



Media Literacy and Social Awareness in Funeral Practices in the Digital Era

Zakiatul Abdi¹, Zukfi Akmal¹, Muhammad Yahya¹, Syamsudin²

¹Universitas Islam Negeri Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar, Indonesia

²STAI Yayasan Tarbiyah Islamiyah (YASTIS) Lubuk Bagalung Padang, Indonesia

✉ zakiatulabdy@gmail.com*

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Abstract

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly changed the way people access and interpret information. The abundance of digital information is not always accompanied by accuracy, potentially leading to misunderstandings. This study aims to analyze the role of media literacy in fostering social awareness regarding funeral practices in the digital era. This research used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method and was conducted in Ampangan District, Payukumbuh. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with informants, participant observation, and documentation of digital content. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and member checking. The findings indicate that media literacy enhances individuals' ability to critically evaluate information, strengthens social participation, and reinforces collective responsibility in cemetery management. However, challenges such as misinformation, reduced in-person social interaction, and the commercialization of funeral services remain significant. This study highlights the importance of integrating media literacy into community education and involving religious leaders in disseminating accurate information. These findings contribute to the development of socio-religious communication studies and offer practical implications for strengthening community-based media literacy programs.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology in recent decades has brought about fundamental changes in communication patterns and information distribution within society. This transformation has not only impacted the economic and educational sectors but has also penetrated the social and religious spheres (Amelia & Balqis, 2023; Habibah, 2021; Maftuhah & Sella, 2025). Religious practices, previously transmitted directly through face-to-face interactions, have now shifted with the emergence of digital media as the primary source of reference. This phenomenon demonstrates that the media is no longer merely a means of conveying information but has become a space for constructing meaning in society's social life (Nendissa, 2025).

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In the context of funeral arrangements, these changes present new dynamics that merit critical examination. Funeral arrangements, previously understood as a collective practice based on religious and social values, are now increasingly being studied through digital media such as videos, articles, and social media platforms (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). On the one hand, this ease of access opens up opportunities for the public to acquire knowledge quickly and practically. However, on the other hand, not all circulating information is valid and accountable, potentially leading to misunderstandings in sensitive religious practices. This phenomenon can also be observed in local communities, such as in the Payukumbuh area, where people are increasingly relying on digital media as a source of information regarding funeral arrangements.

This situation demonstrates the tension between easy access to information and the quality of public understanding. High reliance on digital media without a balanced critical thinking capability can lead to simplification and even distortion of religious teachings (Moustaghfir & Brigui, 2024; Zhang, 2025). In funeral practices, misunderstandings not only impact ritual aspects but can also affect social values such as solidarity, empathy, and collective responsibility. Therefore, a conceptual framework is needed that can bridge the gap between digital information access and correct, contextual understanding.

In this regard, media literacy emerges as a key concept relevant to explaining this phenomenon. Media literacy is not only related to technical skills in accessing information, but also encompasses analytical skills in critically assessing, understanding, and interpreting media messages (Dadakhonov, 2024; Potter, 2022). With adequate media literacy, individuals are expected to be able to distinguish between valid and invalid information and relate it to prevailing social and religious values. Thus, media literacy is a crucial foundation for building social awareness amidst the rapid flow of digital information.

Several previous studies have shown that media literacy plays a significant role in shaping critical thinking and social behavior. In education, media literacy is associated with improved reflective thinking and rational decision-making. In the context of communication, media literacy is understood as an instrument to mitigate the negative impacts of exposure to inaccurate information. However, most of this research focuses on general contexts, such as social media use, digital education, or information literacy more broadly, without specifically linking it to particular religious practices (Milyane et al., 2023; Tommasi et al., 2023; Woodward & Kimmons, 2019).

These limitations indicate a gap in research that needs to be filled, particularly in examining how media literacy operates within the context of concrete religious practices, such as funeral arrangements. This practice, however, has complex dimensions, not only as a religious ritual but also as a form of expression of social values such as cooperation and concern for others. Thus, a media literacy approach in this context not only enriches theoretical perspectives but also provides a more contextual understanding of the social dynamics of society (Busral et al., 2025; Habibi, 2026).

Furthermore, from a theoretical perspective, this study seeks to strengthen the position of media literacy as a concept that does not stand alone, but rather intersects with theories of social consciousness and religious practices. Media literacy in this study is understood not only as an individual skill but also as a social process that influences how society constructs meaning and acts. Thus, this research contributes to broadening the scope of media literacy theory, from its initial focus on communication aspects to a more integrated approach with social and religious

dimensions (Rohmah & Irawan, 2026).

Amidst the tide of modernization, funeral management practices also face challenges in the form of the emergence of professional services and commercialization. While these services offer efficiency, they also have the potential to displace the community's role in these collective practices. Digital media reinforces this narrative by presenting professional services as the primary solution. Without adequate media literacy, the public can passively accept this construct, further marginalizing the values of togetherness and social participation (Kahfi, 2025; Rohmah & Irawan, 2026).

In the current context, this study is crucial because it attempts to reread the relationship between media, society, and religious practices in the digital era. In practice, the use of digital media not only influences understanding but also has implications for the level of social participation, solidarity, and community involvement in funeral activities. This research views media not only as a tool but also as a factor that contributes to shaping public social awareness. By understanding how media literacy operates in the context of funeral arrangements, this study provides insight into how communities can maintain social and religious values amidst changing times (Amin & Aslan, 2025; Sugianto et al., 2024).

Based on the above description, this study aims to analyze the role of media literacy in building public social awareness regarding funeral arrangements in the digital era. The study's primary contribution lies in its integration of media literacy perspectives with contextual religious practices, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding. This research is also expected to provide a foundation for developing community-based media literacy programs and strengthening the role of religious leaders in conveying accurate information through digital media. Furthermore, this study provides practical recommendations for strengthening community-based media literacy that are relevant to current societal needs.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative, phenomenological approach to understand community experiences of interpreting digital information related to funeral management in the modern era. The research was conducted in the Payukumbuh area, involving informants selected purposively, such as religious leaders, community members, and individuals who access digital media related to funeral practices. The researcher served as the primary instrument, supported by interview guidelines, observations, and documentation. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and analysis of digital content such as videos, articles, and social media. The data were then analyzed using qualitative analysis techniques through the stages of data reduction, categorization, and interpretation to identify patterns related to media literacy and social awareness. To ensure the validity of the data, triangulation and careful data interpretation were applied throughout the research process (Carr, 2019; Engkizar et al., 2026; Fasira, 2025).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Media Literacy in Building Social Awareness

The findings reveal that media literacy plays a crucial role in shaping social awareness. Most informants demonstrated the ability to distinguish between credible and non-credible sources of information.

One informant stated: *"We often find different procedures online, but we usually confirm them with religious leaders before applying them."*

This indicates that media literacy does not function independently but interacts with traditional authority. Individuals with higher media literacy tend to show stronger social responsibility and active participation in funeral practices.

Media literacy plays an important role in shaping social awareness, especially in the handling of the deceased in the modern era. Media literacy is not only related to the ability to access information, but also to understand and critically assess the content of information (López-González et al., 2023; Restianty, 2018; Wuyckens et al., 2022). A good understanding of media information encourages awareness of the importance of social involvement in the handling of the deceased. Information obtained through digital media can shape the public's perspective on social and religious obligations. Social awareness arises when information is understood correctly and contextually (Al-Bantani et al., 2025; Chervinskyi, 2025). The media serves as an effective means of social learning when used critically. Without adequate media literacy, information has the potential to be misinterpreted. Therefore, media literacy is an important foundation for strengthening social awareness.

Media literacy skills also influence empathy and social responsibility. The information presented by the media often contains moral messages and human values. When these messages are understood critically, there is an urge to become actively involved in social life. The handling of the deceased is an important aspect of community life that reflects religious, social, and cultural values (Auliasari, 2025; Azis et al., 2025). This attitude is not only symbolic, but is manifested in concrete actions. Media literacy helps distinguish between educational and sensational information. Thus, the social attitudes that are formed become more responsible. This process shows that media literacy plays a role in shaping social behavior. Social concern is no longer spontaneous, but based on understanding (Cho et al., 2024; Rensiyana et al., 2025).

Theoretically, the role of media literacy is in line with the view that the media influences the formation of social attitudes and behavior. Media literacy theory emphasizes the importance of critical awareness of media messages. This awareness enables individuals to understand the social context and values contained in information. In the management of the deceased, this understanding helps to ensure that practices are in accordance with religious teachings and social values. Media literacy also prevents the spread of practices that do not have a strong basis. With this ability, the community can respond to information more wisely. The media is not seen as the absolute truth, but as a source that needs to be examined. This strengthens the role of media literacy in social life. Social awareness also develops in a more meaningful way (Parhan & Jais, 2025; Restianty, 2018; Rohmah & Irawan, 2026).

Digital Media as a Source of Information and Social Mobilization

Digital media serves as both an information source and a tool for social mobilization. Informants reported that messaging applications are frequently used to announce deaths and coordinate community participation; *“When someone passes away, information spreads quickly through WhatsApp, and people immediately come to help.”*

However, the study also found that digital interaction sometimes replaces physical presence, leading to reduced direct social engagement. Media literacy helps individuals maintain a balance between online and offline participation.

Digital media has become the main source of information related to the handling of the deceased in modern society. Quick and easy access makes digital media widely used in emergencies. Information about the procedures for handling the deceased, funeral times, and prayers is often obtained through online media. This

convenience helps the public acquire basic knowledge virtually. However, the abundance of information also poses its own challenges. Not all information is accurate and clear in terms of its source. This situation requires media literacy skills so that information can be filtered properly. Digital media thus has a dual role, namely as a source of education and a potential source of misinformation (Al Zou'bi, 2022; Fatimah et al., 2019; Putri et al., 2026).

In addition to being a source of information, digital media serves as a means of social mobilization. Social media and instant messaging applications are often used to disseminate information about bereavement and coordinate assistance. The rapid dissemination of information makes it easier for people to get involved in social activities. Assistance in the form of manpower, funds, and moral support can be organized more effectively. This pattern shows that digital media contributes to strengthening social solidarity. Social networks formed through the media expand the space for participation (Rahma, 2025; Randyca et al., 2024; Rofiyanti et al., 2024). However, the effectiveness of such mobilization is highly dependent on how the media is used. Media literacy helps ensure that social mobilization proceeds positively. Without adequate literacy, the media becomes merely a passive means of conveying information (Muringa & Adjin-Tetty, 2024).

On the other hand, the use of digital media also has the potential to reduce direct social interaction. Social awareness is sometimes only manifested through online messages without physical presence. This change reflects a shift in the form of social interaction in the digital age. Mediated communication has become more dominant than face-to-face communication (Afif, 2025; Sukmana et al., 2025). This condition requires critical awareness so that social awareness does not become superficial. Digital media should be a support for social engagement, not a complete replacement. Media literacy helps maintain a balance between digital and direct social interaction. With this approach, the value of social awareness is maintained. Digital media can also be used in a more meaningful way (Aprianis, 2025; Milyane et al., 2023).

Challenges of Modernization and Commercialization

Modernization has introduced professional funeral services, which offer convenience but may reduce community involvement.

Some informants expressed concern;

“Now, many families rely on services, so neighbors are less involved compared to the past.”

Media representation often promotes these services as efficient solutions, which can shift social values. Media literacy enables individuals to critically evaluate such representations and maintain traditional values of cooperation.

Modernization has brought changes to the practice of handling the deceased. Efficiency and practicality have become key considerations in modern society. Professional funeral services are increasingly being used; this provides convenience, especially for families who have limited time and knowledge (Khang & Seman, 2025). However, the use of professional services also has the potential to reduce the social involvement of the surrounding community. The previously strong value of cooperation is beginning to shift. Funeral management tends to be viewed as a private or professional matter. This change poses a challenge to social awareness. Media literacy is needed to understand the social impact of this modernization (Restianty, 2018).

The commercialization of funeral services is also influenced by media representation. The media often portrays funeral services as an ideal and practical solution. This representation shapes the perception that social involvement is no

longer a primary need. Commercially oriented media messages can shift the value of togetherness. Without a critical attitude, these messages are easily accepted at face value (Kurniawan & Sujadi, 2024). Media literacy helps us understand that media messages are not always neutral. There are economic interests behind content production. This awareness is important so that social decisions are not based solely on media images. Thus, the community can be more reflective. The value of social care can still be maintained amid the tide of commercialization (Azis et al., 2025).

Modernization does not always have a negative impact if approached wisely. Media literacy enables the use of modern services without losing social values. Social involvement can still be carried out even when using professional services. Presence, moral support, and emotional participation remain important. Media literacy helps negotiate traditional values and modern needs. This approach is in line with the idea of reflective modernization, which emphasizes critical awareness. The handling of the deceased can still be a space for social learning. Social concern does not disappear, but adapts its form. Thus, media literacy plays a role in preserving the essence of social values (Masriwati & Krismiadi, 2025; Sophia & Anggraini, 2020).

The Role of Education, Religious Leaders, and Culture

Education contributes greatly to improving media literacy among the public. Education shapes critical thinking skills when it comes to information. Individuals with adequate educational backgrounds tend to be more selective in their acceptance of media information. Their understanding of context and information sources improves. In the management of the deceased, education helps people understand religious and social values more fully (Novitskyi et al., 2025; Setiawan et al., 2025; Yunita & Valentine, 2020). Media literacy acquired through education affects the quality of social practices. Both formal and non-formal education play an important role. Therefore, media literacy needs to be integrated into various forms of education. This approach supports the strengthening of social awareness.

Religious leaders have a strategic role in shaping public understanding. Information conveyed by religious leaders has a high level of credibility. Religious leaders serve as interpreters and balancers of media information. This role is in line with the concept of opinion leaders in communication theory. Through the media, religious leaders can spread the correct understanding of the handling of the deceased (Bilalli, 2024; Rosiani et al., 2021). The delivery of messages based on religious values helps reduce the impact of misinformation. Media literacy is also necessary for religious leaders to use the media effectively. The synergy between the media and religious authorities strengthens social awareness. The impact can be seen in the increased collective awareness of the community (Saputra, 2025).

Local culture also influences the practice of handling the deceased. The media plays a role in reinforcing or correcting these cultural practices. Not all cultural traditions are in line with religious teachings (Srimudin et al., 2025). Media literacy helps assess the compatibility between culture and religious values. The media becomes a space for the construction of social and cultural meaning. Without media literacy, this construction has the potential to deviate. Critical awareness enables the preservation of relevant culture. Cultural practices that are not in line can be addressed wisely. Thus, media literacy functions as a tool for cultural selection. Social awareness is also built on balanced values (Rahayu, 2022; Susanti et al., 2024).

The results of the study show an increase in public awareness of the value of *fardhu kifayah* in the handling of the deceased when they receive information guided by reliable sources in digital media. Respondents indicated that they had a better understanding of this collective obligation after accessing digital-based religious

educational materials. Previous research by Firmansyah et al., (2023) confirms that increased consumption of digital information has the potential to erode human values if it is not balanced with an understanding of media ethics.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that media literacy is an important foundation in building social awareness regarding the handling of the deceased in the modern era. This literacy not only functions as technical knowledge, but also as a reinforcement of moral, religious, and social values. These findings directly address the research objective, which is to examine how the media can be used to build social awareness based on a correct understanding in accordance with Islamic law.

CONSLUSSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that media literacy plays a very important role in fostering social awareness among the community, particularly in relation to the handling of the deceased in the modern era. People with media literacy skills tend to be better able to understand and sort through digital information appropriately, so that funeral practices can be adapted to correct social norms and religious values. Media literacy not only increases technical knowledge but also shapes attitudes of empathy, motivation, and active participation in social activities. In addition, well-presented digital media serves to strengthen the values of solidarity and social responsibility within the community. Based on these findings, it is recommended that the community improve their media literacy skills to be able to use digital information wisely and play an active role in socio-religious activities. Religious leaders and funeral directors are encouraged to use digital media not only to convey technical information, but also to instill moral and social values so that social awareness can grow more widely. Future researchers can develop this study by expanding the scope of participants or using mixed methods to measure the impact of media literacy on social participation in greater depth. In addition, educational institutions and policymakers can design community-based media literacy training programs to ensure that social-religious practices are effective, safe, and in accordance with norms.

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