



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY
AND COUNSELLING
(IJEPC)

<https://gaexcellence.com/ijepe>



EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NEW MEDIA LITERACY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG YOUNG ADULT IN PERLIS

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Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 30.03.2026

Revised date: 21.04.2026

Accepted date: 13.05.2026

Published date: 09.06.2026

To cite this document:

Alias, N. S., Ibrahim, S. B. M., Masnan, F., Affandy, H. B., & Tan, X. (2026). Exploring The Relationship Between New Media Literacy and Psychological Well-Being Among Young Adult in Perlis. *International Journal of*

Abstract:

Skills in New Media Literacy (NML) are considered essential in the 21st century. However, the existing literature has yet to sufficiently address whether the younger generation can effectively apply critical thinking to distinguish between accurate and misleading information on social media, despite being among its most active users. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between New Media Literacy (NML), social media usage, and psychological well-being among Malaysian youth aged 15 to 24, with a specific focus on those residing in Perlis. Adopting a quantitative research approach, data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. This study utilizes simple random sampling technique in respondent selection and a total of 110 respondents participated in this study. The analysis examined the correlations between four dimensions of NML which are Functional Consuming, Critical Consuming, Functional Prosuming, Critical Prosuming and levels of psychological well-being. The findings indicate that Malaysian youth demonstrate high levels of both new media literacy and psychological well-being. A statistically significant correlation was observed between NML and

*Education, Psychology and
Counselling, 11(63), 151-165.*

psychological well-being, except for the Functional Consuming dimension, which did not show a significant relationship. This study underscores the importance of cultivating critical and responsible media engagement among youth as a means to enhance their psychological well-being.

DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.1163008

Keyword:

Media Literacy, New Media, Psychological Well-Being, Perlis, Young Adult



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Introduction

The 21st century has witnessed an unprecedented integration of digital media into nearly every aspect of daily life. The use of smartphones, social networking platforms, and multimedia tools has transformed how individuals, particularly young adults, consume, produce, and interact with information and as a way of communication. As digital environments become increasingly participatory and immersive, the ability to navigate, evaluate, and ethically engage with media content has emerged as a crucial competency which commonly referred to as New Media Literacy (NML).

Unlike traditional media literacy, which primarily focused on interpreting and understanding mass media messages, NML reflects the dynamic and reciprocal nature of contemporary media use. In today's digital landscape, individuals are not only passive consumers but also active prosumers. Active prosumers refer to users who generate, share, and remix content in real time. This shift led to a broader conceptualization of media literacy, one that includes functional and critical skills across both consuming and prosuming dimensions (Zhang et al., 2025).

While the educational value of NML has been widely acknowledged, less attention has been given to its potential impact on psychological well-being, especially among young adults. This demographic group is one of the most digitally connected populations (MCMC, 2023), yet they are also vulnerable to challenges such as cyberbullying, social comparison, digital fatigue, and misinformation. These risks can significantly affect psychological health, making it essential to investigate whether media literacy skills may act as a protective factor in promoting emotional resilience, self-efficacy, and personal growth.

Drawing from Ryff's (1989) model of psychological well-being which comprises six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, positive

relations with others, and self-acceptance, this study considers how different aspects of NML may support or hinder well-being. For instance, critical prosuming literacy may empower individuals to express themselves ethically and independently, fostering autonomy and purpose. Meanwhile, functional consuming literacy may help users manage digital tools effectively, contributing to environmental mastery.

Young adults in Perlis are increasingly exposed to a wide array of digital content through mobile devices and social media platforms, often spending several hours daily engaging in activities such as information searching, entertainment, content creation, and social networking. According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC, 2023), mobile internet penetration and smartphone usage continue to rise across rural and semi-urban regions, including Perlis.

However, frequent exposure to digital media does not necessarily equate to critical media competence. Many youths may lack the evaluative and reflective skills required to navigate these complex environments responsibly and ethically (Livingstone et al., 2017; Nasirudeen et al., 2026). This disconnection between access and ability is especially concerning in digitally saturated but structurally underserved regions, where formal instruction in media literacy remains scarce or inconsistent. In particular, the absence of structured media literacy education in rural or semi-urban areas like Perlis may leave youth vulnerable to the psychological consequences of unfiltered media consumption, such as misinformation, online harassment, or harmful social comparisons.

UNESCO (2019) has emphasized that equitable access to media and information literacy education is essential to fostering informed and resilient digital citizens. However, education policies and curriculum are often lacking in national education systems, especially in low-resource settings. Studies by Ugurhan et al. (2020) and Ilomäki (2023) support this view, arguing that without targeted interventions, youth may remain passive consumers of media content, absorbing biased, manipulative, or sensational information without critical analysis. This can contribute to increased cognitive overload, anxiety, and diminished self-worth.

Psychologically, new media environments pose unique risks and opportunities for youth who are at a formative stage of identity development and emotional regulation. According to Ryff (1989), the key dimensions of psychological well-being such as autonomy, self-acceptance, and environmental mastery are challenged in environments that encourage constant comparison, validation-seeking behavior, and performative self-presentation. Social media, while offering platforms for expression and connection, also fosters environments where users are continuously exposed to idealized representations of success, beauty, and lifestyle, which can undermine self-esteem and increase anxiety and depressive symptoms (Keles, McCrae & Grealish, 2020). In this context, NML can serve as a crucial psychological buffer.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore the relationship between new media literacy and psychological well-being among young adults in Perlis. By examining how functional and critical consuming and prosuming literacies relate with psychological well-being, this research seeks to provide new insights into how digital competence can contribute not only to informed media use but also to the emotional and social well-being of young adults. It is important to have an understanding of this dynamic relationship to contribute to extensive academic conversation particularly in the field of media, education and psychology.

Literature Review

This section reviews and critically discusses previous studies related to the new media literacy concepts, framework and its relationship with psychological well-being, highlighting existing findings, theoretical perspectives, and research gaps relevant to the study.

New Media Literacy (NML)

The concept of New Media Literacy (NML) has garnered increasing attention as media environments have become more participatory and complex. Zhang et al., (2025) conceptualize NML as a multidimensional construct that expands traditional literacy beyond reading and writing to encompass both digital skills and participatory engagement. Their proposed framework introduces two key concepts which are consuming versus prosuming, and functional versus critical literacy. These two concepts emphasize the need for individuals to understand and produce media content effectively. This reconceptualization reflects the shift from passive reception to active media participation in the digital age.

In contrast, Surian and Sciandra (2019) focus on the empirical validation of Internet skills as a subset of digital literacy. Their nationally representative study in Italy evaluates competence levels across demographic sectors using a scale already tested in other EU countries. Their work emphasizes functional Internet usage and its implications for academic performance, though it does not extend to the critical or participatory aspects of media literacy explored in Zhang et al.'s framework.

In an educational context, Ugurhan et al., (2020) explore NML among open and distance learners (ODL). While the study does not introduce or validate a new framework, it highlights the practical importance of NML for learners who depend on ICT to access higher education. The findings underscore the role of both technical and critical media literacies in navigating digital learning platforms.

Building upon these conceptual foundations, Luan et al., (2023) developed and validated a widely adopted instrument for measuring NML, particularly among youth. Their framework operationalizes NML through two intersecting dimensions which are functional vs. critical literacy and consuming vs. prosuming, resulting in four quadrants: functional consuming, functional prosuming, critical consuming, and critical prosuming literacy. Luan et al., (2023) framework offers a comprehensive understanding of how individuals engage with media, not only through access and navigation but also through critical analysis and ethical content creation.

New Media Literacy (NML) Framework

The Luan et al., (2023) NML framework is especially relevant for understanding media competencies among young adults. As frequent users of social media, video-sharing platforms, and online collaborative tools, young adults engage in media not just for consumption but also for production and identity expression. However, without strong critical media skills, they are vulnerable to misinformation, manipulation, and negative psychological impacts such as low self-esteem and social comparison.

The framework's dual emphasis on critical thinking and responsible content creation provides a strong basis for assessing digital fluency and not only basic operational skills. It allows researchers and educators to evaluate not only what users do with media, but how and why they do it by addressing the cognitive, ethical, and engagement dimensions of media use.

The framework is structured around two key dimensions: (1) consuming versus prosuming literacy, and (2) functional versus critical literacy.

The consuming and prosuming axis differentiates between passive media use and active content creation. Consuming literacy involves locating, accessing, and understanding digital content, while prosuming literacy reflects users who both consume and produce media.

The functional and critical axis distinguishes between basic digital skills and deeper analytical engagement. Functional literacy includes navigating websites or using applications, whereas critical literacy involves evaluating credibility, recognizing bias, and applying ethical digital practices such as data privacy and respectful interaction.

Together, these dimensions form a four-quadrant model that captures the comprehensive skills required for individuals to navigate, interpret, and produce content within new media environments. The first axis, consuming-prosuming literacy, distinguishes between the passive reception and active production of media. Consuming literacy refers to the ability to locate, access, and understand digital content across multiple platforms. In contrast, prosuming literacy reflects a more active role, where individuals not only consume but also produce and disseminate media content using digital tools. This aligns with Jenkins et al.'s (2009) idea of participatory culture, where users function simultaneously as consumers and contributors within the media ecosystem.

The second axis, functional-critical literacy, addresses the depth of cognitive engagement. Functional literacy involves the basic operational skills necessary to use digital technologies such as navigating websites, operating devices, or using software applications. Conversely, critical literacy refers to higher-order thinking skills that enable individuals to analyze, evaluate, and question the credibility, bias, and intent of media messages. It also encompasses ethical and responsible media practices, including the awareness of digital footprints, data privacy, and respectful online interaction.

These two axes intersect to form four domains: functional consuming, critical consuming, functional prosuming, and critical prosuming. For instance, a person with functional consuming literacy may be skilled in browsing websites or reading digital news but may lack the capacity to question misinformation or recognize persuasive strategies embedded in media messages. In contrast, someone demonstrating critical prosuming literacy not only creates content but does so with reflective awareness, ethical consideration, and analytical insight into audience engagement and message impact. Table 1 provides a clear illustration of the New Media Literacy framework.

Table 1: New Media Literacy Framework

Dimension	Prosuming/Consuming
Functional Literacy	Functional Prosuming (e.g., content creation and sharing) Functional Consuming (e.g., accessing and understanding media)
Critical Literacy	Critical Prosuming (e.g., ethical, reflective media creation) Critical Consuming (e.g., evaluating and analyzing messages)

New Media Literacy and Psychological Well-Being

Beyond digital competence, the NML framework also has implications for psychological well-being. The integration of digital media into everyday life influences not only cognitive and behavioral patterns but also emotional and social functioning. Ryff's (1989) six dimensions of psychological well-being which includes autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. These dimensions could offer a theoretical lens for examining the psychological benefits of media literacy.

Ryff's (1989) Six Dimensions of Psychological Well-Being which includes dimensions of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance provide a robust framework for evaluating the impact of NML on individual psychological well-being. The intersection of these two frameworks enables a multidimensional understanding of how digital literacy skills support not only cognitive but also emotional and social flourishing.

For instance, autonomy involves the ability to make independent decisions and resist social pressures (Ryff, 1989). This capacity aligns closely with critical prosuming literacy, which entails not only creating media content but doing so thoughtfully, ethically, and with awareness of social, political, and cultural contexts. When individuals develop the skills to express their own perspectives through digital media, they exercise agency, challenge dominant narratives, and assert identity, thereby reinforcing personal autonomy (Livingstone et al., 2017).

Meanwhile, environmental mastery is defined as one's ability to manage life situations effectively (Ryff, 1989). This is particularly relevant in the digital age where access to information, services, and resources is mediated through technology. Functional consuming literacy refers to the ability to access and navigate digital content effectively which supports this dimension by empowering individuals to utilize media tools to solve everyday problems. For example, individuals who can locate health-related information, apply for services online, or use GPS navigation demonstrate competence in managing both physical and digital environments (Nasirudeen et al., 2026).

Moreover, personal growth refers to the continuous development of an individual's potential and openness to new experiences (Ryff, 1989). Critical consuming literacy supports this growth by enabling individuals to analyze and reflect on diverse media content. When individuals are able to question assumptions, compare perspectives, and synthesize new understandings, they engage in intellectual and emotional development. Exposure to a range of global narratives and digital cultures also encourages curiosity and lifelong learning (Ilomäki, 2023).

Ryff emphasizes the importance of having warm, trusting, and satisfying relationships. Functional prosuming literacy contributes to this by enabling individuals to actively participate in digital communities, share experiences, and maintain social connections. Through activities like blogging, social networking, or collaborative content creation, users build and sustain interpersonal relationships, a key source of emotional support and social belonging (Labent et al., 2024).

Purpose in life pertains to having meaningful goals and a sense of direction (Ryff, 1989). Engaging critically with media content allows individuals to identify narratives and issues that resonate with their values and beliefs. Prosuming with a purpose such as creating advocacy campaigns, educational content, or storytelling projects, enables users to contribute meaningfully to society and fosters a sense of purposeful identity (Pokulyta et al., 2025).

Lastly, self-acceptance involves holding a positive attitude toward oneself, acknowledging both strengths and weaknesses. Media environments often subject individuals, especially youth, to idealized portrayals and social comparisons. Critical consuming literacy helps users recognize these distortions and resist negative self-evaluations. Awareness of media manipulation and the cultivation of reflective media practices can protect self-esteem and promote resilience (Scully et al., 2023).

Luan et al., (2023) argue that New Media Literacy (NML) not only equips users to interpret and analyze content critically but also empowers them to produce media in a reflective and ethical manner. Young individuals with high levels of NML particularly in the dimensions of critical consuming and prosuming are more likely to challenge harmful narratives, disengage from toxic content, and utilize media in ways that foster personal growth and positive social relationships. For example, critical prosuming can enhance psychological autonomy by enabling youth to create content that reflects their personal values and authentic voice, rather than conforming to dominant online trends for the sake of external approval.

Furthermore, during transitional life stages such as late adolescence and emerging adulthood, youth in Perlis face significant pressures to construct their identities, pursue career aspirations, and find meaning within the context of a digitally saturated environment (DOSM, 2022). In such circumstances, the capacity to manage and regulate media use becomes closely linked to emotional regulation, self-awareness, and self-efficacy. As Pokulyta et al., (2025) suggests, media literacy can serve as a form of "cultural agency," enabling young people to actively shape digital narratives rather than passively absorb them. This sense of agency is especially crucial in settings where access to formal support systems such as mental health services or career guidance is limited.

Although several studies have explored the measurement and educational implications of NML, the relationship between new media literacy and psychological well-being remains under-researched. This gap is particularly relevant for young adults, who are deeply embedded in digital culture and increasingly face challenges related to identity, mental health, and social pressure. Existing studies either focus narrowly on functional Internet skills (Surian & Sciandra, 2019) or on media use within academic or civic contexts, without adequately linking media engagement to psychological outcomes.

This study aims to address this gap by exploring the relationship between new media literacy and psychological well-being. By examining how various NML competencies influence psychological well-being among young adults, this research contributes to both media literacy and positive psychology literature. It also offers practical implications for digital education, youth mental health initiatives, and media policy development aimed at fostering holistic digital and psychological resilience.

Methodology

Participants

For the purpose of this study, a survey was conducted to collect the data. A method of sampling known as random sampling was utilised, and the major focus was placed on young generation between ages of 15 years old to 24 years old who live in Perlis and use social media. The required sample size for this study was calculated using G*power software version 3.1.9.7. For that purpose, the expected effect size (f^2), significant alpha (α) values, desired power, and the number of variables all play a role in determining the total sample size required for correlation. In addition, the effect sizes by Cohen (1992), small ($f^2 = 0.02$), moderate ($f^2 = 0.15$), and high ($f^2 = 0.35$), also served as a reference for choosing the right sample size. Thus, the suggested sample size is 107 participants. Based on these parameters, the recommended minimum sample size was 107 participants. At the conclusion of the data collection period, a total of 110 young individuals had completed and submitted the survey, and their responses were subsequently used for the analysis of this study.

Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instrument employed in this study was a structured questionnaire administered online via Google Forms. The questionnaire comprised three main sections which are Section A, Section B, and Section C, each designed to measure specific constructs aligned with the research objectives.

Section A consisted of demographic items aimed at gathering background information about the respondents, including age, gender and frequency of social media use. These items were self-developed following standard demographic data collection practices.

Section B was designed to assess the level of new media literacy among the young generation. This section was adapted from the New Media Literacy Scale (NMLS) developed by Koc and Barut (2016). It encompassed four dimensions: functional consuming, critical consuming, functional prosuming, and critical presuming. A five-point Likert was used to evaluate the respondent agreement to items. The items in this section aimed to evaluate the participants' ability to access, interpret, create, and critically engage with media content.

While Section C focused on measuring the psychological well-being of the respondents. This section adopted the 18-item version of Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995), which evaluates six key dimensions: self-acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, and autonomy. This section also employed a five-point Likert scale similar to Section B. The use of this instrument allows for a comprehensive and multidimensional assessment of the psychological well-being of the young participants.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, and percentiles were computed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 23.0. The normality of the variables was confirmed through the examination of skewness and kurtosis values. These statistical measures provided a comprehensive overview of the data distribution and guaranteed a strong investigation of the study variables. The reliability results displayed in Table 2 present details regarding the measurement reliability and internal consistency of the study's primary constructions. A measure of internal consistency called Cronbach's alpha shows how closely connected a group of items is to one another. It is frequently employed in research to evaluate the dependability of scales. Each component in NLM constructs is measured which indicated Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.674 for Functional Consuming, 0.912 for Critical Consuming, 0.747 for Functional Prosuming and the last Critical Prosuming score is 0.858. This score indicates that the items used to measure new media literacy based on the components are very trustworthy and consistent, as it is far higher than the generally accepted threshold of 0.60. Based on six components, the psychological well-being construct's Cronbach's alpha is 0.614. Additionally, this result is above the 0.60 cutoff, demonstrating outstanding internal consistency. The psychological well-being scale's high reliability indicates that its items are highly related to one another and offer a reliable indicator of the psychological well-being construct.

Table 2: Reliability Results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Functional Consuming (FC)	0.674	7
Critical Consuming (CC)	0.912	11
Functional Prosuming (FP)	0.747	7
Critical Prosuming (CP)	0.858	10
Psychological Well-Being	0.614	18

Findings

Table 3 summarises the demographic profile of the study participants and offers comprehensive details regarding the distribution of respondents by age, gender and frequency of social media use. A thorough examination of the connections between new media literacy and psychological well-being is made possible by the sample's diversity. A total of 110 respondents made up the study's sample, and each one of them disclosed details on their age, gender and frequency of social media use. The data show that all 110 respondents (100%) are in the age range between 21-24. This shows that all respondents involved in this study are young generation age. According to the sample's gender breakdown, 79 respondents (71.8%) are female, and 31 respondents (28.2%) are male. The larger percentage of female raises the possibility of a gender gap in the population the sample was taken from or in participation rates. Given that gender may have an impact on both new media literacy and psychological well-being, this gender distribution should be taken into account when evaluating the study's conclusions. It may be necessary for the study to take into account how this gender discrepancy affects the outcomes and whether it is representative of new media literacy and mental health trends in Malaysia.

With 110 respondents, majority of participants, 109 (99.1%) have chosen ‘usually’ to mark the participants frequency of social media use and only one (0.9%) participant choose ‘occasionally’. Therefore, the sample appears to be primarily composed of respondents who are persistently using social media in their daily life. This could have an effect on the study's conclusions since lower social media users may have a different link between their new media literacy and psychological well-being. The study may need to take into account how the results are influenced by this high usage of social media and whether a more diverse sample will show comparable trends.

Table 3: Demographic Profile

Designation	Total	%
Respondents	110	100
Age		
<i>21-24 years old</i>	110	100
Gender		
<i>Male</i>	31	28.2
<i>Female</i>	79	71.8
Frequency of social media use		
<i>Occasionally</i>	1	0.9
<i>Usually</i>	109	99.1

Table 4 displays the study participants new media literacy and psychological well-being descriptive statistics. These data offer a glimpse of the central patterns and variability within the sample. Descriptive analysis was conducted to examine the mean scores and standard deviations for each of the key constructs measured in this study. The results indicate that all constructs recorded relatively high mean values, suggesting positive perceptions among respondents. Among the four dimensions of new media literacy, Critical Consuming (CC) ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.352$) had the highest mean score, indicating that respondents showed strong awareness and evaluative skills in assessing media content for credibility, bias, and ethical considerations. This suggests that the young generation in Perlis is capable of critically engaging with various media messages rather than consuming them passively.

Functional Prosuming (FP) ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 0.466$) and Functional Consuming (FC) ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.512$) also demonstrated high mean scores. These findings reflect that respondents are not only adept at accessing and navigating digital media platforms but are also skilled in producing and sharing content using various tools and technologies. Meanwhile, Critical Prosuming ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.627$) had the lowest mean among the four media literacy dimensions, although still within the high range. This may suggest that while participants are actively producing media content, their critical reflection on the implications and ethical aspects of content creation could be further developed.

In terms of psychological well-being (PWB), the construct recorded a high mean score of 4.28 ($SD = 0.499$), indicating that the majority of respondents reported a strong sense of self-acceptance, purpose in life, personal growth, autonomy, as well as positive control of environment and interpersonal relationships. The relatively low standard deviations across all constructs suggest consistency in responses, indicating that most participants shared similar perceptions and experiences related to new media literacy and psychological well-being.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics

Constructs	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Functional Consuming (FC)	110	1	5	4.22	0.512
Critical Consuming (CC)	110	1	5	4.43	0.352
Functional Prosuming (FP)	110	1	5	4.42	0.466
Critical Prosuming (CP)	110	1	5	4.12	0.627
Psychological well-being (PWB)	110	1	5	4.28	0.499

The association data shown in Table 5 provide light on the connections between research participants' new media literacy and psychological well-being. These relationships' direction and strength are measured by Pearson correlation coefficients, and their statistical significance is indicated by significance levels. The results show significant positive correlations among all four new media literacy dimensions. The strongest correlation was observed between functional 161resuming and critical 161resuming ($r = .801$, $p < .001$), suggesting that individuals who actively create media content are also likely to engage in critical reflection and ethical content production. Functional consuming was also strongly correlated with critical consuming ($r = .749$, $p < .001$), indicating that those who are adept at accessing media are also capable of evaluating its content critically. Regarding psychological well-being, the highest correlations were observed with critical 161resuming ($r = .411$, $p < .001$) and functional 161resuming ($r = .410$, $p < .001$), highlighting the importance of participatory and reflective media use in fostering well-being. Critical consuming was also significantly correlated with psychological well-being ($r = .314$, $p < .001$), suggesting that the ability to evaluate media critically is associated with better mental health outcomes. However, functional consuming did not show a significant relationship with psychological well-being ($r = .145$, $p = .131$), indicating that mere access to or consumption of media content may not be sufficient to influence psychological well-being. These findings suggest that deeper engagement with media especially involving critical and productive use, is more closely associated with higher psychological well-being among the young generation in Perlis.

Table 4: Correlation Results

Variables	FC	CC	FP	CP	PWB
Functional Consuming (FC)	1	.749**	.685**	.634**	.145
Critical Consuming (CC)	.749**	1	.677**	.661**	.314**
Functional Prosuming (FP)	.685**	.677**	1	.801**	.410**
Critical Prosuming (CP)	.634**	.661**	.801**	1	.411**
Psychological Well-Being (PWB)	.145	.314**	.410**	.411**	1

Note: **significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

Conclusions

This study examined the relationship between New Media Literacy (NML) and psychological well-being among young adults in Perlis. The findings reveal that, with the exception of Functional Consuming, all other NML dimensions namely Critical Consuming, Functional Prosuming, and Critical Prosuming showed significant positive correlations with psychological well-being. These results contribute to the growing body of literature that underscores the importance of higher-order media literacy skills in promoting mental and emotional health among youth, particularly within increasingly digitized social environments.

The positive relationship between Critical Consuming and psychological well-being reinforces the importance of cognitive engagement in digital media use. As Luan et al., (2023) suggest, the ability to critically assess, interpret, and evaluate media messages enables individuals to make more informed judgments and avoid being misled by misinformation, media bias, or sensationalized content. Such skills are particularly important in the current digital ecosystem, where exposure to manipulated, misleading, or emotionally charged information is common. Critical media consumers are less likely to internalize harmful comparisons or misinformation, which can otherwise contribute to stress, anxiety, or reduced self-worth (Keles, McCrae, & Grealish, 2020).

Furthermore, the significant associations between Functional Prosuming and Critical Prosuming with psychological well-being suggest that creating and sharing digital content, especially when done reflectively can serve as a pathway to enhanced autonomy, creativity, and emotional expression. Functional Prosuming refers to the technical ability to generate media, while Critical Prosuming includes the ethical and contextual awareness required to create meaningful content. Both dimensions allow young people to actively shape their online identities and build digital narratives that align with their values and personal experiences. In doing so, they gain a sense of control, purpose, and connection which are the psychological attributes linked to resilience and well-being (Ryff, 1989).

By contrast, the Functional Consuming dimension did not demonstrate a significant relationship with psychological well-being. This indicates that having basic access and navigational skills, such as searching for information or using digital tools, may not directly influence one's emotional or psychological state. Similar observations have been made by Ilomäki (2023) and UNESCO (2019), who argue that surface-level digital competencies must be complemented by reflective and evaluative abilities to have meaningful psychological impact. While functional skills are necessary for digital inclusion, they do not foster critical thinking or self-reflection, which are central to building emotional resilience in online spaces. In other words, being digitally connected does not guarantee that users are psychologically prepared to engage with the complexities of digital media.

These findings are particularly relevant in the context of Perlis, where structured media literacy education remains limited and digital literacy is often acquired informally or through peer learning. The rapid digitalization of everyday life accelerated by social media, online learning, and digital communication has created environments where youth are expected to develop digital competencies without formal instruction. This disparity increases the risk of digital vulnerability, especially for those who lack access to quality media education and support systems. As noted by Livingstone et al. (2017), the absence of structured media literacy

initiatives in rural or semi-urban areas often leads to unequal digital outcomes, which may impact both knowledge and well-being.

Importantly, the results support the argument that new media engagement is not inherently beneficial or harmful, it depends on how users interact with and make meaning from their digital experiences. Young adults with higher levels of NML are better equipped to regulate their media consumption, critically evaluate online content, and use digital platforms to express themselves constructively. This form of mindful and participatory media engagement can mitigate the psychological risks often associated with uncritical or passive media use, such as social comparison, information overload, and emotional disengagement.

From an educational standpoint, the findings highlight the urgent need to integrate critical media literacy and participatory digital skills into school and university curricula. Digital literacy programs should move beyond basic technical instruction and address broader competencies such as ethical reasoning, emotional regulation, digital storytelling, and content analysis. Institutions may also consider offering co-curricular workshops, peer mentoring, and interdisciplinary modules that bridge media studies, communication, and psychology. These initiatives could play a key role in preparing students to navigate the digital world in ways that support both their cognitive development and emotional well-being.

At the policy level, these insights have implications for national education strategies and youth development policies. Policymakers must view digital literacy as not only a technological competency but also a critical component of personal development and public mental health. Investments in teacher training, curriculum development, and community-based media literacy outreach are essential to ensuring that all youth have equitable opportunities to become competent and reflective media users.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the significance of New Media Literacy in promoting psychological well-being among young adults. While technical media access remains a foundational need, it is the depth of engagement encompassing critical consumption, ethical content creation, and reflective media practices which has the greatest impact on emotional and psychological outcomes. Educators and policymakers should work collaboratively to establish holistic frameworks that embed digital literacy, critical thinking, and well-being as interconnected priorities in youth education. In an era marked by rapid digital transformation, these competencies are not optional, but they are essential for supporting healthy and resilient young citizens.

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- Acknowledgements:** The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Universiti Malaysia Perlis for providing the necessary resources and support throughout the course of this research. Special appreciation is extended to colleagues and peers who contributed valuable insights and constructive feedback, which greatly enhanced the quality of this paper.
- Funding Statement:** This research does not receive any financial support from any grant
- Conflict of Interest Statement:** The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. All authors have contributed to this work and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission to the International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling (IJEPC).
- Ethics Statement:** This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The data collected were used solely for academic purposes.
- Author Contribution Statement:** All authors contributed significantly to the development of this manuscript. Nur Salimah was responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, and overall supervision of the study. Siti Balkis & Faiz Masnan handled data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results. Habee & Tan Xue contributed to the literature review, drafting, and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to submission.
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