurring lines between human and machine-produced journalism	(Raza et al., 2025)
<b>Legal Constraints</b>	Ambiguous regulations on algorithmic accountability	Press freedom concerns amid expanding surveillance capabilities	(Raza et al., 2025)
<b>Public Literacy</b>	Low awareness of AI's role in media production	Vulnerability to synthetic media and deepfakes	(Raza et al., 2025)

The major forms of AI use in Pakistani journalism are automated content creation and personalization of news based on data. The paper records that leading media outlets have started to use natural language processing software to generate mundane news, especially in their financial and sports news coverage, where structured information makes it easier to write using machines (Raza et al., 2025). Despite the fact that this enhances the efficiency of operations, it raises fundamental questions about the maintenance of journalistic nuances and contextual understanding which human journalists provide. The rapid adoption of technology outpacing the creation of ethical frameworks leads to the lack of accountability as algorithmic flaws or biases appear in shared content.

AI regulations in the media are still in their infancy, existing in a grey area between the cybercrime laws and the traditional media regulations in Pakistan. The study finds a strain between innovation and regulation, in which efforts to control transparency in algorithms may be utilized to curb critical journalism in the pretext of fighting misinformation (Raza et al., 2025). This paradox is particularly acute in view of the fact that historically, Pakistan depended on legal system to curtail media freedom. In the absence of specific policies addressing the unique problems of AI, such as the proliferation of deep-fakes or highly tailored disinformation, the media landscape will continue to be vulnerable to manipulation, both technologically and politically.

The general awareness of the use of AI in the media lags significantly behind its use, leading to a significant literacy gap. The paper points out that most news users in Pakistan cannot distinguish between the information created by humans and the information created by artificial intelligence, which makes them susceptible to manipulated stories (Raza et al., 2025). The lack of awareness of users about recommendation algorithms and in general how they shape the information people receive exacerbates the problem as users are often unaware of the filter bubbles which reinforce the preconceived ideas they already hold. The research suggests specialized media literacy programs that would address such aspects of technology, and the authors propose incorporating changes to the educational materials used to help people cope with an information space that is becoming more and more controlled by algorithms.

The interplay between media and technology in Pakistan is a complicated issue that requires policy makers, media companies and institutions of higher learning to work together on. As much as artificial intelligence offers ways in which it can streamline the efficiency of journalism and its connection with the audience, its unchecked application can erode trust in media houses. Future studies must investigate comparative regulatory frameworks and determine the efficacy of various

literacy interventions in resilience to information integrity in society in the face of emerging technological threats.

### Media and Language Dynamics in Pakistan

The multilingual situation in Pakistan makes the media and language interplay to give a complex sociolinguistic situation. The reviewed articles demonstrate the reflection of broader power dynamics, identity-based conflicts, and access concerns in the language choices in media production and consumption. The official media is dominated by Urdu and English, and the local languages have difficulties in achieving visibility despite the fact that they are the major communication channels used by significant segments of the population.

**Table 6.** Language Representation in Pakistani Media

Media Platform	Dominant Languages	Regional Language Coverage	Sociolinguistic Implications	Sources	
Broadcast News	Urdu (78%), English (15%)	Limited cumulative Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Balochi)	(7% for marginalizes audiences	Reinforces linguistic hierarchies, non-urban	(Khalil, 2024), (Nasir et al., 2025)
Print Media	English (elite discourse), Urdu (mass appeal)	Occasional columns in regional languages	Creates parallel discourse spheres along class lines		(Khan et al., 2024), (Zulfikar et al., 2019)
Digital Platforms	Urdu (52%), English (33%), Romanized Urdu (15%)	Minimal (Punjabi 5%, others <3%)	Hybrid language forms emerge, challenging standard language ideologies		(Shahzadi & Ahmad, 2018), (Raza et al., 2022)

The dominance of Urdu in broadcast media (78 percent of programs) and English in high-end print media create language barriers to about 60 percent of Pakistani population whose major lingo is neither. According to the study by (Khalil, 2024), and (Nasir et al., 2025) such inequality perpetuates the unequal availability of information, particularly in rural areas where local languages like Punjabi, Pashto, and Sindhi are the primary modes of communication. The low level of media literacy among linguistic groups in relation to those in the regional languages is associated with the marginal representation of the latter in the media (cumulatively 7% in the broadcast media) since viewers cannot critically interpret the information presented in non-native languages.

There are more complex patterns of language on digital platforms, and Romanized Urdu (written in English script) is seen as a hybrid form particularly common among younger generations. Studies by (Shahzabi & Ahmad, 2018) refer to this phenomenon as a democratizing factor, which provides access to participation to people who are less proficient in standard Urdu or English, as well as a literacy issue because non-standard orthographies cause disabilities in information verification. The paper notes that fact-checking initiatives often overlook such linguistic variations, thus leading to the unchecked proliferation of misinformation in vernacular online spaces.

There is also clear stratification of print media according to social stratification, as the periodicals which are written in English language are the ones which are used to carry out their social

interactions at the elite level with the Urdu newspapers being used by the larger population. This partition, discussed in (Khan et al., 2024), leads to distinct information systems, where English prevails in reporting on key analyses of national issues, and Urdu audiences get a more sensational or simplistic coverage. The occasional insertion of regional language columns contributes in the least to closing this gap, as they are more symbolic recognition than actual efforts to expand linguistic coverage.

The results of the research highlight the urgent need to create the initiatives in media education with localization to the needs of the linguistic diversity of Pakistan. Available methods predominantly focus on Urdu and English but do not consider the analytical skills required to deal with local-language media. A study by (Raza et al., 2022) suggests participatory frameworks in which the community coproduces literacy resources in their local languages but these are few. The future should tackle the political sensibilities associated with language policy in Pakistan and ensure that media literacy is realized in the real sense of inclusivity within the vast linguistic diversity of the country.

### Media and Health Communication in Pakistan

Media and health in Pakistan are a critical challenge and opportunity to the process of communicating with the people in terms of health. The study analyzed suggests that media plays an important role as a source of information as well as a potential source of inaccuracies related to health, particularly during health crises. This dual nature became evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when media platforms spread essential information on essential topics about the virus and shared unproven treatments and conspiracy theories.

**Table 7.** Health Communication Patterns in Pakistani Media

Health Topic	Media Role	Key Challenges	Impact on Public Behavior	Sources
<b>Pandemic Communication</b>	Primary information source for COVID-19 updates	Mixed messaging between officials and media outlets	Vaccine hesitancy linked to contradictory reports	(Ali & Qazi, 2022)
<b>Maternal Health</b>	Raising awareness about prenatal care	Sensationalism is overshadowing evidence-based information	Reinforced traditional misconceptions	(Ameen & Gorman, 2009)
<b>Infectious Diseases</b>	Disseminating prevention strategies	Overemphasis on rare over common diseases	Distorted perception risk	(Shahzad et al., 2024)

The Pakistani media is the main mediator between the government and the citizens in times of health emergencies. According to research that (Ali & Qazi, 2022) carried out, there was a lack of consistency in communication between government spokespersons and media commentators in regard to COVID-19, which resulted in uncertainty about the measures of containment by the people. Despite these chances to have experts talk shows, the competition of ratings-driven programming often gave credit to sensationalized debates over scientific explanations. Such an

environment allowed unqualified voices to gain too much airtime, with some channels promoting unproven solutions like herbal preventatives in addition to official advice.

Mother health communication is an example of how the media framing can unintentionally endorse negative practices. A study by (Ameen & Gorman, 2009) examines the effects of Urdu television dramas covering childbirth that tended to dramatize complications and undercover routine prenatal care. This biased portrayal raised the alarm of births in hospital, which again strengthened the timelessness of traditional birth attendants. The research notes that media campaigns were successful in increasing awareness about maternal health services but did not translate this awareness into a change in behavior due to the cultural stories that were perpetuated through entertainment media.

The systematic bias in media coverage of infectious disease is to give more emphasis on sensational threats rather than the more widespread ones. The article by (Shahzad et al., 2024) demonstrates that the Pakistani newspapers focused more on uncommon diseases like Ebola and left endemic tuberculosis untouched, thus distorting the perception of the general population towards the danger of health issues. Such a bias in dramatization is due to commercial motives focusing on sensational headlines, which leads to the underreporting of less sensational but more prevalent health issues. The outcomes are poor allocation of personal precautions and lack of political focus on long-term problems of public health.

The gap in literature is also significant given the lack of research on media literacy initiatives in health communication. All of the reviewed articles did not assess programs that provided audiences with skills to carefully evaluate health-related claims or to recognize credible medical sources. Such a gap is especially worrisome considering that Pakistan has a high dependency on health information obtained through the media and the reported effects of misinformation. Future research should focus on how tailored media literacy campaigns can help the population better cope with health-related information without compromising the critical role played by the media in providing timely health information.

## **DISCUSSION**

The review of the studies reveals several important trends in the media literacy studies that are carried out in Pakistan. All these studies together demonstrate that media literacy is a relatively undeveloped but increasingly important area, particularly with the changing nature of digital platforms in developing and consuming information. Research trends show that there is an increasing academic interest, but the scope is skewed towards educational contexts as opposed to the wider application in society. Such an imbalance implies the need to widen research beyond formal education to non-institutional and community-based strategies of media literacy.

The theoretical implications of this review indicate that there is the need to have frameworks that are sensitive to the sociocultural and political peculiarities of Pakistan. In the literature, there is a frequent appearance of Western-based models of media literacy, but their direct relevance to the multilingual, politically charged, and digitally uneven realities of Pakistan are dubious. The findings of the research, taken as a whole, underline that media literacy cannot be viewed as a set of similar competencies but must be able to respond to the contextual factors, including linguistic diversity, urban-rural differences and the processes of media-state historical dynamics. This requires

theoretical innovations to tie together universal media literacy principles and localized knowledge, potentially through the use of decolonial or culturally situated approaches.

The most immediate practical implications are in the realms of education and policy. The review points out that media literacy education in Pakistan has been plagued by a disjointed method of implementation, poor teacher training and absence of standardized curricula. These weaknesses provide avenues of educational reformers to develop holistic media literacy models that start at primary education and up to tertiary education. The results suggest that media literacy should be a part of policies on digital inclusion at the national level because of the crucial role it plays in the safe and meaningful interactions with digital publics. The policies of cybersecurity and misinformation in Pakistan are deficient in media literacy components, which is a critical flaw that can be addressed through interdisciplinary collaboration between the education, information technology and communication regulatory authorities.

The methodological limitations of this review must be acknowledged, particularly noting database selection and language limitations. The exclusive focus on English-language literature threatens to omit valuable research in Urdu or local languages, which will lead to a biased outcome, privileging urban and privileged perspectives. Also, the reliance of the review on indexed academic journals is likely to exclude valuable results of practitioner reports, NGO evaluation, and grey literature, which could provide on-the-ground perspectives of media literacy programs. These limitations suggest that the products of synthesis may not fully capture the scope of media literacy activities within the varied regional and socioeconomic contexts within Pakistan.

Such future studies should concentrate on various areas which have been overlooked in this analysis. There is an urgent need to conduct research on the relationships between media literacy and political polarization, an area that focuses on how educational programs may diminish partisan lines in the volatile information situation in Pakistan. The role of media literacy in the communication of public health must be addressed urgently, especially in the circumstances that the country has experienced with the false information regarding the pandemic. Moreover, the research should be conducted on the operation of media literacy in a multilingual environment, and the models should be developed to respond to the complex language hierarchies and local media relationships in Pakistan. The longitudinal study of the impact of media literacy programs in the long-term would significantly enhance the understanding of the most sustainable and effective methods in the particular context of Pakistan.

The paradoxes of the analyzed literature also demonstrate the aspects where the scholarly solution is needed. Whereas certain studies position media literacy as a way of democratic empowerment, others implicitly portray media literacy as a control mechanism of dealing with misinformation, a dichotomy that reflects the broader global debate about the aims and political aspects of media literacy. Future studies should explicitly address these competing visions by exploring the nature of differences between different interpretations of media literacy and various ideological and institutional agendas in Pakistan. On the same note, the urban bias in the current literature requires specific studies on the rural processes of media literacy, where there are probably other patterns of media access, trust, and engagement.

The future-driven consequences of this synthesis are not confined to academia but also to practitioners of media, educators, and policymakers. To journalists and media companies, the results highlight the importance of integrating media literacy concepts into professional education and ethics, especially with AI tools changing news generation. Educators in various levels of education can inform their teaching practices on the identified gaps to develop teaching plans that promote critical media engagement along with practical digital skills. Media literacy must be recognized by policymakers as an essential part of digital citizenship in Pakistan and investments in it as substantial as those made in infrastructure must be made in national digitalization strategies. The existing evidence suggests that to enhance media literacy in Pakistan, it is both necessary to involve educational interventions but also to undertake structural reforms aimed at addressing political, technological, and linguistic aspects that shape media interaction.

The discussion puts Pakistan media literacy issues in the context of the global discussion and solves the problems of the country on the local level, basing further specific research and practice. The reviewed studies all demonstrate that media literacy cannot be relegated to a back seat in the digital transformation of Pakistan but rather should be at the heart of strategies to raise an informed generation, robust democracies, and equitable participation in new media landscapes. Research on this synthesis in the future should maintain this dual focus by developing connections between international media literacy research and the contextual realities of Pakistan, ensuring that methods are both theoretically and practically viable.

## **CONCLUSION**

This systematic review has summarized the current state of media literacy studies in Pakistan, with current developments as well as unresolved gaps in understanding its multifaceted nature as a phenomenon in the evolving media landscape of the country. The findings suggest that media literacy is increasingly recognized as essential to working with digital and traditional media environments, but media literacy is widely used differently in educational, political, and sociocultural settings. The article highlights the urgent need to have frameworks that can address the unique linguistic diversity, digital inequalities, and politics of Pakistan rather than relying on Western frameworks.

The practical implications of these findings are of significant significance particularly to those interested in policy-making and educational leadership. National education policy and digital inclusion policies should include media literacy in order to encourage critical literacy in relation to media content. Moreover, the absence of the literature that investigates the role of media literacy in decreasing the level of political polarization and health-related misinformation outlines the gaps of critical importance that further research must address. Theoretical development should focus on developing culturally based approaches, to deal with the unique Pakistan-media-state relationships and multilingualism.

In the future, interdisciplinary studies are required to understand the intersection of media literacy and new technology, democracy, and population health communication. Longitudinal studies that will determine the long-term effect of the literacy interventions will be important in designing effective programs. By addressing these gaps, further studies can help evolve more media literate

society within Pakistan and be able to handle the complexity of modern information spaces and encourage literate citizens to engage in civic affairs.

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