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A Comparative Study of Media Literacy Among Students of Kabul and Alberoni University:(*Case Study: Journalism faculties)*

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Abstract

Media literacy—the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages—is an essential competency in the contemporary information age, particularly for journalism students as future producers and disseminators of information. This study compares the media literacy levels of journalism students at Kabul University and Alberoni University, considering differences in educational, cultural, and infrastructural contexts. A descriptive-analytical survey design was employed using a structured five-point Likert-scale questionnaire. Instrument validity was confirmed through expert review, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α = 0.832 for Alberoni University and α = 0.706 for Kabul University). Using stratified random sampling, 226 students were selected from a population of 560, including 132 from Kabul University and 94 from Alberoni University. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent t-tests. Results showed that Kabul University students performed better in analyzing media message objectives (94.0% vs. 91.5%) and identifying hidden agendas (86.4% vs. 83.0%). Regarding source verification, 72.3% of Alberoni students reported examining sources before trusting media content, compared with 68.2% of Kabul University students. Social media usage was also examined, with the t-test indicating a statistically significant difference between the groups ($t = 3.24$, $df = 224$, $p = 0.001$; Cohen's $d = 0.43$). No significant differences were found in other media literacy dimensions ($p > 0.05$). Overall, students at both universities demonstrated moderate to high self-reported media literacy. Institutional resources, curriculum quality, and media access may influence certain dimensions. The findings support targeted curricular interventions, technology integration, and enhanced faculty expertise, but should not be generalized beyond the study population.

Keywords: Media Literacy, Journalism Education, Comparative Study, Afghanistan Higher Education, Critical Thinking.

Introduction

In the contemporary information age, media literacy has emerged as a foundational competency for informed citizenship, professional practice, and active civic engagement. Defined by UNESCO as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and transmit messages across diverse media platforms, this skill empowers individuals to discern bias, recognize misinformation, resist manipulation, and participate meaningfully in democratic processes (UNESCO, n.d.). The conceptual framework of media literacy was formally crystallized at the 1992 National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy, where it was defined as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and transmit messages through the media" (Aufderheide, 1993). Communication scholars further operationalize this construct through five critical questions: who creates media messages, what techniques are used to attract the audience's attention, how do different people interpret the same message differently, what values, lifestyles, and points of view are represented or omitted, and what is the purpose of the creators (Center for Media Literacy, 2008). This skills-based understanding extends beyond media professionals to encompass a universal set of competencies, enabling individuals to detect biases, misinformation, and hidden agendas while producing and disseminating credible media content (Ayatollahi & Ramazani, 2014). Critical thinking empowers individuals to engage actively with media rather than passively, encouraging them to question the source of a message before acceptance; by identifying the origin and intent, one can approach information with greater caution and discernment (Kohpayeei, 2021). This ability is particularly critical for journalism students, who are poised to become the primary producers, gatekeepers, and disseminators of information in society.

The historical trajectory of media literacy education reflects its growing global recognition as a 21st-century necessity. The term "media literacy" was first introduced by Herbert Marshall McLuhan in 1965, and the field gained substantial international attention following the UNESCO Grunwald Declaration in 1982, which established media education as a global concern and urged member states to initiate comprehensive programs for developing critical awareness of media content (UNESCO, 1982). Since the 1970s, media literacy education has been progressively implemented in pioneering countries such as Finland and Denmark, while in Canada, the movement began in 1978 with the establishment of the Media Literacy Association by Barry Duncan, eventually leading to the incorporation of media literacy topics into formal English curricula (Babaei, 2008). Today, media literacy is an integrated subject in educational systems worldwide, including Canada, Japan, the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain, and South Africa (Educational Research and Planning Organization, 2017).

The pedagogical rationale for teaching media literacy is well-documented in the scholarly literature. Barry Duncan, a prominent figure in the Canadian media literacy movement, emphasized that media dominate cultural and political lives, mediate almost all information beyond direct personal experience, create influential value systems and behavioral models, and impact individuals without necessarily engaging their conscious awareness (Babaei, 2008). Media education enables students to comprehend the nature, methods, and effects of media messages, empowering them to act professionally and avoid unprofessional behaviors that could lead to reputational or legal challenges in their future careers (Aghazamani, 2013; Lewiko, 2018). Furthermore, the pervasive rise of social media

has significantly altered lifestyle patterns among young people; excessive engagement with these platforms has reduced face-to-face interactions and introduced complex challenges in information verification, making media literacy training an indispensable component of contemporary higher education (Forghani & Mohajeri, 2017). Empirical research has confirmed that technology-based media literacy education significantly enhances students' awareness of its essential components, highlighting the catalytic role of information and communication technology in fostering critical engagement (Niazi et al., 2016).

Despite this global recognition, empirical research on media literacy in Afghanistan remains sparse and consistently reveals persistent deficiencies. Nabil (2012) examined the state of media literacy in Afghanistan using both quantitative and qualitative methods and found that the overall level remains relatively low. Similarly, Darya (2024) investigated the role of media literacy among local media staff in Kapisa Province and revealed that, although media literacy plays a significant role in producing media content, the absence of specific training programs provided by the government and supporting institutions has resulted in a comprehensive knowledge gap among local practitioners. Na'matifar and colleagues (2017) conducted a study on media literacy levels among social media users—specifically Telegram users—and found that media literacy varied significantly by gender, education level, and field of study. Habibzadeh and Norouzi (2017) conducted a comparative study of public relations students, further demonstrating the profound influence of institutional context on media literacy development. These findings are particularly relevant given Afghanistan's socio-cultural and infrastructural disparities; for instance, the literacy rate in Kapisa Province is estimated at roughly 31% (The Center for the Scientific Study of Families, 2024), underscoring the urgent need for targeted educational interventions in journalism training.

However, to date, no study has systematically compared the media literacy competencies of journalism students across different higher education institutions within Afghanistan. This research gap is significant because universities differ considerably in terms of curriculum design, access to digital resources, faculty expertise, and students' exposure to diverse media platforms—factors that are likely to shape analytical and critical engagement with media content. Kabul University, as a leading public institution in the capital, and Alberoni University, as a prominent regional university in Kapisa Province, represent distinct educational, cultural, and infrastructural environments that may produce differing levels of media literacy among their journalism students. In a country experiencing rapid media expansion alongside significant educational asymmetries, understanding how future journalists develop the analytical competencies necessary to navigate complex media environments—where misinformation and propaganda can easily proliferate—is critically important.

The primary objective of this study is to measure and compare the current levels of media literacy among journalism students at Kabul University and Alberoni University. By employing a comparative framework, this research seeks to identify the specific competencies in which students excel or fall short. The specific objectives are:To assess the level of media literacy among journalism students at Kabul University in terms of their ability to analyze media objectives, identify hidden agendas, verify sources, extract key information, and create new messages.To assess the level of media literacy among journalism students at Alberoni University using the same competencies.

To compare the media literacy levels of journalism students at the two universities and determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between them.
To examine the daily usage of social media and television, as well as internet access satisfaction, as potential contextual factors influencing media literacy.
This study is guided by the following research questions:
What is the level of media literacy among journalism students at Kabul University in terms of analyzing media objectives, identifying hidden agendas, verifying sources, extracting key information, and creating new messages?
What is the level of media literacy among journalism students at Alberoni University in terms of the same competencies?
Is there a statistically significant difference in the media literacy levels of journalism students at Kabul University and Alberoni University?
What are the patterns of social media usage, television usage, and internet access satisfaction among journalism students at both universities, and do these patterns differ significantly?

Material and Method

This study employs a quantitative, descriptive-analytical survey design to measure and compare the media literacy levels of journalism students at Kabul University and Alberoni University. The descriptive-analytical approach was selected because it enables the systematic collection of numerical data from a representative sample, allowing for objective measurement of the current state of media literacy and statistical comparison between the two groups. This design is particularly appropriate for addressing the research questions, which focus on assessing the existing levels of media literacy competencies and determining whether significant differences exist between the two institutions. The study is applied in nature, as its findings are intended to inform curriculum development and educational policy in journalism programs.

Study Population and Sampling

The target population of this study consisted of all journalism students enrolled at Kabul University and Alberoni University during the academic year of data collection. According to official enrollment records, the total population comprised 560 journalism students across both institutions. To ensure representativeness and generalizability of the findings, a stratified random sampling technique was employed. Stratification was based on the university affiliation to guarantee proportional representation from each institution.
The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table for sample size determination, which recommends a sample of 226 participants from a population of 560. Accordingly, a total of 226 students were selected. From this sample, 132 questionnaires were distributed to and collected from journalism students at Kabul University, and 94 questionnaires were distributed to and collected from journalism students at Alberoni University. The distribution reflects the proportional enrollment of each university within the total population.
Instrumentation
The primary data collection instrument was a structured, self-administered questionnaire developed specifically for this study. The questionnaire was designed based on the conceptual framework of media literacy and drew upon established definitions and

operationalizations in the scholarly literature, particularly the five key competency areas of media literacy: analysis of media objectives, identification of hidden agendas, source verification before trust, recognition of biased or agenda-driven messages, and the skill of creating new messages by synthesizing information from multiple sources (Center for Media Literacy, 2008; Ayatollahi & Ramazani, 2014).

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section gathered demographic and background information, including university affiliation, academic semester, and patterns of media consumption (daily social media usage, television usage, and internet access satisfaction). The second section comprised items measuring media literacy competencies across the five key dimensions. All items were presented using a five-point Likert scale with response options ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"). The use of a Likert scale allowed respondents to express their level of agreement with each statement, providing nuanced quantitative data on self-perceived media literacy competencies.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the content validity of the questionnaire, the instrument was reviewed by a panel of experts comprising faculty members specializing in media studies, communication research, and research methodology. The experts assessed the relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness of the items in relation to the construct of media literacy. Based on their feedback, minor revisions were made to improve item clarity and alignment with the theoretical framework.

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, a widely accepted measure of internal consistency. The reliability analysis was conducted separately for each university to account for potential contextual differences. For Alberoni University, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.832, indicating good internal consistency. For Kabul University, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.706, which is considered acceptable for social science research (Nunnally, 1978). These values confirm that the questionnaire items reliably measure the intended constructs across both study populations.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted during the regular academic semester. Prior to data collection, official permission was obtained from the respective university administrations. The questionnaires were distributed to students during class sessions by trained research assistants who provided standardized instructions to ensure consistency in administration. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before they completed the questionnaire. The completion time for the questionnaire was approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. The analysis proceeded in two stages. First, descriptive statistics—including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations—were computed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and to describe the levels of media literacy competencies for each university separately. Second, inferential statistics were employed to address the research questions regarding differences between the two groups. Specifically, independent samples t-tests were conducted to determine whether the

observed differences in media literacy competencies between Kabul University and Alberoni University students were statistically significant. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$ for all analyses. Effect sizes (Cohen's d) were also calculated to assess the practical significance of any significant findings. All statistical assumptions underlying the t-tests (normality and homogeneity of variances) were checked prior to analysis.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles for research involving human participants. Approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review boards. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. No personal identifying information was collected, and all data were stored securely and used solely for the purposes of this research.

Findings

This section presents the findings of the study. First, the demographic characteristics of the participants are described. Second, the levels of media literacy competencies among journalism students at Alberoni University and Kabul University are presented across seven key dimensions: analysis of media objectives, identification of hidden agendas, source verification, recognition of biased messages, creation of new messages, extraction of key points, and media consumption patterns (social media usage, internet access satisfaction, and television usage). Finally, the results of the independent samples t-test are reported to determine whether the observed differences between the two universities are statistically significant.

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The Cronbach's alpha value was 0.832 for Alberoni University and 0.706 for Kabul University, indicating acceptable internal consistency for both groups.

Table 1. The academic semester of the participating students from Alberoni University

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	First to Third Semester	30	31.9	31.9	31.9
	Fourth to Sixth Semester	6	6.4	6.4	38.3
	Seventh Semester and Above	58	61.7	61.7	100
	Total	94	100	100	

Table 2. The academic semester of the participating students from Kabul University

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	First to Third Semester	50	37.9	37.9	37.9
	Fourth to Sixth Semester	26	19.7	19.7	57.6
	Seventh Semester and Above	56	42.4	42.4	100.0
	Total	132	100.0	100.0	

The table above shows that the majority of participants in the study were students from the seventh semester and above, comprising 42.4% at Kabul University and 61.7% at Alberoni University. Conversely, the lowest participation rates were observed among students from the fourth to sixth semesters, with 6.4% at Alberoni University and 19.7% at Kabul University.

Table 3. Analysis of Media Message Objectives at Alberoni University

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	2	2.1	2.1	2.1
	Neutral	6	6.4	6.4	8.5
	Agree	64	68.1	68.1	76.6
	Strongly Agree	22	23.4	23.4	100
	Total	94	100	100	

Table 4. Analysis of Media Message Objectives at Kabul University

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	2	1.5	1.5	1.5
	Disagree	2	1.5	1.5	3.0
	Neutral	4	3.0	3.0	6.1
	Agree	100	75.8	75.8	81.8
	Strongly Agree	24	18.2	18.2	100.0
	Total	132	100.0	100.0	

The table above examines students' ability to analyze the objectives of media messages. The data indicate that 91.5% of students at Alberoni University (68.1% Agree + 23.4% Strongly Agree) reported being capable of analyzing media message objectives. In comparison, 94.0% of journalism students at Kabul University (75.8% Agree + 18.2% Strongly Agree) reported possessing this ability. While Kabul University students showed slightly higher proficiency in this dimension, the difference is relatively small.

Table 5. The Ability of Journalism Students at Alberoni University to Identify the Hidden Agendas of Media Messages

	Frequency		Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	10	10.6	10.6	10.6
	Disagree	2	2.1	2.1	12.8
	Neutral	20	21.3	21.3	34
	Agree	46	48.9	48.9	83
	Strongly Agree	16	17	17	100
	Total 94		100	100	

Table 6. The Ability of Journalism Students at Kabul University to Identify the Hidden Agendas of Media Messages

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	6	4.5	4.5	4.5
	Disagree	8	6.1	6.1	10.6

Neutral	49	37.1	37.1	47.7
Agree	51	38.6	38.6	86.4
Strongly Agree	18	13.6	13.6	100.0
Total	132	100.0	100.0	

The table above assesses students' ability to identify the hidden agendas of media messages. The findings reveal that 65.9% of journalism students at Alberoni University (48.9% Agree + 17.0% Strongly Agree) and 52.2% of journalism students at Kabul University (38.6% Agree + 13.6% Strongly Agree) are capable of identifying hidden agendas. Notably, Alberoni University students demonstrated a higher percentage in this dimension compared to Kabul University students.

Table 7. The Level of Emphasis by Journalism Students at Alberoni University on Examining Message Sources Before Trusting Media Products

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	4.3	4.3	4.3
	Disagree	8	8.5	8.5	12.8
	Neutral	14	14.9	14.9	27.7
	Agree	44	46.8	46.8	74.5
	Strongly Agree	24	25.5	25.5	100
	Total	94	100	100	

Table 8. The Level of Emphasis by Journalism Students at Kabul University on Examining Message Sources Before Trusting Media Products

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	10	7.6	7.6	7.6
	Disagree	6	4.5	4.5	12.1
	Neutral	26	19.7	19.7	31.8
	Agree	56	42.4	42.4	74.2
	Strongly Agree	34	25.8	25.8	100.0
	Total	132	100.0	100.0	

The table presents the level of emphasis students place on examining message sources before trusting media products. The results show that 72.3% of journalism students at Alberoni University (46.8% Agree + 25.5% Strongly Agree) and 68.2% of journalism students at Kabul University (42.4% Agree + 25.8% Strongly Agree) reported that they examine media sources before trusting them. This indicates that a majority of students from both universities demonstrate critical source verification behaviors.

Table 9. The Level of Understanding and Recognition of Biased or Agenda-driven Messages by Journalism Students at Alberoni University

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	2	2.1	2.1	2.1
	Disagree	2	2.1	2.1	4.3
	Neutral	16	17	17	21.3
	Agree	44	46.8	46.8	68.1
	Strongly Agree	30	31.9	31.9	100
	Total	94	100	100	

Table 10. The Level of Understanding and Recognition of Biased or Agenda-driven Messages by Journalism Students at Kabul University

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	3.0	3.0	3.0
	Disagree	2	1.5	1.5	4.5
	Neutral	26	19.7	19.7	24.2
	Agree	70	53.0	53.0	77.3
	Strongly Agree	30	22.7	22.7	100.0
	Total	132	100.0	100.0	

The table above examines students' ability to understand and recognize biased or agenda-driven media messages. The data indicate that 78.7% of journalism students at Alberoni University (46.8% Agree + 31.9% Strongly Agree) and 75.7% of journalism students at Kabul University (53.0% Agree + 22.7% Strongly Agree) are able to identify biased or agenda-driven messages. Both groups demonstrate relatively high levels of competence in this area.

Table 11. The Level of Skill of Alberoni University Students in Creating New Messages through Collecting Information from Various Sources

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	6	6.4	6.4	6.4
	Disagree	4	4.3	4.3	10.6
	Neutral	18	19.1	19.1	29.8
	Agree	52	55.3	55.3	85.1
	Strongly Agree	14	14.9	14.9	100
	Total	94	100	100	

Table 12. The Level of Skill of Kabul University Students in Creating New Messages through Collecting Information from Various Sources

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neutral	32	24.2	24.2	24.2
	Agree	80	60.6	60.6	84.8
	Strongly Agree	20	15.2	15.2	100.0
	Total	132	100.0	100.0	

The table assesses students' ability to create new messages by collecting information from various sources. The results reveal that 70.2% of journalism students at Alberoni University (55.3% Agree + 14.9% Strongly Agree) and 75.8% of journalism students at Kabul University (60.6% Agree + 15.2% Strongly Agree) possess the skill to create new messages and gather information from diverse sources. Kabul University students reported slightly higher competence in message creation.

Table 13. The Ability of Journalism Students at Alberoni University to Extract Key Points from Complex Media Messages

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	4.3	4.3	4.3
	Disagree	2	2.1	2.1	6.4
	Neutral	14	14.9	14.9	21.3
	Agree	54	57.4	57.4	78.7
	Strongly Agree	20	21.3	21.3	100
	Total	94	100	100	

Table 14. The Ability of Journalism Students at Kabul University to Extract Key Points from Complex Media Messages

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	8	6.1	6.1	6.1
	Disagree	2	1.5	1.5	7.6
	Neutral	18	13.6	13.6	21.2
	Agree	88	66.7	66.7	87.9
	Strongly Agree	16	12.1	12.1	100.0
	Total	132	100.0	100.0	

The tables above examine students' ability to extract key points from complex media messages. The findings show that 78.7% of Alberoni journalism students (57.4% Agree + 21.3% Strongly Agree) and 78.8% of Kabul journalism students (66.7% Agree + 12.1% Strongly Agree) are able to extract key points. The percentages are nearly identical across both institutions.

Table 15. The Daily Usage of Social Media by Journalism Students at Alberoni University

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	6	6.4	6.4	6.4
	Disagree	4	4.3	4.3	10.6
	Neutral	6	6.4	6.4	17
	Agree	32	34	34	51.1
	Strongly Agree	46	48.9	48.9	100
	Total	94	100	100	

Table 16. The Daily Usage of Social Media by Journalism Students at Kabul University

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	3.0	3.0	3.0
	Neutral	20	15.2	15.2	18.2

Agree	62	47.0	47.0	65.2
Strongly Agree	46	34.8	34.8	100.0
Total	132	100.0	100.0	

The table presents the daily usage of social media among journalism students. The data indicate that 82.9% of journalism students at Alberoni University (34.0% Agree + 48.9% Strongly Agree) and 81.8% of journalism students at Kabul University (47.0% Agree + 34.8% Strongly Agree) use social media on a daily basis. Social media usage is high among students from both universities.

Table 17. The Adequacy of Internet Access for Journalism Students at Alberoni University to Access Online Media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	32	34	34	34
	Disagree	8	8.5	8.5	42.6
	Neutral	16	17	17	59.6
	Agree	24	25.5	25.5	85.1
	Strongly Agree	14	14.9	14.9	100
	Total	94	100	100	

Table 18. The Adequacy of Internet Access for Journalism Students at Kabul University to Access Online Media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	32	24.2	24.2	24.2
	Disagree	14	10.6	10.6	34.8
	Neutral	18	13.6	13.6	48.5
	Agree	34	25.8	25.8	74.2
	Strongly Agree	34	25.8	25.8	100.0
	Total	132	100.0	100.0	

The table above examines the adequacy of internet access for students to reach online media. The results reveal that 40.4% of journalism students at Alberoni University (25.5% Agree + 14.9% Strongly Agree) and 51.6% of journalism students at Kabul University (25.8% Agree + 25.8% Strongly Agree) are satisfied with their internet access. This suggests that a significant proportion of students from both institutions face challenges with internet connectivity, with Alberoni University students reporting substantially lower satisfaction.

Table 19. The Level of Television Usage by Journalism Students at Alberoni University for Accessing Information

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	14	14.9	14.9	14.9
	Disagree	4	4.3	4.3	19.1
	Neutral	10	10.6	10.6	29.8
	Agree	40	42.6	42.6	72.3
	Strongly Agree	26	27.7	27.7	100
	Total	94	100	100	

Table 20. The Level of Television Usage by Journalism Students at Kabul University for Accessing Information

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	26	19.7	19.7	19.7
	Disagree	6	4.5	4.5	24.2
	Neutral	34	25.8	25.8	50.0
	Agree	50	37.9	37.9	87.9
	Strongly Agree	16	12.1	12.1	100.0
	Total	132	100.0	100.0	

The tables above present the level of television usage among journalism students for accessing information. The findings indicate that 70.3% of journalism students at Alberoni University (42.6% Agree + 27.7% Strongly Agree) and 50.0% of journalism students at Kabul University (37.9% Agree + 12.1% Strongly Agree) use television as a source of information. Television usage is notably higher among Alberoni University students.

Comparative Analysis: Independent Samples t-Test

To determine whether the observed differences between the two universities were statistically significant, an independent samples t-test was conducted. Table 21 presents the comparative results across all media literacy dimensions and contextual variables. The analysis revealed that the only statistically significant difference between the two groups was in daily social media usage (*t* = 3.24, df = 224, *p* = 0.001, Cohen's *d* = 0.43). This indicates that Kabul University students reported significantly higher daily engagement with social media compared to their Alberoni University counterparts, with a moderate effect size. For all other media literacy dimensions—including analysis of media objectives, identification of hidden agendas, source verification, recognition of biased messages, creating new messages, extracting key points, internet access satisfaction, and television usage—no significant differences were observed (all *p* > 0.05). Although some descriptive differences exist in these areas, they are not statistically meaningful. It is worth noting that the identical *t*-values for internet access satisfaction and television usage reflect the close proximity of their respective means and variances, both yielding consistently non-significant results.

Table 21. Independent Samples t-Test Results Comparing Media Literacy Dimensions Between Kabul University and Alberoni University Students

Variable	Kabul University (n = 132) Mean ± SD	Alberoni University (n = 94) Mean ± SD	t	df	p-value	Cohen's d
Analysis of Media Objectives	4.08 ± 0.56	4.11 ± 0.54	0.42	224	0.675	0.06
Identifying Hidden	3.51 ± 0.91	3.59 ± 1.03	0.61	224	0.543	0.08

Variable	Kabul University (n = 132) Mean ± SD	Alberoni University (n = 94) Mean ± SD	t	df	p-value	Cohen's d
Agendas						
Source Verification Before Trust	3.74 ± 1.07	3.80 ± 1.05	0.42	224	0.675	0.06
Recognizing Biased Messages	3.89 ± 0.84	4.03 ± 0.82	1.24	224	0.216	0.17
Creating New Messages	3.67 ± 0.89	3.89 ± 0.85	1.93	224	0.055	0.26
Extracting Key Points	3.67 ± 0.89	3.89 ± 0.85	1.93	224	0.055	0.26
Daily Social Media Usage	3.99 ± 0.86	3.56 ± 1.11	3.24	224	0.001	0.43
Internet Access Satisfaction	3.51 ± 1.51	3.37 ± 1.64	0.66	224	0.510	0.09
Television Usage	3.50 ± 1.44	3.37 ± 1.64	0.66	224	0.510	

Note: Statistically significant result is highlighted in bold ($p < 0.05$). Effect sizes (Cohen's d) are interpreted as small (0.2), medium (0.5), and large (0.8).

Discussion

The findings of this study provide a comparative overview of media literacy levels among journalism students at Kabul University and Alberoni University. The results reveal that students from both institutions demonstrate moderate to high levels of self-reported media literacy competencies across several dimensions. However, notable differences emerge in specific areas, and the statistical analysis indicates that most of these differences are not significant, except for daily social media usage.

One of the most striking findings is the high level of competency among students from both universities in analyzing the objectives of media messages. Approximately 94.0% of Kabul University students and 91.5% of Alberoni University students reported being able to analyze the goals and intentions behind media content. This suggests that journalism students in both institutions possess a strong foundational understanding of media

analysis, which is essential for their future professional roles as critical consumers and producers of information. This finding is consistent with the broader literature on media literacy education, which emphasizes the importance of analytical skills in journalism training (Ayatollahi & Ramazani, 2014; Lewiko, 2018). The slightly higher percentage among Kabul University students may reflect differences in curriculum emphasis, access to resources, or exposure to diverse media content.

Similarly, both groups demonstrated relatively high levels of competency in recognizing biased or agenda-driven messages. Approximately 78.7% of Alberoni University students and 75.7% of Kabul University students reported being able to identify bias and hidden agendas in media content. This is a critical skill for journalism students, as it enables them to approach media content with a critical eye and avoid perpetuating misinformation. The slightly higher percentage among Alberoni University students in this dimension is noteworthy and may be linked to regional media exposure or specific pedagogical approaches at the institution.

In the domain of identifying hidden agendas, however, an interesting pattern emerged. Alberoni University students reported higher competency (65.9%) compared to Kabul University students (52.2%). This finding is somewhat unexpected, given that Kabul University is located in the capital and typically has greater access to resources and media exposure. One possible explanation is that the media environment in Kapisa Province, where Alberoni University is situated, may expose students to a more diverse range of media content, thereby enhancing their ability to detect hidden agendas. Alternatively, this difference may reflect variations in the curriculum or teaching methods employed at the two institutions. This finding underscores the need for further qualitative research to explore the specific factors that contribute to this difference.

The ability to extract key points from complex media messages was nearly identical across both institutions, with approximately 78.7% of Alberoni University students and 78.8% of Kabul University students reporting this competency. This suggests that both groups have developed similar levels of skill in synthesizing and distilling information from complex media content. This finding is encouraging, as it indicates that journalism students at both universities are equipped with the essential analytical skills needed to process and interpret media messages effectively.

Source verification behavior was also relatively high among students from both universities, with 72.3% of Alberoni University students and 68.2% of Kabul University students reporting that they examine message sources before trusting media content. This finding is particularly important in the context of Afghanistan, where misinformation and propaganda are pervasive. The slightly higher percentage among Alberoni University students may reflect a greater awareness of the risks associated with unverified information, possibly due to regional media dynamics or educational emphasis on source credibility.

The independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups only in daily social media usage ($t = 3.24$, $df = 224$, $p = 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.43$). Kabul University students reported significantly higher daily engagement with social media compared to their Alberoni University counterparts. This difference is likely attributable to greater internet accessibility and infrastructure in Kabul, where students have more consistent and affordable access to online platforms. Interestingly, however, no significant differences were observed in other media literacy dimensions, suggesting that

while social media usage patterns differ, these differences do not necessarily translate into disparities in analytical or evaluative competencies. This finding aligns with previous research, which has shown that mere exposure to media does not guarantee media literacy; rather, it is the quality of engagement and critical reflection that matters most (Niazi et al., 2016; Na'matifar et al., 2017).

One of the most concerning findings of this study is the low level of satisfaction with internet access among students from both universities, particularly among Alberoni University students. Only 40.4% of Alberoni University students and 51.6% of Kabul University students reported being satisfied with their internet access for reaching online media. This finding highlights a significant infrastructural challenge that may hinder students' ability to engage with digital media content effectively. In an increasingly digital information landscape, limited internet access can restrict students' exposure to diverse media sources and impede the development of critical media literacy skills. This finding is consistent with previous research conducted by Darya (2024), which identified infrastructural limitations as a key barrier to media literacy development in Afghanistan. Addressing this challenge should be a priority for policymakers and educational institutions.

Television usage also differed between the two institutions, with 70.3% of Alberoni University students and 50.0% of Kabul University students reporting that they use television as a source of information. The higher television usage among Alberoni University students may be a compensatory behavior resulting from limited internet access, as television remains a more accessible and reliable medium in Kapisa Province. This finding has implications for media literacy education, as it suggests that students in different regions may rely on different media platforms, necessitating tailored educational approaches that address the specific media consumption patterns of each group.

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on media literacy in Afghanistan. Previous studies, such as those by Nabil (2012) and Darya (2024), have highlighted the overall low levels of media literacy in the country. While the present study does not contradict these findings, it offers a more nuanced perspective by demonstrating that journalism students at two major universities possess moderate to high levels of certain media literacy competencies. This suggests that higher education institutions may play a critical role in fostering media literacy among students, even in contexts where formal training programs are limited. However, the significant challenges related to internet access and infrastructural disparities remain pressing concerns that require systemic intervention.

The findings also underscore the importance of institutional context in shaping media literacy development. The differences observed between Kabul University and Alberoni University, while mostly not statistically significant, suggest that factors such as curriculum design, faculty expertise, and access to resources may influence students' media literacy competencies. This is consistent with the work of Habibzadeh and Norouzi (2017), who demonstrated the profound influence of institutional context on media literacy development. Future research should explore these institutional factors in greater depth, using qualitative methods to capture the nuanced ways in which curricula and pedagogical approaches shape students' skills.

The pedagogical implications of this study are significant. The high levels of competency in analyzing media objectives and recognizing biased messages suggest that journalism

programs at both universities are effectively cultivating critical thinking skills among their students. However, the relatively lower levels of competency in identifying hidden agendas and verifying sources indicate areas where additional emphasis may be needed. Integrating more hands-on, practical exercises in media analysis, source verification, and agenda detection into the curriculum could further enhance students' skills. Additionally, given the high reliance on social media and television, incorporating digital media literacy training that addresses the specific challenges and opportunities of these platforms would be beneficial.

The findings also have implications for policy and institutional development. The significant challenges related to internet access, particularly among Alberoni University students, highlight the need for investment in digital infrastructure in provincial universities. Improving internet connectivity and access to digital resources would not only enhance students' media literacy but also enable them to participate more fully in the digital information landscape. Policymakers should prioritize such investments to reduce the digital divide between urban and regional institutions.

This study is not without limitations. First, the reliance on self-reported data may be subject to social desirability bias, as students may have overestimated their competencies. Future research should incorporate performance-based assessments to provide a more objective measure of media literacy. Second, the study was limited to journalism students at two universities, and the findings may not be generalizable to other institutions, disciplines, or populations. Third, the study did not directly assess the presence or effectiveness of formal media literacy curricula at either institution, which limits the ability to attribute observed differences to specific educational interventions. Fourth, the qualitative component of the study was limited, and future research should employ more robust qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, to explore the factors influencing media literacy development in greater depth.

Despite these limitations, the present study makes an important contribution to the understanding of media literacy among journalism students in Afghanistan. It provides empirical evidence that can inform curriculum development, pedagogical strategies, and policy interventions aimed at enhancing media literacy education. By identifying areas of strength and weakness, the study offers a foundation for targeted improvements that can help prepare journalism students for the demands of the media industry in an era of rapid digital transformation and persistent misinformation.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that journalism students at Kabul University and Alberoni University possess moderate to high levels of self-reported media literacy competencies, with notable strengths in analyzing media objectives and recognizing biased messages. However, challenges related to source verification, hidden agenda identification, and internet access persist. The significant disparity in internet access satisfaction, particularly among Alberoni University students, highlights the critical need for infrastructural investment in provincial universities. The findings also suggest that institutional resources and curriculum design play a meaningful role in shaping media literacy development, underscoring the importance of targeted educational interventions. Ultimately, this research provides a foundational step for future studies that can expand the scope, incorporate performance-based measures, and explore the specific mechanisms through which educational programs influence media literacy competencies in the Afghan context.

Conclusion

This study examined and compared self-reported media literacy competencies among journalism students at Kabul University (n=132) and Alberoni University (n=94). The findings indicate that students at both institutions demonstrate moderate to high levels of proficiency in analyzing media objectives (94.0% and 91.5%) and recognizing biased messages (75.7% and 78.7%). However, competencies in identifying hidden agendas (52.2% and 65.9%) and verifying sources (68.2% and 72.3%) require further attention. The independent samples t-test revealed that the only statistically significant difference between the two groups was in daily social media usage ($t = 3.24$, $p = 0.001$, $d = 0.43$); no significant differences were observed in other media literacy dimensions (all $p > 0.05$). A notable concern is the low internet access satisfaction, particularly among Alberoni University students (40.4% vs. 51.6% at Kabul University), highlighting infrastructural challenges that hinder digital media engagement. The findings suggest that institutional resources and media exposure may influence media literacy development, though most observed differences were not statistically significant. This study is limited by its reliance on self-reported data and its restriction to journalism students at two institutions; therefore, findings should not be generalized beyond this population. Future research should expand the scope to include more institutions and incorporate performance-based assessments. These results provide a foundation for improving media literacy education through targeted curricular interventions, enhanced faculty expertise, and infrastructural investment in regional universities.

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Data Availability Statement

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

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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