

Role of New Media Literacy in Developing Competences for Democratic Culture among University Teachers in Lahore

Amna Amin¹, Prof. Dr. Anjum Zia²

Abstract

The age of digitized information and communication crucially requires understanding the role of new media literacy in the development of competences for democratic culture within the academic landscape. The study investigates the role of new media literacy in empowering university teachers to serve as not merely knowledge transmitters but also the torchbearers for democratic citizenship among students in Lahore. The existing literature exhibits a notable gap in focusing on the educators' role in promoting democratic culture within higher education. Utilizing the theoretical lens of the new media literacy (NML) framework, the study adopts a quantitative approach, conducting a structured survey from a sample of 267 full-time university teachers belonging to media studies and political science departments of various public and private institutions of Lahore. Employing the purposive sampling technique, the study adopts the validated scales for new media literacy (NML) and competences for democratic culture (CDC), derived from the Council of Europe's reference framework. The findings suggest that new media literacy significantly contributes to developing critical perception, political understanding, tolerance, mutual respect, communication skills, emotional intelligence, and intercultural awareness as competencies for democratic culture among university teachers. It offers valuable insights for higher education institutes, curriculum developers, policymakers, and academicians to integrate new media literacy into university level teacher training programs, initiating critical thinking, intercultural understanding, digital citizenship, and participatory communication.

Keywords: New Media Literacy, Competences for Democratic Culture, University Teachers, Purposive Sampling, Survey Method

Introduction

New media is considered to be a massive and significant source for modern democracy to flourish. It has enabled people to access, create, evaluate, and distribute information online and become part of the participatory culture fostering democratic resilience among digital citizens (Garcia et al., 2021). New media refers to a combination

¹ PhD Scholar, School of Media and Communication Studies, University of Management and Technology, Lahore. Email: S2023491007@umt.edu.pk

² Dean, School of Media and Communication Studies, University of Management and Technology, Lahore. Email: anjum.zia@umt.edu.pk

of interactive socio-cultural networked technologies where messages are created digitally and distributed by users (Koc and Barut, 2016).

Democracy is a governance system where citizens have equality to share information, exchange ideas and opinions; encourage dialogue and mutual participation. (Bukhari et al., 2024). The 20 competences of democratic culture defined by the Council of Europe in 2016 help us to understand each other not only on individual level, but more importantly, as communities. They are based on values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding (Rautiainen et al., 2019). Simultaneously, it is essential for individuals to be media literate in order to achieve active digital citizenship within media saturated convergence culture. (Bano et al., 2024).

Education is considered as a crucial component in democratic empowerment (Merry, 2020). As far as the teachers embody democratic culture, they can effectively form democratic citizens (Zembylas et al., 2017). According to the Council of Europe (2016), teaching and learning practices should promote the values and principle of democracy and human rights. This requires the teachers to be competent in developing CDC themselves professionally, becoming politically educated and perceptive to train students in reflection, openness, flexibility, adaptability, civic mindedness, empathy, and tolerance of ambiguity (Shuali et al., 2020). Such competences include interpersonal, pedagogical and psychological, subject relevant or methodological, organizational and intercultural (d'Haenens & Ioris, 2025). Democratic competence is closely connected to the teacher's work in relation to new media literacy which enables them to work cordially and mutually through different digital mediums (Kumar, 2020).

Lahore, as a major urban center having high internet penetration and access to digital media is a sphere of large scale political activities. Students are digitally immersed and frequently consume and share using digital platforms, but very few of them are able to interpret, comprehend or create media content accurately. If provided appropriate guidance or training, they will be better able to navigate complex narratives in the evolutionary democratization of Pakistan. Therefore, it necessitates to educate teachers in new media literacy and competences for democratic culture so that they may guide young learners through critical media analysis, encourage open-mindedness, respectful debate and address the potential risks digitally (Arooj et al., 2019).

University curricula are a crucial concern for incorporating digital or new media literacy highlighting significant gaps in undergraduate Media and Communication programs in Pakistan. The literature suggests that media-oriented courses here often lack digital media literacy approach which serves to be fundamental in pedagogy of media (Jamil et al., 2022). Students while being proficient in media technologies, still does not possess evaluative and ethical skills necessary to critically analyze the digital content (Ross et al., 2022). Integrating new media literacy incorporating concepts like media effects, content creation, and ethical consumption into the university curriculum can prove significant to address these gaps (Kirchhoff, 2022) However, in Pakistan, the

discrepancy between academic curricula and industry needs highlight the urgency of such reforms. As demonstrated by Tatheer et al. (2025), digital media has a democratizing impact on individuals enabling new opportunities for individuals with minimal resources. The digital tools and learning applications are transforming worldwide, yet Pakistani institutions are still adapting them at a slow pace (García-Peñalvo, 2024).

According to Joynes et al (2019), 21st century skills comprehend both functional and critical aspects of communication. It incorporates technical proficiency, collaboration, digital content creation and distribution, active participation, problem-solving, digital citizenship, digital safety and privacy etc. The theoretical framework proposed by Chen et al. (2011;2018) for conceptualizing new media literacy by means of two continuums: consuming and prosuming media literacy, and from functional to critical media literacy assimilates all these necessary skills to become a reflective and critically democratic citizen. A refined version of the framework as presented by Lin et al. (2013) added ten associating indicators to extend the NML components. (Tugtekin & Koc, 2020). Subsequently, an instrument for NML was developed and validated by Lee et al. (2015) based on the previously presented framework by Lin et al (2013) providing a better understanding of the ten indicators along with production 1.0, production 2.0, and participation. These considerations associated new media literacy with practicing democratic culture.

In the constantly evolving digital landscape, new media literacy not only serves to be a technical skill but a civic competence as well. In the higher education institutions in Lahore, teachers need to be able to navigate, analyze, and utilize new media critically and responsibly in order to ingrain the democratic culture in their students through embedding new media literacy in their training.

Hypotheses Development

New Media literacy and Competences for Democratic Culture

New media refers to different media consumption, production and distribution forums characterized by digital, interactive, hypertextual, virtual and networked nature. In the field of education, new media provides various information services helping to overcome the limitations of time and place (Lee et al., 2025; Zhang & Wu 2023; Assalihee et al., 2024). New media literacy is considered crucial for the 21st century, referring to an individual's ability to consume and create content on the digital platforms (Zhang et al., 2025). With respect to its relationship with the democratic culture, new media literacy supports critical thinking, informed decision-making and respect for diversity. It also initiates dialogue and civic participation. It predominantly provides resistance to disinformation, hate speech and polarization (Tugtekin & Koc, 2020). The competences for democratic culture have been presented in the reference framework (RFCDC) by the Council of Europe outlining 20 competences essential for democratic citizenship characterized into values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical

understanding. It serves to be a foundational model for achieving democratic sense and involvement (TOURBIER, 2024). Teachers may serve to be the catalysts for such change and role models in democratic societies. By acquiring new media literacy, they can successfully counter misinformation in digital spaces, stimulate a sense of critical inquiry among students and integrate digital tools for an enhanced participatory learning. Thus, equipping teachers with new media literacy in the universities of Lahore is vital for developing resilient democratic values in classrooms and beyond (Awang-Hashim et al., 2019).

It is challenging to design a compatible curriculum for the new generation learners addressing their learning preferences and expectations. Therefore, the existing educational teaching paradigm needs a drastic transformation such as incorporating case studies, visual representations, simulations, and other participatory learning techniques (Ortega-Sánchez et al., 2024). The simulation technology would help them to receive feedback in real time settings. Such teaching methods can enable teachers to fulfil the requirements of varied learners by integrating digital technology and democratic sense (Rehman et al., 2022). According to Tuğtekin and Koç (2019), there is a significant relationship among NML, communication skills and democratic tendency. Hence, the existing literature supports that NML and competences for democratic culture may have a significant relationship.

H1: There is a significant relationship between new media literacy and competences for democratic culture.

Functional Consumption and Competences for Democratic Culture

With an information overload and technological advancements, it is crucial to navigate and effectively use media and digital platforms. Media literacy involves specific knowledge and skills to comprehend and use media (Hobbs, 2017; Jeong et al., 2012). It inherently incorporates digital skills and competences to use digital tools and platforms enabling individuals to make informed decisions, handle misinformation and digital threats (Helsper, 2024). A media literacy intervention is necessary to enhance critical thinking, raising awareness about media influence, assess, consume and understand media content or representations. This educational approach helps to develop understanding of media messages and critically evaluate their meanings and effects on society. Such interventions empower individuals to use digital technologies effectively (Alon et al., 2024).

The epicenter of transformation in this process within education are the teachers. They must redirect their focus under a transformative and intercultural democratic framework work based on equity, justice, inclusion, solidarity, critical understanding, communication, empowerment and, above all, humanity (Liagkis et al., 2022). Conventionally, media education incorporates the critical analysis or evaluation of media texts, intended meanings and contexts, and representation but, digital media consumption and democratic participation have become largely integrated over the past

few years (Kellner & Share, 2007, pp. 19-20). Hence, the teachers need to be competent in new media literacy skills and competences for democratic culture to educate individuals to become democratic citizens.

H1(a): There is a statistically significant relationship between functional consumption and competences for democratic culture.

Critical Consumption and Competences for Democratic Culture

It is crucially important for the teachers to possess a critical perception, knowledge and critical understanding of ‘self’ and the world around them. Such behaviors are observable in terms of critically examining their values, beliefs, prejudices, and stereotypes (Lenz et al., 2022). The commitment of teachers to different dimensions of self-i.e., rational, affective, somatic, spiritual, and sociocultural is necessary for them to understand their individuality and social contexts around them (Liagkis et al., 2022).

According to Mihailidis (2018), media literacy serves to be a path towards an active and vigorous civic engagement in the 21st century. With a rise in the proliferation of digital media platforms, digital literacy has become fundamental to good citizenship practices (Hobbs, 2024). The advocates of media literacy have acknowledged its participatory role in democracy. They present the view that media education has a positive association with individual’s political and civic involvement (Ashley et al., 2017).

Media exposure and ability to analyze, evaluate and synthesize media content have significant influence on political participation, civic engagement and quality of life of individuals, reinforcing social norms and political trust (Martens & Hobbs, 2015). Many scholars have reported that media education can contribute in promoting political and civic activities. They demonstrate that critical evaluation of political issues using digital tools fortify democratic culture (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012). Therefore, it is proposed that there is a positive association between critical consuming literacy and democratic culture.

H1(b): There is a statistically significant relationship between critical consumption and competences for democratic culture.

Functional Prosumption and Competences for Democratic Culture

Hobbs (2018) supports the notion of a holistic media literacy pedagogy empowering students to critically evaluate, consume, responsibly share and ethically respond to digital content. There is ample literature advocating the role of digital literacy in fostering digital citizenship where citizens participate as democratizing content creators and distributors, upholding ethical standards online (Tatheer et al., 2025). Misinformation and algorithmic bias can be addressed analytically through critical digital literacy (Ayduğ & Altınpulluk, 2025). Researchers also stresses the interplay between digital tools and sociocultural practices and their significance in shaping learning environments (Jiang & Hafner, 2024).

The use of media for information regarding public affairs tends to be the strongest predictor of political participation, positively associating new media literacy with online democratic perspectives (Kahne et al., 2016). Research has consistently demonstrated that media literacy and political actions are positively correlated (Ashley, 2017). There is a strong relationship among media literacy, civic engagement and attitudes regarding news and participating in the production and distribution of media content (Hobbs et al. 2017).

Research also demonstrates that students who have a nuanced observation of media and society have depicted highest extent of media literacy. Respectively, media literacy is considered to be a pathway for emerging citizens to flourish in a digital culture leading towards an active, engaged, informed and participatory democracy (Lilleker et al., 2024). Hence, on the basis of these empirical findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1(c): There is a statistically significant relationship between functional prosumption and competences for democratic culture.

Critical Prosumption and Competences for Democratic Culture

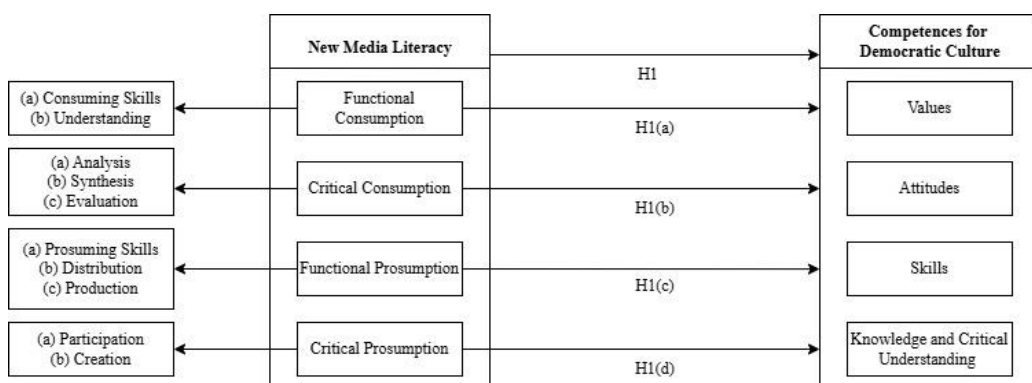
The swift transition to new media has presented both educators and students with a range of cognitive, social, pedagogical, and technical challenges which included mastering emerging digital tools, navigating social interactions in digital spaces and adopt participatory roles. Research indicates that most educators are digitally literate but still need to be proficient in the online discourse. Such encounters highlight the need for incorporation of new media literacy to enhance the quality and scope of the changing teaching methods (Wut & Xu, 2021).

Educators have acknowledged the need to equip students with the necessary skills to critique and evaluate media content in the present diverse digital environment (Erstad et al., 2021). This recognition is driven by the shift from traditional modes of communication towards digital platforms, necessitating the adaptation of educational curricula to meet the modification of the changing world of learners (Almakaty, 2024). This adaptation also relates to individual's ability to effectively create and communicate as good citizens. The true deliberation in participatory democracy depends on citizens to develop and share their perspectives on different community issues; and continuing to distribute these perspectives through the use of new media. Today's media audiences, serve to act as co-creators rather than being mere consumers. They create meanings and reinterpret them or remix them with media messages and share such created content with different social groups (Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013). According to Jenkins (2014), this convergence of consumption, creation, participation and citizenship, especially in the classroom, can serve to provide the means for preparing new generations for engaged citizenship and stimulating or reviving our political system.

Living in an age of increased digitization, students as responsible citizens must be able to critically access, analyze, create and distribute media content in the diverse stream of information to develop their competences for democratic culture (Gonzalez-Mohino et al., 2023). They must be able to critically access and analyze a constant and diverse stream of information on which to base their democratic participation (Franklin, 2014). Hence, critical participation and creation of media contents based on political discourse is necessary for students to thrive as responsible, active citizens.

H1(d): There is a statistically significant relationship between critical prosumption and competences for democratic culture.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Research Design

This quantitative study employs a survey method to collect data from university teachers in Lahore across two disciplines i.e., Media Studies and Political Science.

Population and Sample Size

Purposive sampling technique is employed for data collection. Due to the unavailability of exact number of full-time teachers in political science and media studies departments in universities of Lahore, the number of 267 respondents was selected using the Cochran formula (Cochran & Carroll, 1953; Cochran, 1952). The study achieved a response rate of 17.21%, with 1,551 questionnaires distributed via online social media platforms and university administration channels.

Measurement Scale

New Media Literacy (NML)

The translated version of NML scale was adapted to assess NML levels among participants. The NML scale has four subscales including functional consumption (FC; 7 items), critical consumption (CC; 11 items), functional prosumption (FP; 7 items) and

critical presumption (CP; 10 items). All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (Ho et al., 2024).

Competences for Democratic Culture

The adapted scale for competences for democratic culture comprised of 52 items categorized into six components: Democratic Values; Respect for the other; Intercultural Awareness; Communication Skills and Emotional Intelligence; Critical Perception; Political Understanding. These components highlight the behaviors of thinking, reflecting and acting (Liagkis et al., 2022).

Ethical Considerations

The study ensured the privacy and confidentiality of the participants in the research. Survey questions did not include personal information such as names or ethnicity, thus protecting the privacy of participants. Additionally, informed consent of the participants had been taken providing them choice to participate and share information voluntarily.

Results

The demographic description of the respondents shows a highly qualified and experienced group of university teachers from public and private universities in Lahore. A total of 267 participants included 48.5% females and 41.4% males, which is a relatively balanced sex representation. The majority of respondents were mid-level or senior professionals with ages between 28 and 62 years and almost half (48.5%) with more than four years' teaching experience. A noteworthy majority (71%) possessed PhD degrees, whereas 18.9% possessed MPhil qualifications, indicating the educational strength of the sample. With respect to designation, Assistant Professors were the biggest group (41.1%), followed by Associate Professors (25.3%), Lecturers (11.8%), and Professors (11.8%). Respondents belonged to two prominent disciplines—Media Studies (56.2%) and Political Science (33.7%)—from a combination of public (40.1%) and private (49.8%) universities. Predominantly, 93.3% of the respondents reported having access to media and technology on their institutions, and 97.8% reported using digital media every day, indicating widespread digital use by faculty. Yet, just 64.4% had formal training in media literacy or digital skills, showing a divide between access and formal digital skill-building. In general, the results indicate a digitally active but unequally trained scholarly community with robust educational and professional backgrounds.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics for Key Constructs

Constructs	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Functional Consumption (FC)	7	.713
Critical Consumption (CC)	11	.792
Functional Prosumption (FP)	7	.740
Critical Prosumption (CP)	10	.868
Democratic Values (DV)	10	.795
Respect for Others (RO)	12	.814
Intercultural Awareness (IA)	7	.819
Communication Skills & Emotional Intelligence (CSEI)	8	.832
Critical Perception (CPR)	4	.732
Political Understanding (PU)	11	.813

The reliability test of the study constructs is satisfactory to high internal consistency in all scales based on Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. The values in all of them are above the acceptable level of 0.70, which proves that the items of each construct consistently measure their respective underlying factors. In particular, the Functional Consumption ($\alpha = .713$), Critical Consumption ($\alpha = .792$), and Functional Prosumption ($\alpha = .740$) have good reliability, and Critical Prosumption ($\alpha = .868$) has a very high degree of internal consistency. In the same way, constructs for democratic and interpersonal dimensions such as Democratic Values ($\alpha = .795$), Respect for Others ($\alpha = .814$), Intercultural Awareness ($\alpha = .819$), and Communication Skills & Emotional Intelligence ($\alpha = .832$) also show strong reliability. Last but not least, Critical Perception ($\alpha = .732$) and Political Understanding ($\alpha = .813$) reflect acceptable and strong reliability, respectively. In general, these findings validate that measurement tools applied in the research are internally consistent and ideal for additional statistical analysis.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

Variables	NML	CDC
NML	1	.681**
CDC	.681**	1

The correlation analysis explored the association between New Media Literacy (NML) and Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC) among teachers in Lahore universities. The results signified a high and statistically significant correlation between the two variables ($r = .681$, $p < .01$). It infers that more the teachers are able to critically analyze and consume new media, the more they become capable of inculcating democratic competences and values among students. It centralizes the role of new media literacy in developing competences for democratic culture in higher education settings.

Table 3: Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β (Standardized Coefficient)	R	R ²	Sig. (p)	Decision
H1	NML → CDC	.681	.681	.464	.000***	Supported
H1(a)	Functional Consumption (FC) → CDC	.490	.490	.240	.000***	Supported
H1(b)	Critical Consumption (CC) → CDC	.610	.610	.372	.000***	Supported
H1(c)	Functional Prosumption (FP) → CDC	.570	.570	.325	.000***	Supported
H1(d)	Critical Prosumption (CP) → CDC	.554	.554	.307	.000***	Supported

The primary hypothesis (H1) stating that new media literacy (NML) significantly affects competencies for democratic culture (CDC) was supported through regression analysis. The results signified that NML explained for 46.4% of the variance in CDC ($R^2 = .464$, $p < .001$), while the standardized beta value was .681. It validates that the teachers with higher levels of new media literacy are more capable of delivering democratic competences.

While testing sub-hypotheses, functional consumption (FC) appeared as a weak predictor of CDC accounting for 24.0% of the variance in CDC ($R^2 = .240$, $p < .001$). Its standardized beta value was .490, indicating that the functional ability to access and use media contributes to enhance democratic values but is not enough to develop more substantial democratic competences.

Conversely, critical consumption (CC) had the major effect on CDC comprehensively. According to the findings, CC accounted for 37.2% of variance in CDC ($R^2 = .372$, $p < .001$) with the beta of .610. It signifies the teacher's capacity to assess and critically interact with media content. The teachers can enhance their democratic capabilities by identifying credibility in media messages, recognizing bias, and detecting misinformation. It makes critical consumption a foundational source of developing democratic culture.

Functional prosumption exhibited a significant impact, attributing 32.5% of the variance in CDC ($R^2 = .325$, $p < .001$), with a standard beta of .570. The result suggests that the teachers who do not only consume but rather produce and distribute information

through media messages or content are more competent and active participants in democratic processes.

Similarly, critical presumption (CP) had a significant relationship with competences for democratic culture (CDC), accounting for 30.7% of the variance ($R^2 = .307$, $p < .001$), with a standardized beta of .554. It designates that if the university teachers produce and disseminate media responsibly and critically, considering the ethical, social and democratic aspects, they exhibit the competences for democratic culture more effectively. It emphasizes the need for such content creation that demonstrates not only technical competence but critical argumentation and civic sense.

Combined, the findings validate that all of the aspects of new media literacy individually contribute to democratic culture competences, but with varying relative effect. Critical consumption proved to have the most significant prediction potential, then functional presumption, critical presumption, and functional consumption. This order indicates that although functional competences lay the groundwork, the most crucial is critical approach to media, whether through consumption or production.

Discussion

The democratic evolution in Pakistan holds complex narratives often shaped or framed by digital media. Online campaigns or advocacy projects can reinforce value systems. The open digital discussions encourage tolerance among students as citizens. It is emulating the diverse and pluralistic social culture of Pakistan. The digital technologies have completely transformed the ways in which information is shared and consumed.

Teachers are responsible to educate individuals to be socially active and responsible. They can develop the critical thinking and decision-making power in the young minds who are responsible to surface better future prospects for the country. The democratic teaching style is preferred globally nowadays putting an emphasis on democratic-competency based education and training programs for teachers. When an individual grows to become a democratic citizen, his actions are not only based on the values of democracy, but also on the will, knowledge and skills involved in developing it. It is imperative to understand and implement the ethical, social and emancipatory considerations of information societies of present era. Educators hold the tendency to challenge the dominant notions of education and curricula through democratic ones and are better able to contextualize democratic notions in different cultural and political contexts.

The measurement of new media literacy among teachers and their collective representation is crucial to enable individual teachers to assess their own new media literacy competences and improve accordingly. Professional training and development in NML skills can contribute to achieve educational goals for their students and policy development (Simons et al., 2017). On the other hand, competences for democratic culture provide educators at all levels with a practical tool to work on democracy in the educational settings. The values, attitudes and practices embedded in democratic culture

competences, in the context of education, not only teach students what to think, but rather how to think. It is pivotal to navigate a world where every student as a responsible citizen, upholds democratic principles allowing cultures to co-exist (Jónsson & Rodriguez, 2021).

Many educational programs in Lahore still focus on traditional pedagogies highlighting prominent university curricula gaps. They overlook digital citizenship education, integration of media literacy frameworks and training in online civic engagement strategies. Hence, the teachers in the universities of Lahore need to be equipped with critical media analysis, encouraging open-mindedness and respectful debate, and addressing digital echo chambers and risks associated with radicalization. The existing body of literature supports the development of democratic culture competences through new media literacy. It asserts that the core areas presented by the Council of Europe's Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC) model like values, attitudes, skills and knowledge can be shaped and developed through new media literacy. It can ingrain evaluative and analytical skills in them such as critical media analysis, fact-checking and ethical online conduct. It can also provide an understanding of democratic institutions, digital rights and media systems among students.

Conclusion

Developing new media literacy in teacher education is essential for sustaining democratic culture in the present age. In the perspective of Lahore universities, where education, technology and social change intersect, teachers must be empowered with the competences to guide responsibly in the digital public sphere. The forefather of media literacy, Masterman (2018), asserted that the citizen's ability to make logical and rational decisions; acting as agents of social change; and effective use of media has influenced the democratization of institutions and evolved the participatory democracy (Muzaffar et al., 2020). The role of media cannot be ignored or overlooked when it comes to civic participation and engagement (Gordon & Mihailidis, 2022). Literature surfaces three main outcomes for media literate people, critical thinking, content creation and communication, and bringing social change by distributing media content and participating in democratic activities (Ashley et al., 2017).

The teacher's role in the formation of sensible citizens relates to Gordon's civic web and notion of new civic engagement with a collective aim to build core competences for future generations to effectively utilize digital spaces and tools for civic information and communication needs (Gordon, 2016). Teachers lack the vision and experience in teaching digital communication technologies in ways to enable their students to participate actively in public, private and economic spheres of social life (Gretter & Yadav, 2018).

The study accentuates the potential of university teachers specifically from media studies and political science departments, and the respective educational programs to foster critical thinking and new media awareness and understanding among the students. These require them to acquire new media literacy skills in order to develop competences

for democratic culture and explore initiatives integrating cognitive and motivational dimensions, counting on individual traits, adopting multi-dimensional strategies to address and overcome the challenges of the digital information landscape.

Policy Recommendations

- Formal integration of new media literacy programs for faculty development and teacher training in Pakistan.
- Initiatives addressing the digital divide among institutions and faculty members.
- Development of structured frameworks on new media literacy and democratic competences through public-private collaboration.
- Embedment of new media literacy and democratic competences modules in university curriculum.

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