



Media Literacy and Fake News: Bangladesh Perspective*

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 [10.15408/jch.v10i2.25921](https://doi.org/10.15408/jch.v10i2.25921)

Abstract

Social media have become an integral element of modern life. Internet accessibility has boosted the public's engagement in computer-controlled official and informal activities. However, many information sources contain unsupported, inaccurate, and erroneous material. In this circumstance, media literacy is a significant phenomenon in developing and non-developing nations. Due to the misuse of social media and lack of media literacy in Bangladesh, some unexpected communal acts of violence happened during the past decade. This study intends to emphasize, from a Bangladeshi viewpoint, the significance of media literacy in reducing rumors, misinformation, disinformation, and fake news. Using descriptive research methodologies, more than forty secondary data sources from Bengali, English, Russian, Indonesian, and Turkish literature, such as research papers, reports, news stories, publications, books, and theses, have been examined. In order to combat misinformation, rumors, fake news, and yellow journalism in developing nations like Bangladesh, where literacy rates are still low, it is imperative to increase media literacy levels. In this regard, governments and non-governmental groups should work collaboratively to fix the deficiencies in this process.

Keywords: Media literacy; Fake news; Digitization; Social media; Bangladesh

* Received: March 10, 2022, revised: April 11, 2022, accepted: April 20, 2022, Published: August 25, 2022.

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Literasi Media dan Berita Palsu: Perspektif Bangladesh

Abstrak

Media sosial saat ini telah menjadi bagian penting dari kehidupan sehari-hari. Sebagai hasil dari ketersediaan internet, partisipasi masyarakat dalam kegiatan formal atau informal yang dikendalikan komputer telah meningkat. Namun, banyak sumber informasi yang membawa informasi yang tidak berdasar, menyesatkan, dan palsu. Oleh karenanya, literasi media dapat memainkan peran penting di negara berkembang dan tidak berkembang. Sayangnya, selama beberapa dekade terakhir, beberapa kekerasan komunal yang tidak terduga telah terjadi karena penyalahgunaan media sosial dan kurangnya literasi media di Bangladesh. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyoroti pentingnya literasi media untuk mengurangi rumor, misinformasi, disinformasi, dan berita palsu dari perspektif Bangladesh. Metode penelitian dilakukan dengan cara menyelidiki lebih dari 40 sumber data sekunder dari literatur Bengali, Inggris, dan Turki, termasuk makalah penelitian, laporan, artikel berita, publikasi baru, buku, dan tesis dengan menggunakan metode penelitian deskriptif; selain itu, makalah studi ini ditulis dalam bahasa Bengali, Inggris, dan Turki. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa peningkatan tingkat literasi media adalah kebutuhan mendesak untuk mengatasi informasi yang salah, rumor, berita palsu, dan jurnalisme kuning di negara berkembang seperti Bangladesh, di mana tingkat melek huruf masih turun. Dalam situasi ini, organisasi non-pemerintah dan pemerintah harus bekerja sama untuk mengatasi kekurangan dalam proses ini.

Kata Kunci: Literasi media; Berita Palsu; Digitalisasi; Media sosial; Bangladesh

Медиаграмотность и фейковые новости: Бангладеш Перспектива

Абстрактный

Социальные сети стали неотъемлемым элементом современной жизни. Доступность Интернета способствовала вовлечению общественности в контролируемую компьютером официальную и неформальную деятельность. Однако многие источники информации содержат неподтвержденный, неточный и ошибочный материал. В этих обстоятельствах медиаграмотность является значительным явлением в развивающихся и неразвивающихся странах. Из-за неправильного использования социальных сетей и отсутствия медийной грамотности в Бангладеш за последнее десятилетие произошли некоторые неожиданные массовые акты насилия. Это исследование призвано подчеркнуть, с точки зрения Бангладеш, важность медийной грамотности в уменьшении слухов, дезинформации, дезинформации и фейковых новостей. С использованием методологии описательного исследования было изучено более сорока вторичных источников данных из бенгальской, английской, русской, индонезийской и турецкой литературы, таких как исследовательские работы, отчеты, новости, публикации, книги и диссертации. Чтобы бороться с дезинформацией, слухами, фейковыми новостями и желтой журналистикой в таких развивающихся странах, как Бангладеш, где уровень грамотности все еще низок, необходимо повышать уровень грамотности в средствах массовой информации. В связи с этим правительства и неправительственные группы должны совместно работать над устранением недостатков в этом процессе.

Ключевые Слова: медиаграмотность; Фейковые новости; оцифровка; Социальные медиа; Бангладеш

A. INTRODUCTION

The truthful and misleading information are walking side by side from the very beginning of human civilization. In this process, someone has chosen the truth while others have spread misleading information for their advantage. On the other hand, in the ancient period, when people were used to living in caves or cluster villages' true or fake information had stuck within geographical boundaries. However, through the development of web 2.0, presently, information has no barrier, and technologies are getting advanced. The whole world is now occupied by internet-connected mobile phones, which are also deeply connected with social media. The role of media education for understanding public interest communications, according to [Muzykant V., and Shlykova, O. \(2019\)](#), is of primary importance in the formation of a modern educational environment that comprehends schools, colleges, universities as well as libraries, digital archives, digitized museums, circuses, and zoos, etc.

In Bangladesh, as a result of the government's Digital Bangladesh motto, tremendous changes have been happening in communication technology and the digital inclusion process of the country. However, some of the most severe concerns in these relevant regions are fake news, disinformation, and misinformation, which have occasionally caused various socio-political and inter-religion conflicts. As a result, multiple detrimental episodes have occurred in this country like communal tensions in the Ramu case (2012), Sayeedi's face showed on the moon (2013), Nasirnagar Case (2016), sudden price hick in Salt (2019), false child abduction rumor ([Bangladesh lynching, 2019](#)), different false health tips and remedy suggestion regarding COVID 19, and so on. [Rathore & Farooq \(2020\)](#) and [Keelery \(2020\)](#) suggested that the information complexity is high in nations with higher social media penetration rates, including India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Besides, according to [Rahman and Jahan \(2020\)](#), recently, the amount of speculative stories in Bangladesh has increased, such as rumors of the use of human heads on the Padma Bridge, a sudden increase in salt prices, and chele dhora (child abductor) for a variety of reasons using social media such as Facebook, all of which have undermined the country's socio-political environment. From this point of view, we have decided to have an overview of the media literacy scenario in Bangladesh through a descriptive research method. Because these kinds of incidents, which we had referred early, have destroyed harmony and initiated hatred and discrimination in the society. Besides, we need to be clear that "media literacy" is a long-term process that has been gained through appropriate "media education," and its necessity has emerged with the development of media convergence. In addition, media literacy has been deeply connected with humanity's communication growth

process that began with the inauguration of the traditional alphabet and has advanced to include electronic media and digitalized information.

Literature Review

During the scanning process of previous works on media literacy in Bangladesh, we found a few academic types of research regarding the theoretical perspective of media literacy. Although media literacy-related works have become familiar through UNESCO since the 1970s ([Uysal, 2016: 24-25](#)), there is still little systematic research and planning regarding media literacy, news literacy, and digital literacy in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, we have found a few research where media literacy has taken notice of its theoretical background. Research has used the phenomenon "media literacy" but does not include any theoretical discussions. Most of the research has focused on fake news, misinformation, disinformation, and rumor incidents but talked less about media literacy as a theory when suggesting rumor and conspiracy theories to analyze the situations ([Kanozia & Arya, 2021](#); [Al-Zaman, 2021](#); [Hossain et al., 2020](#), [Karim, 2021](#)).

In this circumstance, the first move regarding these issues has taken by MRDI in 2016 ([Chowdhury, 2020:18](#)). That research entitled "News literacy: people's perception" made an effort to examine the citizen's perception of news literacy through these inquiries in a controlled scope, such as what kind of media and media contents are consumed by Bangladeshi People, media's ethic perceptions and child issue treatment of Bangladeshi media.

On the other hand, in 2018, South Asia Center for Media in Development (SACMID) and Free Press Unlimited jointly inaugurated some other initiatives to minimize the gap between the Government, Media, and Civil Society in Bangladesh. They worked with the high school students aged between 14 to 16 and their teachers. SACMID has conducted surveys, arranged round table discussion programs, and shared these outputs with the Bangladesh National Curriculum and Text Book Board (NCTB). Besides, the Bangladesh Prime Ministers Access to Information Program, the Ministry of Education, and the Media Studies and Journalism Department of the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh collaborated in this research. They made the decision to include Media literacy as a topic in a higher secondary school which would be happened in 2020 ([Quarmal, Hasan & Sultana, 2018](#)). The primary restriction of this research is a methodology where a sample of the baseline survey was only secondary school students and their teachers in the Dhaka city of, the country,

and their center of attention was to understand the media profile, which is frequently used by the high school going students of Bangladesh.

Unfortunately, as with many other decisions in Bangladesh, this decision has not been applied yet. Further, in 2020, another research work entitled "News Literacy in Bangladesh: National Survey" was conducted under the supervision of MD Saiful Alam Chowdhury, an Associate Professor at the Department of Mass Communication & Journalism at Dhaka University has been published. This research report is a piece of the "Promoting News Literacy and Ethical Journalism" project, which is being carried out by the Management and Resources Development Initiative (MRDI) with the assistance of UNICEF Bangladesh. This research has followed survey and focus group discussions (FGD) as a research method where face-to-face surveys have been conducted with 18 over-aged groups of 1,209 respondents. Accordingly, 10 FGD have directed for better results. However, the limitation of this report is limiting the age of responders over 18.

[Al-Zaman \(2021\)](#) has conducted a research where he focused on Bangladeshi social media users' reactions to religious disinformation. That study has followed the content analysis method and found two main themes emotion-driven reactions and reason-based reactions towards social media content and disinformation. According to the research findings, users' emotional reactions (62.02%) are more tangible than their thinking skills (37.98%). The limitations of the subject research lie in the data processing and applicability problem of the findings.

[Hossain et al. \(2022\)](#) have researched Bangla News fact-checking tools where they used an annotated dataset of $\approx 50K$ news. Besides, by using traditional linguistic features and neural network-based methods, they have provided an analysis of the dataset and developed a benchmark system with state-of-the-art NLP techniques to identify Bangla fake news.

B. METHODS

This research has been conducted using qualitative data analytics techniques and the case study method. For this purpose, we have been doing a literature review to understand the research area, especially from Bangladesh's perspective. We have analyzed some cases that have a strong relationship between the lack of media literacy, digital literacy, and social media misuse in Bangladesh. During this process, we have identified a lack of enough academic researchers in this field. However, we have aimed to minimize that gap through

this article. Besides, this research can shed light on the importance of these topics in Bangladesh and improve better political policy to spread awareness about this issue. We have scanned and used more than 40 secondary data sources, including research papers, reports, news articles, new publications, books, and theses. The languages of these research works are Bengali, English, Russian, Indonesian, and Turkish. Firstly, we have attempted to provide a brief overview of Bangladesh's digitalization process. Then we have looked at some major occurrences resulting from disinformation and rumor circulated through social media, which resulted in widespread communal violence. We've also included some brief conceptual thoughts on digital, new, and conventional media. We then explored the theoretical underpinning of media literacy and its significance to Bangladeshi societies. In addition, we have attempted to focus on the perspective of fake news in Bangladesh.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Digital Media, New Media and Traditional Media

The massive development of digital technology in the 21st century has brought about a drastic change in the concept of mass media. Digital literacy is the functional skills required to operate and communicate with technology and media. The quantitative indicators of the research by [Muzykant, V., Shlykova, O. \(2019\)](#) proved that the emergence of new media has qualitatively changed both the configuration of the media space and the processes occurring in it. As a result, the two suffixes 'digital media' and 'new media' have emerged. Along with these two trends, mass media's nature and concept have also changed drastically. Thus, the convergence processes have moved into the sphere of media, characterizing changes both in technology and in other areas: economic, spatial, professional, and cultural. As a result, there was a formation of new management techniques for the rapid creation of an original information product to placement in different media environments to further focus the target audience's attention ([Muqsith, 2021](#)). Integrating traditional and New Media is traditionally accompanied by duplication of content. In this situation, a logical question arises before society: what to do with traditional sites gradually losing their relevance in favor of digital media.

The Canadian Center for Digital Media defines digital Media as a combination of technology and content. According to the definition, Digital Media includes e-commerce, games (online, offline), websites and mobile apps, animation, social media, video, virtual reality, data visualization, and so on

[\(Center for Digital Media, 2020\)](#). On the other hand, New Media is a media structure where you have to trust computers to deliver messages. In his book *The New Media Reader*, Manovich (2003:16-23) introduces eight propositions for defining new media. In it, he presents the difference between new media and cyberculture. He called New Media a distribution platform that uses computer technology. New Media is considered a digital data regulator through software. Besides, New Media is a mixture of existing cultural practices and conventional software [\(Manovich, 2003\)](#). Introducing the features of New Media in 2004, Jagadish Chakraborty said that New Media includes some characteristics such as Digital, Interaction, Instant, Hypertextual, Computerized, Networked, and so on [\(Chakravarthy, 2004\)](#). New media types include the Internet, mobile phones, Skype, blogs, video conferencing, wiki, Google, social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), and so on [\(Manjula, 2016\)](#). Of these two concepts, the digital media concept is the largest. As can be seen from the above definition, the concept of new Media belongs to the concept of digital media. For this reason, the digital media suffix has been used in this text.

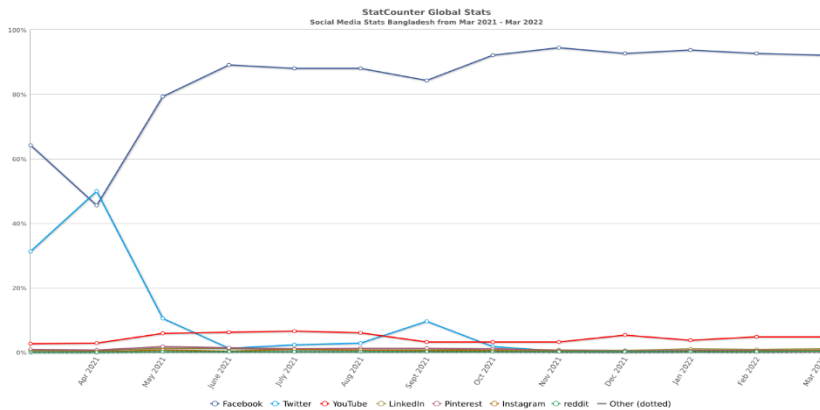
In general, there are two main types of media such as traditional media and digital media. Therefore, traditional media can be divided into print media and broadcast media. Print media includes newspapers, books, magazines, periodicals, booklets, brochures, billboards, small print media leaflets, banners, festoons, and so on [\(Karmakar, Talukdar, Kayyum & Hoque, 2020:19-20\)](#). On the other hand, broadcast media includes television and radio. On the other hand, cinema industries or movies are regarded as a form of traditional media. However, digital media has broader categories of platforms the traditional media. Digital Media includes online media, websites, social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, etc.), e-mail (Yahoo, Gmail), blogs, Vlogs (YouTube, Dtube, Vimeo, Daily Motion, Twitch, etc.), video games, and so on [\(Karmakar, Talukdar, Kayyum & Hoque, 2020:19-20\)](#).

2. Social Media Stats in Bangladesh

According to Kepios's research, the number of people using social media in Bangladesh increased by 4.6 million (+10.1%) from 2021 to 2022. In January 2022, Bangladesh had 49.55 million social media users [\(Kemp, 2022\)](#). Besides, at the beginning of the first month of 2022, social media users accounted for 29.7% of the total population, while Bangladesh's total population reached 167.1 million people in the same period [\(Kemp, 2022\)](#). Accordingly, Bangladesh's internet penetration rate stood at 31.5 percent of the total

population, and the number of internet users has been increasing to 52.58 million. In contrast, the number of mobile phone users is reached 163.3 million. It means that the vast majority of the population can afford a smartphone and that information can flow freely.

However, this information also includes fake news and misinformation. In Bangladesh, Facebook is the most popular social media platform as a messenger; YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Imo are also familiar social media platforms (Statcounter, 2022). In Bangladesh, social media, particularly Facebook, has recently grown in popularity as a convenient venue for disseminating fake news (Karim, 2021:11). Also, Bangladesh has 30 million Facebook users, according to a BTRC estimate from November 2017 (Karim, 2021:11). As a result, Facebook has evolved into a simple instrument for quickly disseminating information with strong positive or negative opinions. A click now has the potential to be both beneficial and harmful. In recent years, fake news has been a major worry in Bangladesh, fueled by technology. According to data from Meta's advertising tools, in early 2022, Bangladesh had 44.70 million Facebook members (Kemp, 2022).



Source: <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/bangladesh>

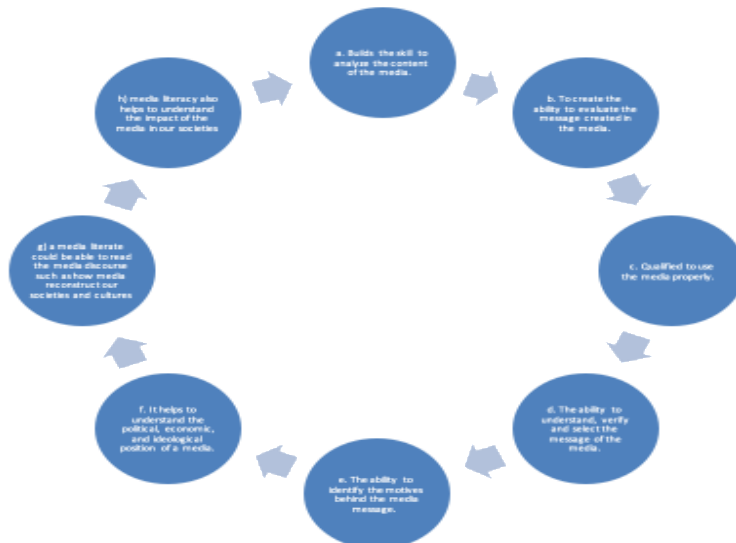
3. Media Literacy and Fake news in Bangladesh

Media literacy refers to analyzing, evaluating, and understanding the message created in traditional media and digital media. With this capability, the process of the news of the media and its impact can be judged (Durur, 2016:15). Media literacy creates some capabilities for the people. These are considered as to how the message created by the media affects our people, how it is shaping society, the reasons behind this construction, and the ability to understand the

political and ideological position of the media organization. According to UNESCO's definition of media literacy, media literacy is a collective capacity through which a citizen qualifies to enter the media, retrieve, understand, evaluate and create content for the media. At the same time, exchange information and create different formats of news using different types of content. One of the goals of media literacy is to provide critical, ethical, and appropriate analysis of the content to create participation and involvement in personal, professional, and social activities ([Uddin, 2018, p. 51](#)).

A media literate person has acquired certain skills and qualifications that help them differentiate true information and news against misleading information, fake news, disinformation, etc. As the most influential organizer of public interest communications processes, the teacher integrates all information flows to and from the audience and generates data flow for the students. We support the position of considering self-design and media competence as necessary characteristics of a modern teacher. Moreover, as [Muzykant V., Shlykova, O. \(2019\)](#) said, these characteristics should be considered a set of knowledge, skills, motivation, and personal qualities that will allow building a new understanding of public interest communications. These skills and qualifications can be referred to as media literacy characteristics. According to [Karmakar, Talukdar, Kayyum, and Hoque \(2020:24\)](#), media literacy characteristics could be consisting of eight abilities.

Diagram of media literacy characteristics (prepared by authors)



Media literacy has a close relationship to the general literacy rate. However, it is fair to presume that in developing nations like Bangladesh, the rate of media literacy is closely linked to society's education level. Furthermore, fake news, misinformation, and disinformation are considered among the most serious concerns in the relevant region's many sociopolitical conflicts. After Warden C. and Derakhshan D.H.'s report on Information Disorder, a new category of 'mal-information' was added to the classification. Namely, information based on reality aimed to harm other people, organizations, or countries, like spreading personal data in cyberspace. Mal-information like this - such as true information that violates a person's privacy without justifying the public interest - is against journalism's standards and ethics ([Muqsith, et al, 2021](#)). The point is that narrative is present in the news, including disinformation, misinformation, and mal-information.

Therefore, the narrative is embedded in what facts are chosen to be highlighted in the news (or what facts are fabricated or taken out of context as misleading communications). Crime news reports, which are not disinformation or the like, may find it relevant to mention the alleged race or nationality of the perpetrator and the victim. Perhaps the fact is that the suspected robber was a migrant and a man, and the victim was a female citizen. As a result, different harmful incidents have happened in this country, including Ramu communal violence, Nasirnagar Case, Sayeedi Rumor, etc. On the other hand, according to [Roy \(2018\)](#), Bangladesh is now ranked 128th in the world in terms of literacy, with 72.8 percent of the population aged 15 and up being literate, compared to the global average of 86 percent. Regarding the most recent data, 24% of persons in Bangladesh aged 15-24 have not completed primary school, and 44% have not completed secondary education. In these circumstances, in a country like Bangladesh, the knowledge of media literacy needs to be disseminated among all classes of people. Examples of some incidents occurred due to the illiteracy of media in Bangladesh.

Incident-1: Ramu Violence

Message/information spread through Facebook Post

Issue: Defaming religion

Description of the incident

Date: September 29, 2012

Location: Ramu Buddhist Village, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Time: 9 pm

Claim:

Uttam Barua, a Buddhist youth, is accused of posting a picture of the demolition of the Qur'an on Facebook.

Ramu unrest includes a series of attacks by regional mobs against Buddhist temples, shrines, and Buddhist residents' homes in Ramu Upazila in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar District on September 29, 2012. In retaliation for an image illustrating the demolition of a Quran that was released on the status of a phony Facebook account with a Buddhist male identity, crowds demolished 12 Buddhist temples and monasteries as well as 50 homes. Buddhist monasteries and Hindu temples were attacked in Ukhia Upazila in Cox's Bazar District and Patiya Upazila in Chittagong District as the violence expanded. Over 300 persons were arrested in connection with the attacks against Buddhists, which involved approximately 25,000 people. However, the accused Buddhist was found innocent.

Source: Rioting mob torches temples in Bangladesh (September 30, 2012). ABC news.

Incident-2: Sayeedi Rumor

Message/information spread through mosque loudspeakers, mobile phone and Facebook

Issue: Politically motivated

Description of the incident

Date: March 2, 2013

Location: Bogra, Bangladesh

Claim:

Rumor spread that Delwar Hossain Sayeedi (one of the Islamic political leaders in Bangladesh who is accused of War Crime in 1971) was hanged by the government and his face had been seen on the moon.

Miscreants falsely claimed that the government had secretly hung Sayeedi and that an image of his face could be seen on the moon after 2 a.m. on March 3, 2013, utilizing mosque loudspeakers and mobile phones.

On the streets, Sayeedi's supporters poured out. Following the Fajr prayer, a mob armed with sticks and sharp weapons attacked and set fire to the

Muktijoddha Sangsad, the train station, police stations, and various government buildings.

In the mayhem unleashed by Jamaat-Shibir officials, workers, and sympathizers, at least 11 people, including women and children, were killed. Following the incident, fifty cases were brought against 1.5 lakh persons in various parts of Bogura.

Source: Bilu (2020). Sayeedi rumour riot hearing drags on. The Business Standard.

Incident-3: Nasirnagar Case

Message/information spread through mosque loudspeakers, mobile phone and Facebook

Issue: Defaming religion

Description of the incident

Date: October 29, 2016

Location: Nasirnagar in Brahmanbaria district, Bangladesh.

Claim:

Rasraj Das, a Hindu youth from Nasirnagar in Brahmanbaria district, has been accused of posting defamatory pictures on Facebook.

Following a rally over an alleged defamatory post by an illiterate Hindu youth, Rasraj Das, on Facebook, around 3,000 angry mobs took part in a series of violent attacks in Hindu areas of Nasirnagar, even though he had apologized to the Muslims the day before, claiming that his account had been hacked. Over a dozen temples and Puja pavilions, as well as more than 100 residences, were damaged in the attacks. The attacks harmed almost 100 persons, many of them were women.

Source: Bilu (2020). Sayeedi rumour riot hearing drags on. The Business Standard.

D. CONCLUSIONS

Media literacy knowledge is essential for all classes of people. Regarding the development of digital media, the need for literacy about the media has become acute. As well as to prevent fake news and misleading information in Bangladesh, media literacy can play a vital role in analyzing the evolution of fake from fake news to deep fake. The Deepfake program uses Google's image search, explores social media websites, and then, on its own, enters data to replace the faces in videos almost flawlessly. Deepfake is not only in the form of

video but also in images, sound, etc. One of the fruitful ways to eliminate the spread of this fake news and misinformation is fact-checking tools. Bangladesh can learn how Indonesian experience to fight the false Information, the Journalist association - AJI is a provider of human resources in fact-checking personnel and concentrates on providing fact-checking training with standardized modules ([Muzykant et al, 2021](#)).

In contrast, MAFINDO, on the other hand, provides technology resources for all the tools needed for CekFakta.com operations. The programmers of Mafindo prepare a website with a special content management system (CMS) called Yudistira. In this regard, Fact-checking tools are an effective technique to combat the spread of fake news and misinformation worldwide. In Bangladesh, there are now many fact-checking organizations that are steadily gaining popularity. On the other hand, fact-checking tools are still complicated for general internet users. In this circumstance, more awareness has been needed to increase fact-checking to enhance media literacy and reduce the spread of misleading and distorted information. This article focused on an overview of situations of media literacy in Bangladesh. Besides, academic contributions and progress regarding this issue have been analyzed. We have limited our research to qualitative research ingredients, which can be a limitation for this study.

Nonetheless, we hope that this research will help the further researcher follow the development of the media literacy situation in Bangladesh. Finally, the study's findings will aid academics in better understanding fake news, media literacy, news literacy, and digital literacy development in Bangladesh perspective. As we noticed, these kinds of works are still new in Bangladesh. There should also be policymakers taking effective measures to control interreligious tensions.

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