# Assessing and Addressing Gaps in Media Education: Faculty Perspectives on Integrating Media Literacy into University Curricula

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**Abstract**

This study explores faculty perspectives on integrating media literacy into the curricula of media education in the underrepresented regions of India – Odisha and Jharkhand. In an era of escalating mis/disinformation, the research underscores the critical role of media literacy in higher education for fostering critical thinking, ethical media engagement, and informed citizenship among Mass Communication students. The study involved conducting semi-structured interviews with media educators from six universities representing central, state and private institutions. A thematic analytical approach was used to examine faculty members' conceptual understanding of media literacy, their pedagogical practices, perceived institutional challenges and their recommendations for strengthening media literacy education. The study reveals that the educators unanimously recognise the growing importance of media literacy in this age of information disorder. However, its incorporation into Mass Communication programmes remains limited and uneven. Public universities struggle with outdated curricula, bureaucratic delays, and shortages of resources and trained manpower, which hinder meaningful integration. Although private universities enjoy greater flexibility and comparatively better infrastructure, their focus tends to lean towards technical and industry-oriented training, often at the cost of fostering critical media literacy competencies. The study calls for systematic reforms, including enhanced faculty training, interdisciplinary collaboration, participatory pedagogies, and policy-level interventions aligned with global media literacy frameworks. Incorporating faculty voices into the broader discourse on higher education reform, the research advocates for a structured approach to embedding media literacy across curricula to cultivate critically informed and engaged citizenship.

**Keywords:** media literacy, media education, faculty perspectives, curriculum development, Odisha, Jharkhand.

## 1. Introduction

The conventional notion of literacy has evolved significantly with the rapid expansion of digital technologies over the past two decades. This advancement has transformed everyday practices, particularly in the ways information is constructed, shared, disseminated, and consumed (Currie, Kelly, 2022; Gálik, 2020). Given the immense power of digital media to shape people's values, beliefs, behaviours, and decisions (Baran, 2011), basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills are no longer sufficient in an era of information overload. Alongside these challenges are issues related to privacy, security, cyberbullying, addiction, and phishing (Burnett, Merchant, 2011). In this context, students of Mass Communication – who will become the journalists, content creators, and opinion leaders of tomorrow – play a critical role. Strong media literacy skills among these students are essential for fostering a healthy information ecosystem. Consequently, media

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education must focus on equipping learners with the competencies required to become both critical consumers and responsible producers of media content.

The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) defines media literacy as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication" (Potter, 2022). Media literacy has been widely acknowledged as a lifelong learning competency essential for empowerment, creativity, and informed citizenship (Hobbs, 2010). Empirical research further establishes that students exposed to media literacy education (MLE) are better able to detect misinformation and disinformation, resist stereotypes, and develop civic sensibilities. Educational institutions are thus the most appropriate sites for cultivating media literacy competencies. For this ecosystem to thrive, not only media educators but also teachers from other disciplines must themselves be media literate (Domine, 2011).

Many developed countries have integrated media literacy skills into their pedagogy, often embedding them within teacher training programmes. In contrast, in developing countries such as India, this dimension remains underemphasised. Scholars have argued that the absence of media literacy education in teacher training constitutes one of the key barriers to its effective implementation (Alvermann, Moon, Hagood, 2018). Despite policy interventions such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, India's education system continues to rely heavily on rote learning and has failed to nurture a culture of critical thinking and reflective analysis (Singh, Rai, 2025). This deficiency is shaped by multiple, interrelated factors. While government policy is a major determinant, teachers, students, and the broader functioning of educational institutions at the ground level also play significant roles in sustaining these shortcomings.

When considering states such as Odisha and Jharkhand in India, which remain among the underdeveloped regions of the country, the situation appears even more critical. A significant proportion of the population in these states continues to struggle for basic necessities. In this context, it becomes imperative to critically examine and assess the education system, with particular attention to media education. Despite the pressing need, limited research has been conducted on the educational landscape of these underrepresented states. This study makes a modest attempt to address this gap by examining the state of media literacy, specifically through the perspectives of experienced faculty members engaged in media education. Their insights are expected to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and constraints faced by media educators in these regions, as well as their views on integrating media literacy into Mass Communication curricula. Furthermore, the study explores the barriers to effective implementation and presents suggestions for strengthening media literacy education within these contexts.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore how faculty members in Odisha and Jharkhand perceive and integrate media literacy education into their teaching practices and curricula. Specifically, it examines educators' understanding of media literacy concepts, evaluates the extent to which media literacy components are included in Mass Communication curricula, and analyses the pedagogical and institutional barriers that influence its effective adoption. In doing so, the research captures faculty recommendations for strengthening media-literacy competencies among communication students. Insights from faculty perspectives in Odisha and Jharkhand can offer a roadmap for advancing media education in India and other developing countries with similar contexts, particularly in integrating media literacy as a core component.

## 2. Materials and methods

The researchers employed a qualitative exploratory design to examine how media educators perceive and integrate media literacy within Mass Communication curricula in the eastern Indian states of Odisha and Jharkhand. A qualitative approach was adopted to get in-depth understanding of institutional practices, pedagogical approaches, and barriers in contexts of media literacy's integrations in Mass Communication curricula.

*Sampling and Participants*

A purposive sampling strategy was used in the study to ensure representation across central, state, and private universities in Odisha and Jharkhand to get the teachers' perspectives. Faculties from the Mass Communication departments from six institutions were selected: Central University of Odisha, Berhampur University, Birla Global University, Central University of Jharkhand, Ranchi University, and Amity University Ranchi.

The researchers initially had planned for 12 faculty interviews (two per university), but due to institutional constraints, one interview at Amity University Ranchi could not be conducted. Thus,

the thematic analysis is based on the inputs from 11 faculty members, still maintaining balance across the institutions. Respondents were faculty engaged in teaching and curriculum-related responsibilities in the mass communication departments of the respective universities. The participating media educators were selected either on the basis of their seniority within the Mass Communication departments or due to their expertise in media literacy. This selection ensured that they possessed the requisite authority and professional experience to offer meaningful insights into media literacy education and its integration within their respective departmental curricula.

*Data Collection*

The researcher visited the respective departments in person to conduct semi-structured interviews with faculty members between June and August 2024. Each interview lasted 30–40 minutes and followed a fixed set of guiding questions with scope for flexibility in interactions. The focus was on recording insights of faculty on:

1. Integration of media literacy components.
2. Pedagogical practices.
3. Institutional and policy barriers.
4. Suggestions for improvement.

With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded, later transcribed using TurboScribe software. Ethical clearance was obtained from the researcher's home institution as well as the participating faculty members. All participants were informed about the study's purpose, provided informed consent, and assured of confidentiality and anonymity.

*Data Analysis*

The data analysis process in this study was guided by the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (Braun, Clarke, 2006). This approach emphasises researcher reflexivity and interpretive engagement in identifying, shaping, and refining themes. RTA is widely recognised and applied in exploratory qualitative research, making it suitable for the purposes of this study. Analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-step process:

1. Familiarization with transcripts.
2. Generating initial codes.
3. Searching for themes.
4. Reviewing themes.
5. Defining and naming themes.
6. Producing the report.

Coding was conducted manually using Microsoft Word and Excel to strengthen reflexive engagement. Both shared codes (common across Odisha and Jharkhand) and unique codes (state-specific) were identified.

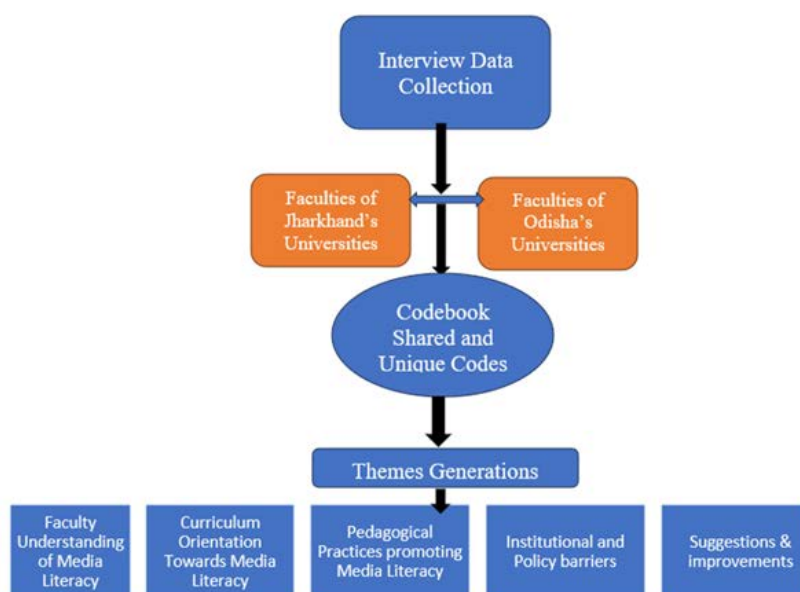*Visual Presentations of Thematic Analysis (Figure 1):*



**Fig. 1.** Visual Presentations of Thematic Analysis

The process yielded five themes:
1. Faculty Understanding of Media Literacy.
2. Curriculum Orientation Towards Media Literacy.
3. Pedagogical Practices Promoting Media Literacy.
4. Institutional and Policy Barriers.
5. Suggestions and Improvements.

## 3. Discussion

The study explores faculty insights by capturing their understanding of media literacy, examining its integration within Mass Communication curricula, analysing their pedagogical practices, identifying institutional and policy barriers, and documenting their recommendations for strengthening media-literacy education in universities across Odisha and Jharkhand.

The findings of the study highlight a significant disparity in faculty awareness and institutional integration of media literacy education across universities in Odisha and Jharkhand. Although the conceptual understanding of the interviewed faculty members varied considerably, all of them unanimously acknowledged that, in this escalating age of misinformation and disinformation, media literacy plays a highly significant and indispensable role. Some respondents, in expressing their understanding of media literacy, placed greater emphasis on digital and technical skills such as content creation, fact-checking, and verification. Others, however, adopted a broader outlook, defining media literacy as an intellectual framework that encompasses critical thinking, analytical reasoning, ethical judgment, and participatory engagement with information consumed from diverse sources (Hobbs, 2021; Mihailidis et al., 2021). Hence, the diversity of opinions regarding the conceptual understanding of media literacy reflects a fragmented awareness within higher education, particularly in the domain of media education. This observation aligns with the findings of Alvermann, Moon and Hagood (Alvermann et al., 2018), who noted that a lack of conceptual clarity remains one of the major challenges in implementing media literacy education in developing countries.

The study reveals that in most universities offering Masters of Arts (MA) Mass Communication programmes across Odisha and Jharkhand, there is no dedicated course explicitly titled Media Literacy. Out of the six universities examined, only two had a fully dedicated paper on media literacy within their Mass Communication curriculum. However, all the universities, including those without a specific course on the subject, addressed media literacy components indirectly as part of other courses in the programme. This indicates that while media literacy is not always taught as a standalone subject, its elements are implicitly integrated across different papers. Such partial and inconsistent inclusion of media literacy within Mass Communication programmes reflects an uneven and implicit treatment of the concept in media education. In contrast, universities and colleges in the United States and the United Kingdom have systematically integrated media literacy into their curricula as a compulsory or integral component of media and communication studies (Buckingham, 2019; Currie, Kelly, 2022; Potter, 2023).

The faculty members interviewed strongly advocated for the inclusion of *media literacy* in Mass Communication curricula. The faculty members highlighted that media-literacy education remains insufficiently addressed due to institutional rigidity and the absence of robust policy- and administrative-level support within India's higher-education system. They noted that higher-education authorities have not prioritised media-literacy competencies in the same way as other emerging skill areas in contemporary academic environments. These observations are consistent with international scholarship, which shows that even well-established education systems encounter comparable challenges, including limited policy backing and institutional stagnation (Bulger, Davison, 2018; Frau-Meigs, 2023). This finding of the study also supports Mihailidis' concept (Mihailidis, 2021) of the "implementation gap," wherein educators recognise the importance of media literacy but lack institutional support to translate it into practice. Most universities also fail to update their curricula in line with the changing media and information ecosystem, further hindered by bureaucratic constraints.

The absence of structured faculty development programmes on media literacy training aggravates the problem. Domine (Domine, 2011) similarly noted that insufficient teacher preparation remains one of the most overlooked barriers to advancing media literacy in Indian media education. Additionally, the study found that many universities in Odisha and Jharkhand face shortages of resources. Several institutions lack even basic media laboratories for practical

training, let alone facilities dedicated to media literacy. Although private universities generally have better infrastructure, they prioritise job-oriented training over the cultivation of critical and analytical skills. In contrast, most state universities continue to operate with outdated syllabi and minimal focus on media literacy. These disparities reinforce Tejedo et al. (Tejedo et al., 2023) observation that institutional apathy and inadequate funding are key obstacles to the effective implementation of media literacy programmes.

Several faculty members from universities in Odisha and Jharkhand emphasised the need for greater collaboration at both inter-university and national levels to promote knowledge sharing and the exchange of best practices. They recommended organising periodic faculty development programmes to upskill and update media educators in the field of *media literacy*. These suggestions align with the observations of Livingstone and Bulger (Livingstone, Bulger, 2022), who advocated for sustained professional learning communities as a means to bridge the gap between policy and practice in digital and media literacy education. Although media educators indicated that curricular activities such as classroom discussions on current events, news analysis exercises, media-production assignments, and even informal conversations beyond the classroom help foster critical thinking among Mass Communication students, they also acknowledged that these practices remain largely informal, unstructured, and dependent on individual faculty initiative. Consequently, media-literacy instruction lacks a formal and systematic approach, with no clearly defined framework for its integration into Mass Communication programmes. This finding resonates with studies by Potter (Potter, 2023), which emphasise the value of pedagogical innovations such as case-based learning, participatory projects, and critical reflection to enhance students' media literacy competencies. The absence of structured pedagogical guidance in media education within the Indian context restricts educators' ability to move beyond conventional modes of knowledge transmission and to adequately foster critical thinking and engagement among Mass Communication students.

Despite existing challenges, the faculty members expressed optimism about potential reforms and innovations in media education. They advocated for the inclusion of a dedicated *media literacy* course within the curriculum and encouraged collaboration with government bodies, non-governmental organisations, fact-checking groups, and media houses to provide students with broader exposure to the functioning of the media and information ecosystem. Such partnerships could help bridge the knowledge and skill gaps between classroom learning and the evolving demands of the media industry (Bhoi, Kumar, 2022).

One of the key findings of this study is that all participating faculty members were acutely aware of the growing threat posed by mis/disinformation in the contemporary media landscape. They viewed *media literacy* not merely as an academic discipline for Mass Communication students, but as a broader societal necessity. The respondents emphasised that media literacy should extend beyond the confines of media education departments to reach students of other disciplines and the wider civil society. Such an approach, they believed, is essential for nurturing an informed citizenry capable of discerning truth from falsehood and resisting propaganda. This perspective resonates with Hobbs (Hobbs, 2021), who emphasises that media literacy should not be perceived solely as a mechanism for combating misinformation, but rather as a transformative tool for cultivating critical, informed, objective, and socially responsible citizens.

Collectively, the study underscores that the integration of media literacy education in Indian universities remains at a nascent stage and demands both structural and pedagogical reform, as reflected in the perspectives of media educators in Odisha and Jharkhand. The evidence suggests that comprehensive reform is urgently required. Such reform should prioritise revising curricula to embed media literacy competencies, strengthening faculty development programmes dedicated to critical media pedagogy, and establishing education policies that emphasise the cultivation of critical and analytical skills among students. These measures align with global recommendations advocating the incorporation of media literacy within a broader participatory and democratic ecosystem (Lioenko, Huzar, 2023; Tejedo et al., 2023, Tayie, 2023). The discussion further highlights that media literacy should not be perceived merely as an academic construct but as a vital tool for strengthening the democratic values of society.

## 4. Results
The analysis of faculty interviews conducted across universities in Odisha and Jharkhand yielded five dominant themes that collectively reflect the state of media literacy integration within

Mass Communication programmes in these regions. These themes are: Faculty Understanding of Media Literacy, Curriculum Orientation Towards Media Literacy, Pedagogical Practices Promoting Media Literacy, Institutional and Policy Barriers, and Suggestions and Improvements. Each of these themes is discussed in detail in the following subsections.

*Faculty Understanding of Media Literacy*

The faculty members in Odisha and Jharkhand demonstrated varying levels of awareness regarding the concept of media literacy, with the depth of understanding differing across institutions. Some respondents associated media literacy primarily with digital proficiency, fact-checking, and the use of verification tools to detect misinformation and disinformation. In contrast, others adopted a more holistic perspective, viewing media literacy as encompassing critical thinking, analytical reasoning, evaluation of media texts, and ethical content production. This variation in interpretation indicates that media literacy remains a dynamic and evolving construct within the broader field of media and communication studies. Many faculty members stated that their understanding and exposure to media literacy as a discipline were largely confined to reading research papers, attending conferences, or participating in fact-checking workshops and related events, rather than through any formal academic or teacher-training programmes. As one respondent from the Central University remarked: "We discuss media literacy in our classrooms and during seminars, conferences, and workshops, but I have not come across any dedicated teacher-training or faculty development programme specifically focused on media literacy." The absence of a standardised and common framework for understanding media literacy may stem from the lack of formal and structured faculty development programmes available to media educators in India.

*Curriculum Orientation Towards Media Literacy*

According to the faculty members, only two of the six universities offering Mass Communication programmes in Odisha and Jharkhand have a dedicated course or paper on media literacy. However, faculty from all universities reported that media literacy components are, to varying extents, incorporated indirectly within other courses or modules in the syllabus, classroom discussions, and various brainstorming exercises. Faculty members expressed that, in many cases, Mass Communication students are exposed to topics such as misinformation, disinformation, ethical content creation, informed citizenship, and critical thinking during their master's programmes. However, most departments still lack a structured curriculum specifically designed to cultivate comprehensive media literacy competencies among students.

Most respondents highlighted that curriculum structures are often rigid and rarely updated, largely due to bureaucratic approval processes and university-level regulations. A faculty member from a state university remarked: "Even if we include media literacy as a dedicated paper, that alone is not sufficient. Inclusion is not the real issue; rather, delivering the content effectively – both conceptually and practically – is what matters. To do so, we need adequate resources and an ecosystem that supports media literacy instruction for Mass Communication students." Another respondent from a private university noted that institutional priorities tend to focus primarily on employability and skill-based training, often at the expense of nurturing critical thinking and analytical abilities.

*Pedagogical Practices Promoting Media Literacy*

Pedagogical practices related to media literacy in Mass Communication departments were found to be largely informal and individual-driven, as reported by faculty members. Many educators noted that they attempt to integrate topics such as media bias, stereotyping, misinformation, disinformation, ethical content creation, critical thinking in democracy, and the art of questioning into their teaching. However, these classroom discussions and activities are not mandated by the universities, resulting in an absence of standardised pedagogical approaches. Assignments, news reviews, classroom debates, and interactive discussions were identified as the most common strategies adopted by the faculty to foster critical thinking among students. So, the Pedagogical practices related to media literacy remain scattered and dependent on individual faculty initiative.

*Institutional and Policy Barriers*

Institutional barriers emerged as one of the major hurdles in implementing media literacy education. During the interviews, respondents highlighted several issues, including inadequate information infrastructure, limited resources, and an absence of administrative awareness regarding the significance of media literacy. A faculty member from a central university expressed

concern that, at a broader level, there is no university-wide policy framework or dedicated funding to promote media literacy through seminars, projects, field visits, or collaborations with media and fact-checking organisations.

Respondents also noted a persistent information and skills gap between academia and contemporary industry practices, which further constrains the effective integration of media literacy into media education. Respondents from state and central universities extensively highlighted the infrastructural deficiencies they face, including the absence of media laboratories, limited access to essential softwares, and outdated curricula. Conversely, although private universities generally have stronger infrastructure and greater autonomy in curriculum development, their efforts predominantly prioritise industry-driven skill training aimed at enhancing student employability. As a result, the cultivation of critical thinking and analytical abilities among communication students often receives limited attention.

*Suggestions and Improvements*

Faculty members offered several constructive suggestions to improve and strengthen the inclusion of *media literacy* in higher education curricula, particularly within media education. They proposed the introduction of a stand-alone paper on *media literacy* or, alternatively, a broader integration of *media literacy* components across existing course modules. Several respondents also recommended that both the curricula and syllabi should explicitly emphasise areas such as *critical thinking, critical evaluation, ethical media content creation*, and *civic engagement.*

A faculty member from a private university remarked, "The syllabus should be reviewed and revised annually to reflect the rapid changes occurring in today's dynamic media environment. With the rise of artificial intelligence and other advanced technologies, the media landscape is evolving swiftly. To keep pace with these developments, we must update our syllabus and curriculum on a yearly basis."

Another respondent suggested that universities should take institutional-level initiatives such as *student-led campaigns on misinformation and disinformation*, and organise *media literacy drives* in collaboration with government and non-government organisations. They further proposed that universities conduct *workshops, seminars,* and *special lectures* on *media literacy* not only for media students but also for learners from other disciplines, given the urgency of the current information environment. A third faculty member emphasised the need for *university-level collaborations, interdisciplinary engagement, faculty development programmes*, and *faculty exchange initiatives* to strengthen both conceptual and practical understanding of *media literacy.*

Across interviews, faculty members consistently expressed the need for stronger *policy interventions* at both national and regional levels. Given that education is a subject under the concurrent list, respondents believed that state and central governments should provide greater emphasis on integrating *media literacy* into higher education frameworks. They collectively argued that *media literacy* should be formally recognised as an essential and emerging skill within India's higher education policy, especially in the current social media era marked by the uncontrolled spread of misinformation and disinformation.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal a growing recognition and awareness of media literacy among faculty members in Mass Communication departments across India. However, the integration of media literacy components within curricula remains limited and uneven. The absence of structured curricular frameworks, pedagogical guidelines, and administrative support has led to unorganised and fragmented approaches to teaching and training students in media literacy concepts and practices. Despite faculty awareness of the consequences of misinformation and disinformation – particularly their impact on young audiences – most universities continue to overemphasise vocational and professional skill development over emerging competencies such as critical thinking and critical analysis of media texts. Outdated curricula, bureaucratic hurdles, inadequate funding, and limited focus on faculty development programmes further hinder efforts to embed media literacy meaningfully within higher education, especially within the media education landscape.

The study recognises the crucial contribution of faculty members in advancing media literacy education and underscores the importance of their perspectives in shaping future curriculum reforms and policy directions. Drawing from the insights of media educators across Odisha and Jharkhand, the findings highlight the pressing need for pedagogical innovation, stronger

departmental and institutional collaboration, periodic curriculum revision, and structured faculty development programmes dedicated to media literacy. The integration of UNESCO's Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Framework (2013) provides a globally recognised roadmap for embedding competencies such as critical thinking, ethical media engagement, informed citizenship, and participatory learning within higher education. Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of drawing inspiration from international best practices, particularly from countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, where media literacy has been institutionalised as a core component of the educational process. India, while differing in context, can adapt these models to suit its socio-educational realities. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 offers a promising platform for such transformation, with its emphasis on interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and holistic learning. However, the policy's successful implementation demands greater operational clarity, adequate resource allocation, and sustained funding support to ensure that its vision translates effectively into practice.

From a regional perspective, Odisha and Jharkhand remain among the most underdeveloped regions of India, facing persistent socio-economic and political challenges. Large sections of the population in these states continue to struggle with limited access to basic education and infrastructural deficiencies. Resource constraints, administrative hurdles, and inadequate funding have further impeded the growth of higher education in general, and media education in particular. Yet, the enthusiasm of faculty members for innovation and collaboration in fostering critical skills such as media literacy signals strong potential for progressive reform. Institutional and policy-level interventions – such as interdepartmental and inter-university collaborations, faculty development programmes, and partnerships with media organisations, fact-checking agencies, and government or non-government bodies – can help bridge the gap between the vision and actualisation of media literacy education. Given the contemporary challenges of misinformation and disinformation that profoundly shape socio-political and economic discourse, media literacy should no longer be treated as a peripheral or optional skill. Instead, it must be recognised as a core educational priority in preparing future communicators, journalists, and opinion leaders. Integrating media literacy competencies across higher education – particularly within Mass Communication programmes – enhances students' critical and analytical abilities and strengthens their capacity for informed judgement. At the same time, such integration contributes to reinforcing democratic values and fostering social resilience in an increasingly complex and rapidly evolving information ecosystem.

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