

## The Use of Journalistic Media in Students and Lecturers of State Universities in Medan City

M Yoserizal Saragih<sup>1</sup>, Ahmad Tamrin Sikumbang<sup>2</sup>, Winda Kustiawan<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of digital media has transformed journalistic media consumption patterns in higher education, raising concerns about information credibility and increasing vulnerability to misinformation. This study aims to analyse differences in patterns, preferences, and objectives of journalistic media use between university students and lecturers in Medan City. The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving students and lecturers from several higher education institutions. The findings reveal clear differences between the two groups. Students tend to rely on social media platforms and digital news portals due to their speed, ease of access, and compatibility with digital lifestyles. At the same time, lecturers predominantly use more credible and analytical journalistic sources, such as *Kompas.com*, *Tempo.co*, and academic journals to support teaching and research activities. Variations influence these differences in digital literacy levels, information needs, and attitudes toward misinformation. Students are found to be more vulnerable to hoaxes, whereas lecturers demonstrate more critical and selective information practices. The study highlights the importance of strengthening media literacy in higher education through curriculum integration, targeted training, and collaboration with media professionals to foster a credible and educational digital information ecosystem.

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### Corresponding Author:

M Yoserizal Saragih

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

Email: [yoserizal@uinsu.ac.id](mailto:yoserizal@uinsu.ac.id)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital communication technology has fundamentally transformed patterns of journalistic media consumption, particularly within academic communities. Journalistic media encompassing print, electronic, and online platforms play a vital role not only in disseminating information but also in shaping public opinion, supporting democratic processes, and fostering critical awareness [1]. In the digital era, however, the acceleration of information flows has raised serious concerns regarding

credibility, misinformation, and the decline of critical news consumption, especially among younger audiences [2].

The central research problem addressed in this study is the growing disparity in journalistic media use between academic groups, particularly students and lecturers, which may contribute to unequal levels of media literacy and vulnerability to misinformation. Students, as part of the digital native generation, tend to prioritise speed, accessibility, and platform convenience, often relying heavily on social media and online news portals. In contrast, lecturers generally demonstrate more selective and analytical information practices, grounded in professional and academic needs. This divergence creates challenges for higher education institutions in developing a shared culture of credible and responsible media consumption. From a theoretical standpoint, this study is grounded in the Uses and Effects (U&E) theory, which posits that media consumption is a purposive activity driven by users' needs, motivations, and expected outcomes [3]. Recent studies confirm that U&E theory remains relevant in analysing digital news consumption, particularly in understanding platform choice, information-seeking behaviour, and audience vulnerability to misinformation in online environments [4]. In addition, media literacy theory emphasises the importance of critical evaluation skills in enabling users to assess credibility, detect hoaxes, and responsibly engage with media content [5].

Previous research has extensively examined journalistic media use among students, revealing a strong preference for digital and social media-based news consumption [6]. Other studies focus on millennials and Generation Z as highly connected but information-vulnerable audiences [4]. Meanwhile, research on lecturers and academics highlights their role as gatekeepers of credible information and agents of media literacy within educational settings [1], [7], [8]. In the Indonesian context, several studies have explored media literacy levels among university communities and emphasised the urgency of structured media education programs [3] [9]. Then users who choose online media are quite evenly distributed, 35-44 years old at 29%, 45-54 years old at 29%.

Meanwhile, radio, print media, and podcasts are only selected by 4% to 6%. Print media is recorded at 3% to 5%, and news podcasts are at 3%. Students, as part of the digital native generation, have unique characteristics in interacting with technology. They were born and grew up along with the rapid development of digital technology, making them very familiar with mobile devices and social media as the main means of obtaining information.

Quick access to news, the ability to customise information according to personal preferences through digital platform algorithms, as well as the tendency to share and discuss news publicly, are characteristic of their behaviour in information consumption [10]. Students also face great challenges in filtering the information they consume. The emergence of the phenomenon of hoaxes, misinformation, and disinformation that is widespread on social media poses a risk to the quality of their understanding of public issues. Many college students tend to read the news in a skim (*skimming*), without checking the correctness of the information. This condition is aggravated by the nature of *multitasking*, digital, and information overload that hinders the process of processing information in depth [11]. Student news consumption shows the platform's preference for interactive, visual, and easily digestible content.

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Research on the use of journalistic media has been extensive, but most of it still focuses on a single group, such as the general public or students, without comparing it to other academic groups. Nongmaithem and Sharma [12] examine the pattern of news consumption among students and find the tendency to use digital media as the main source of information. Georgiadou and Masiola [13] researched students' perceptions of data journalism, while Panagiotou et al. [14] show that millennials and Gen Z, including college students, are increasingly reliant on social media to access news. In the Indonesian context, Limilia and Arist [15] highlight the level of media literacy among academics, while Hobbs [16] emphasises the importance of strengthening digital media literacy through structured media education programs. In addition, Hajdarmataj and Paksoy [17] developed a theory of *Uses and Effect* in the context of digital media by identifying new dimensions such as interactivity, demassification, and user control over content.

However, these studies tend to examine students and lecturers separately, without offering a comparative analysis that captures intergenerational differences in journalistic media consumption within the same academic ecosystem. Moreover, there is still limited empirical research that specifically investigates patterns, preferences, and attitudes toward misinformation among academic communities in regional contexts such as Medan, where local digital infrastructure, cultural characteristics, and institutional dynamics may shape media behaviour differently from national trends. This lack of comparative and contextual analysis constitutes a clear research gap. To address this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to comparatively analyse journalistic media use among students and lecturers.

The author plans to explore how digital literacy levels, academic roles, and information needs influence differences in media preferences, credibility assessment, and responses to misinformation. This approach is expected to provide a more nuanced understanding of journalistic media consumption within higher education. Accordingly, this study aims to analyse differences in patterns, preferences, and objectives of journalistic media use between students and lecturers in higher education institutions in Medan City. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to media studies by extending the application of *Uses and Effects* theory in academic media consumption contexts. Practically, this research is expected to support the development of more targeted and sustainable media literacy strategies, inform curriculum design, and assist policymakers, educators, and media practitioners in fostering a healthier, more credible, and educational information ecosystem in higher education.

## **2. METHOD**

According to Fadli [18], descriptive methods that are carried out based on the formulation of the problem with the intention of the study to be studied can be more in-depth related to the use of journalistic media, and the data collected is then analysed and described so that it is easy to understand by readers. Through a descriptive approach, researchers can identify the types of journalistic media most frequently used by informants (such as online news portals, social media, or print media), their frequency of use, and the most sought-after types of information, as well as the reasons underlying their preference for certain media.

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In addition, the researcher will also explore the factors that influence the decision in choosing media, including ease of access, content relevance, interactivity, and source credibility [19]. Researchers can understand more comprehensively how students and lecturers assess the credibility of the media, the extent to which they are satisfied with the information available, and the challenges they face in accessing journalistic information, such as limited media literacy, information overload, or content bias. As stated by Rachmad and Rohmah [20], the qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the meaning that individuals construct of their experiences, particularly in complex social and cultural contexts. Refers to Machali [21], an important or main source of data in qualitative research. In the data sources of this research, there are two, namely: Primary data required in the research is obtained from informants who are considered credible for the research [22].

The selection and determination of key informants is obtained directly from lecturers and students. In this study, primary data are needed from the use of journalistic media by students and lecturers of UIN North Sumatra and the University of North Sumatra. Secondary data in this study were obtained from various documents such as books, scientific articles, theses, and dissertations related to journalistic media. Literature or references are based on the themes of journalism, new media, and social media, which are relevant to this study [23]. The researcher chose the data collection measures focused on the depth of information and meaning resulting from the interaction between the researcher and the participant. Therefore, data collection is carried out through several complementary techniques to increase the richness and validity of the data. In this study, interviews were conducted with informants in depth to obtain data to answer research questions.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face. The topics of the questions in the interview included the types of journalistic media accessed, the intensity and purpose of use, the perception of media credibility, and the influence of the use of journalistic media on academic activities, such as learning, research, and scientific discussion [24]. Observations include libraries, computer labs, campus cafes, or student discussion rooms. The researcher recorded the time of media use, the type of device used (smartphone, laptop, tablet), and the social context of use (individual or group). These observations provide visual and behavioural data to support the narrative of the interview results [25]. Documentation is used to review the extent to which students and lecturers have been involved in activities related to the use of journalistic media as well as to verify empirical data obtained from interviews and observations [26].

In the qualitative descriptive technique of data analysis, there are stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, data verification, and a conclusion drawn. Data reduction helps researchers find initial patterns, such as the reason for choosing certain journalistic media or the frequency of their use [27]. Presentations can be done in the form of a matrix, graph, or thematic chart to visualise patterns and relationships between variables. This visualisation helps researchers and readers understand the phenomenon more clearly and systematically [23]. To ensure the validity of the conclusions, the researcher verified through data triangulation, member checking, and critical reflection on the analysis process [28]. In this study, the triangulation carried out is method triangulation, source triangulation, and researcher triangulation.

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With the use of three triangulations carried out by the researcher to get the compatibility between information, data, and reality in the field. As Braun said, triangulation research is carried out in various stages of direct checking, re-interviewing, and recording the same data in the field [29]. Ensuring the validity of data is the spirit of research because the validity of data determines the results and quality of the research itself. One of the data assurance techniques is data triangulation [18]. This study uses triangulation through peer examination. This is done to avoid excessive subjectivity from the researcher themselves. Therefore, it is necessary to triangulate this research with other researchers or parties involved in journalistic media activities.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **The Use of Journalistic Media in Students and Lecturers of State Universities in Medan City**

##### **3.1. The Use of Journalistic Media in UIN North Sumatra Students**

The findings of the research on the use of journalistic media in UIN North Sumatra (UINSU) students can be explained comprehensively through Uses and Effects Theory. This theory asserts that audiences are not only active users who choose media based on certain needs (*uses*), but also experience cognitive, affective, and behavioural impacts of the use of these media (*effects*). In the context of this research, UINSU students use journalistic media to meet various needs, such as cognitive needs (understanding academic and social issues), affective needs (entertainment and relaxation), and integrative needs (building academic and social identity). The use of news as material for task analysis, class discussions, and academic references shows that journalistic media is used instrumentally and reflectively, not just consumptively. The impact can be seen in increasing critical thinking skills, media literacy awareness, and selective attitudes towards information, as described in the findings of this study. These results are in line with research by Boulianne et al. [30] and Bimber et al. [31], which shows that the consumption of digital news by the younger generation has direct implications for increasing political knowledge, social awareness, and evaluative ability to information. Thus, the use of journalistic media by UINSU students reflects the dynamic relationship between the motives of media use and the intellectual effects produced. UINSU students play a role as *Early adopters* in the use of digital platforms, especially social media and online journalistic media, as the main source of information.

Social media serves as a communication innovation that is quickly adopted because it offers relative advantages in the form of speed, ease of access, and a visual format that suits students' lifestyles. This study shows that the adoption of media innovation does not take place completely and without criticism. Students retain mainstream news portals as verification references, which indicates the existence of a process of *reinvention* and *selective adoption*. These findings are in line with research by Chan-Olmsted et al. [32] and Gammon and White [33], which states that the younger generation adopts new media technologies pragmatically, while still considering the credibility and reliability of information sources. Thus, the use of journalistic media by UINSU students reflects the diffusion of adaptive innovation, where new technologies do not completely replace old media, but form a complementary media ecosystem.

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From the perspective of *Agenda Setting Theory*, the findings of this study show that journalistic media still have a significant role in shaping students' cognitive agendas, even though it is in a fragmented media landscape. UINSU students admitted that issues that were widely reported, such as education policy, social issues, and campus dynamics, were the main topics of their academic and social discussions. The role of the current journalistic media setting the agenda is *Intermediate Agenda Setting*, where social media and journalistic media influence each other in determining issues that are considered important. Social media functions as a trigger for the virality of the issue, while journalistic media provides legitimacy, depth, and an interpretive framework for the issue. These findings are in line with research by Vraga and Tully [34] and Feezell [35], which shows that the public agenda of the younger generation is formed through the complex interaction between social media and professional news media. In the context of UINSU students, the agenda-setting process is not passively accepted. Students actively assess media framing, the interests behind the news, and the relevance of the issue to academic and Islamic values. This shows a shift from the classic agenda setting to the *audience-centred agenda setting*, where the audience has a greater capacity to interpret and negotiate the media's agenda.

This study emphasises that the use of journalistic media in UIN North Sumatra students is a multidimensional process that involves the motives of use, technology adoption patterns, and the construction of cognitive and normative agendas. The main contribution of this research lies in the disclosure of how academic and Islamic values interact with the dynamics of global digital media. This research enriches the treasure of communication studies by presenting local and religious perspectives in the study of journalistic media consumption, which is still relatively limited in the international literature. These findings also affirm the urgency of strengthening journalistic media literacy institutionally so that students are able to become critical media users, adaptive to innovation, and adhere to the principles of ethics and social responsibility.

### **3.2. The Use of Journalistic Media by Students of the University of North Sumatra**

The findings of the study show that the use of journalistic media by USU students is active, selective, and goal-oriented, which is in line with the main assumptions of the *Uses and Effects theory* [36]. Students are not positioned as passive audiences, but rather as rational actors who consciously choose the media to meet certain needs. In this context, students of the University of North Sumatra (USU) use online journalistic media as a strategic means to meet their various communication needs. In terms of cognitive needs, journalistic media is used to obtain accurate and in-depth information related to academic interests, such as the development of education policies, socio-political issues, and public dynamics relevant to their field of study. Affectively, the existence of credible journalistic media provides a sense of security and confidence in the truth of information amid the rise of hoaxes, disinformation, and sensational content on social media. Meanwhile, in the integrative and social dimension, online journalistic media functions as a common reference space that allows students to be actively involved in public and academic discourse, both through classroom discussions, online forums, and social conversations based on actual issues.

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This pattern shows that journalistic media consumption is no longer individual and passive, but rather part of the process of forming collective understanding, critical attitudes, and intellectual identities of students in the campus environment. In the framework *Uses and Effects*, the use of journalistic media produces cognitive effects (increased analytical skills and understanding of context), affective effects (concern for public issues and campus policies), and behavioural effects (habits of cross-verification and selective media consumption). These effects show that journalistic media function not only as a source of information, but also as an instrument for the formation of students' academic literacy competencies.

The findings of this study are in line with various cutting-edge studies that confirm the shift in the role of young audiences, especially students, from passive consumers to active and reflective users in the digital media ecosystem. Research by Kumpel et al. [37] in *Digital Journalism* shows that students tend to use online journalistic media selectively to meet their cognitive needs and verify information, especially when dealing with the flow of disinformation on social media. This strengthens the findings of this study that USU students use journalistic media as the main source of reference for the legitimacy of information, not just as a daily news consumption. In perspective, *Uses and Effects Theory*, research [38], it was found that the use of quality journalistic media had a significant effect on improving political literacy, critical attitudes, and student discursive participation. These findings are consistent with the results of research at USU, which shows the cognitive, affective, and behavioural effects of journalistic media consumption, especially in forming cross-verification habits and concern for public issues and campus policies. The consumption pattern of digital journalistic media in USU students can be understood through the *Diffusion of Innovations Theory* [39].

Online journalistic media is widely accepted because it has innovative characteristics that support adoption, such as relative advantage (speed, easy access), compatibility (according to students' digital learning styles), and observability (easy to share and compare across platforms). This study found that the diffusion process did not take place evenly. Students from the social-humanities group tend to act as *early adopters* who use journalistic media for critical and reflective analysis. On the other hand, students from the exact group are more often in the *early majority* or *late majority* category, with more pragmatic and instrumental consumption patterns. This condition shows that structural factors, such as curriculum, academic traditions, and intellectual environment, influence the diffusion of journalistic media.

The lack of integration of journalistic media literacy in learning causes media adoption to run individually, so that the media literacy gap persists even though access to digital media is wider. The research confirms that journalistic media play an important role in shaping the priorities of USU student issues, especially related to education, campus policy, and regional development. A study by Facciani et al. [40] emphasised that the adoption of digital journalistic media among students is influenced by disciplinary backgrounds, academic culture, and curriculum integration. Social sciences and humanities students tend to be *Early adopters*, while exact students showed a more instrumental adoption pattern. These findings corroborate the results of research at USU, which shows

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the inequality of journalistic media diffusion between scientific groups due to the lack of systemic media literacy policies.

Research by Vargo et al. [41] explained that journalistic media continue to play a key role as *Agenda Legitimiser* in the midst of the dominance of social media. Social media does serve as a trigger for initial attention, but it is journalistic media that provides depth, framing, and epistemic validation to the issue. This pattern is identical to the research findings at USU, where students first discovered issues through social media, but relied on journalistic media, including campus media such as *The Voice of USU*, to understand the issue comprehensively and academically. This is in line with *Agenda Setting Theory* [42], which states that the media influences what is considered important by the public. USU students are generally first exposed to issues through social media, but journalistic media is the main reference to understand the depth of issues, framing, and policy implications. In this context, social media serves as an *Agenda Diffuser*, while journalistic media acts as an *Agenda Legitimiser*, which gives epistemic weight to public issues. Campus media such as Suara USU have a strategic position in the internal agenda-setting of the campus. This media not only reflects the interests of students but also directs collective attention to academic issues in a critical and data-driven manner. Campus media contributes to the formation of a healthy and participatory culture of academic discourse.

In addition to the aspect of information consumption, the research findings also show that USU students are involved in active interaction with digital journalistic media, both through comment columns, news sharing, online discussions, and involvement as contributors in campus media. This phenomenon can be explained through the Theory of Digital Media Interactivity [43]. Research by Boulianne [44] emphasised that interactive features of digital media encourage young audiences to transform into *Prosumers* who actively participate in public discourse. Interactivity increases cognitive engagement and a sense of ownership of discourse, but also has the potential to lead to polarisation and emotional bias if not balanced with critical literacy. These findings are parallel to the condition of USU students who actively discuss, share, and comment on the news, while facing algorithm and *Information overload*. This theory emphasises that digital media is no longer one-way, but rather allows for two-way and participatory interaction between users and media. In the context of USU students, this interactivity strengthens the role of students as prosumers of consumers as well as producers of information. The interactivity of journalistic media plays a significant role in shaping the pattern of student involvement in public issues, especially in the digital space.

Through commentary, content sharing, and cross-platform discussions, journalistic media not only increase students' cognitive engagement in understanding and analysing actual issues but also strengthen a sense of ownership of the academic and social discourse that develops in society. This condition encourages students not to be readers, but actors who are involved in the process of producing meaning. Furthermore, this interactivity encourages critical participation of students in the digital public space, both in the form of argumentative discussions, clarification of information, and the delivery of data-based attitudes and credible media references, thereby strengthening the function of journalistic media as a medium of educational public deliberation. However, high levels of interactivity

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also carry risks, such as polarisation of opinions, the spread of subjective opinions, and emotional bias, especially when interactions are driven more by algorithmic logic than academic rationality.

The integration of previous research shows that the findings of this study do not stand alone, but rather confirm global trends in the study of digital communication and journalism. The uniqueness of this research lies in the local context of Indonesian higher education institutions, which shows that although access to digital journalistic media is widening the gap, strengthening media literacy and journalistic ethics still requires structured institutional interventions so that students are not only technologically adaptive but also intellectually critical and socially responsible. Although the use of journalistic media has a positive impact, this study also identifies serious challenges in the form of information overload, dominance of social media algorithms, and clickbait practices. From the perspective of *Uses and Effects*, this condition has the potential to produce negative effects in the form of superficial consumption (*headline reading*) and cognitive fatigue. Within the framework of *Agenda Setting*, the dominance of viral issues risks shifting students' attention from substantive issues to sensational issues. Meanwhile, in *the Diffusion of Innovations*, this challenge shows that the adoption of journalistic ethical values and critical literacy has not fully followed the adoption of media technology.

The media literacy gap between students emphasises that access to technology is not synonymous with critical skills, so systematic pedagogical interventions and institutional policies are needed. Overall, the use of journalistic media by students at the University of North Sumatra shows a complex interaction between academic needs, digital media innovation, issue agenda construction, and media interactivity dynamics. Within the framework of *Uses and Effects Theory*, journalistic media functions as an instrument to meet the needs of information and learning that students actively choose to support academic activities and understanding public issues. Meanwhile, through the perspective of Diffusion of Innovations Theory, digital journalistic media is understood as an innovation whose adoption process takes place unevenly among students, influenced by scientific backgrounds, media literacy levels, and social and institutional environments. *The Setting Theory agenda* emphasises the strategic role of journalistic media in shaping the priorities of academic and public issues that are considered important by students, especially in providing depth, context, and legitimacy to issues that were previously spread through social media.

From the perspective of Digital Media Interactivity Theory, journalistic media also function as a participatory space that allows students to play the role of *prosumers*, namely not only consuming information but also engaging in the process of producing meaning through discussion, commentary, and content distribution. This interactivity strengthens cognitive engagement, a sense of ownership of academic and social discourse, and encourages students' critical participation in digital public spaces. These findings affirm the urgency of strengthening journalistic media literacy institutionally so that USU students are not only adaptive to technological developments, but also able to be intellectually critical, uphold normative ethics, and be socially responsible in facing the complexity of the digital information ecosystem.

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### 3.3. The Use of Journalistic Media by Lecturers at the University of North Sumatra

This discussion interprets empirical findings regarding the use of journalistic media in lecturers of the University of North Sumatra (USU) in the context of the digital information ecosystem and academic culture of universities by referring to the findings of previous research and the theoretical framework of contemporary mass communication. In general, the results of the study show that USU lecturers position journalistic media not just as a source of daily information, but as a strategic academic instrument that is used reflectively, selectively, and layered. This pattern is in line with the findings of Newman and Fletcher [45] and Saulīte and Ščeulovs [46], which suggests that academics tend to develop news consumption patterns based on credibility, verification, and epistemic relevance amid a flood of digital information. Perspective *Uses, and Effects Theory*, the use of journalistic media by USU lecturers reflects the fulfillment of cognitive needs (public policy information, social issues, and national dynamics), professional integrative needs (strengthening the role of lecturers as public intellectuals), and long-term effects in the form of increasing critical awareness of the structure of the media and the power of information. These findings reinforce the argument [47] that active audiences, including lecturers, not only choose the media, but also interpret and evaluate its impact on professional practice.

USU lecturers show a pattern of journalistic media consumption that is oriented towards source credibility, editorial stability, and academic relevance, by combining online journalistic media, print media, news television, as well as scientific journals and research reports. This pattern is consistent with the results of the study [48] stating that academics use news as a "*Contextual Knowledge Source*" that complements the scientific literature. *Uses and Effects Theory*, journalistic media serve as an initial source of information (*Surveillance function*), which helps lecturers understand the social context before conducting scientific research. The effect of media use is not direct, but is mediated by academic literacy, teaching experience, and scientific ethos. Therefore, journalistic media do not replace scientific journals, but act as a bridge between social reality and academic analysis. Generational differences in media preferences can also be explained through variations in media needs and experiences. Senior lecturers tend to maintain conventional media due to the stability and depth of analysis, while junior lecturers are more adaptive to digital media without ignoring the principle of verification.

These findings are in line with [49], which emphasises that professional and institutional factors determine news consumption patterns more than age alone. In choosing a journalistic media platform, USU lecturers showed a selective adoption of digital media innovation. Online news portals are adopted as innovations that provide ease of access, speed of information, and diversity of perspectives, while social media is carefully positioned as a distribution channel, rather than the main source of truthful information. This pattern is in line with *Diffusion of Innovations Theory*, especially at the *Persuasion and Decision*, where technology adoption is not automatic, but rather through the evaluation of relative benefits, value compatibility, and epistemological risks. Research [50] shows that academics tend to be *Early majority* critical, not *Early adopters*, who are reactive, in adopting digital news platforms. These findings explain why USU lecturers accept online media innovations, but still maintain academic standards and information ethics.

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USU lecturers' awareness of media framing, economic-political interests, and ideological orientation of news shows that journalistic media is understood as a strategic actor in the formation of an issue agenda, not a neutral entity. In the context of *Agenda Setting Theory*, journalistic media play a role in determining what issues are of concern to the public and academics, especially related to education policy, national politics, and socio-strategic issues. Research [51] emphasised that the media agenda not only affects the general public, but also intellectual elite groups, including lecturers and researchers. However, the findings of this study show that USU lecturers do not passively accept the media agenda, but rather carry out *counter-framing* through academic discussions, research, and critical learning in the classroom. Thus, the relationship between the media and lecturers is dialectical, not deterministic. The use of journalistic media by USU lecturers does not stop at consumption, but develops into active participation through opinion writing, column articles, and the distribution of academic ideas in the public space.

This phenomenon is in line with the Theory of Digital Media Interactivity put forward by [47], media users transform into *Prosumer* producers as well as consumers of information. Research [52] shows that the involvement of academics in journalistic media strengthens the quality of public discourse and narrows the distance between scientific knowledge and society. In this context, USU lecturers use journalistic media as a deliberative space to carry out the social functions of higher education, as well as strengthen the legitimacy of science in the digital public space. Overall, the use of journalistic media by lecturers at the University of North Sumatra reflects the complex interaction between academic needs (*Uses and Effects*), adoption of digital media innovations (*Diffusion of Innovations*), the construction of the agenda (*Agenda Setting*), and the dynamics of digital media interactivity. Journalistic media is positioned as a strategic partner in the implementation of the tridharma of higher education to support contextual learning, enrich research, and expand intellectual service to the community. However, structural, epistemological, and pedagogical challenges underscore the urgency of institutionally strengthening journalistic media literacy. Media literacy is not enough to be understood as a technical ability to access information, but must be developed as a critical, ethical, and social competence so that lecturers are able to play a role as guardians of the quality of public discourse and knowledge agents in the digital era.

### **3.3. The Use of Journalistic Media in UIN North Sumatra Lecturers**

The findings of this study are in line with *Uses and Effects Theory*, which places the audience as an active actor in choosing and using media based on cognitive, affective, and normative needs [53]. Lecturers of UIN North Sumatra use journalistic media, especially to meet cognitive needs, namely understanding public policy issues, social dynamics, and national developments, but the effect of the media is not directly accepted. Journalistic information is processed reflexively through scientific verification and scientific ethical considerations, so that the media effect is mediated by the literacy capacity and academic value of lecturers. These results are in line with research [54] and [45], which shows that academics and higher-educated groups tend to use news media as a starting point of inquiry, rather than as a source of final truth.

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In the context of Islamic universities, this practice is strengthened by the principle of *tabayyun*, which functions as an epistemological as well as normative mechanism in responding to public information. Perspective *Diffusion of Innovations Theory*. The adoption of digital journalistic media among UIN SU lecturers shows a pattern of *selective adoption*. Online media has been widely adopted due to its relative advantages (speed and accessibility), but considerations of compatibility with academic values and scientific ethics limit its use. This explains why lecturers do not completely abandon conventional media or scientific journals, but combine them strategically. These findings corroborate the study [55] and [56], which state that the adoption of digital media in the academic environment is not linear but is influenced by organisational culture, scientific disciplines, and professional norms. Thus, the diffusion of journalistic media at UIN SU is not only determined by technological factors, but also by the *Academic Value System* and institutional identity as an Islamic university.

*Agenda Setting Theory*, journalistic media play an important role in shaping the priorities of issues that lecturers pay attention to, especially related to public policy, contemporary religious issues, and socio-political dynamics. However, the power of the media agenda does not work hegemonically. UIN SU lecturers are actively *Counter-agenda setting* through critical reading, academic discussion, and integration of the scientific literature. This is in line with the findings [57] and [58], which confirm that in the educated elite group, the media's agenda tends to be negotiated, not passively accepted. In this context, lecturers are not only the object of the media agenda, but also subjects who produce counter-agendas through research, teaching, and opinion writing in the mass media. Digital Media Interactivity Theory explains how online journalistic media opens up a wider space for lecturers as *Prosumers*, both as critical readers and producers of public discourse. UIN SU lecturers utilise opinion columns and analysis articles as a medium for disseminating academic ideas to the public, as well as carrying out the function of *Public Intellectual*. These findings are consistent with research [30] and [59], which shows that the interactivity of digital media allows academics to contribute directly to public discourse, while still facing the risk of polarisation, misinformation, and simplification of issues.

Therefore, lecturers' involvement in the digital public space is always accompanied by epistemological prudence and moral responsibility. In synthesis, the use of journalistic media by lecturers of UIN North Sumatra shows a pattern that can be understood through the integration of several main theoretical perspectives. In the framework of *Uses and Effects*, journalistic media are used to meet cognitive and pedagogical needs, but the effects caused are not direct; they are mediated by the level of academic literacy and epistemological awareness of lecturers. Meanwhile, through the perspective of *Diffusion of Innovations*, the adoption of digital media by lecturers is selective and value-based, where technological innovation is accepted as far as it is compatible with scientific ethics, academic culture, and Islamic values embraced by the institution. On the other hand, *Agenda Setting Theory* shows that lecturers do not just follow the media agenda, but actively negotiate it through the process of scientific verification and deepening of academic literature. Furthermore, in the context of *Digital Media Interactivity*, lecturers play a dual role as consumers as well as producers of public discourse through the use of mass media and digital platforms.

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The integration of these four perspectives emphasises that journalistic media in the context of UIN SU not only function as a means of information, but also have epistemological, pedagogical, social, and normative dimensions, which are in line with the mission of Islamic universities in building scientific civilisation, public ethics, and intellectual responsibility in the digital era.

### **Novelty**

The main novelty of this discussion lies in the comprehensive integration between classical and contemporary mass communication theories (*Uses and Effects*, *Diffusion of Innovations*, *Agenda Setting*, and *Digital Media Interactivity*) with the local context of state universities in Medan City, as well as the epistemological and normative values of Islam. In contrast to previous studies that generally focused on one group of audiences (students or lecturers) or emphasised the technological aspect alone, this study simultaneously compared the patterns of journalistic media use among students and lecturers across institutions (USU and UIN SU) to be able to capture the structural relationship between academic generations, institutional culture, and digital media ecosystems. Conceptual novelty is also seen in the finding that journalistic media not only function as informative, but also operate as an epistemological and normative arena, especially in the Islamic university environment.

The principles of *tabayyun*, scientific ethics, and social responsibility act as mediating variables that distinguish the effect of media on lecturers and students compared to global findings in the Scopus literature, which tend to be secular and universalistic. Thus, this study expands the Uses and Effects Theory by showing that media effects are not only mediated by media literacy, but also by religious values and institutional identity. The empirical novelty of this research lies in the disclosure of the dual role of journalistic media as a "*legitimiser agenda*" and an "*academic prosumer space*". The findings show that although social media serves as an early trigger for attention to issues, journalistic media remains a source of epistemic legitimacy for students and lecturers.

At the same time, lecturers and students are not only consumers, but also producers of public discourse that contribute to academic and social discourse, especially through campus media and opinion columns. This enriches the Agenda Setting and the Theory of Digital Media Interactivity with institutional and pedagogical perspectives. Overall, the novelty of this research lies in the development of a multidimensional analysis framework on the use of journalistic media in Indonesian universities, which places the media as a node between digital innovation, academic practice, public agenda construction, and scientific ethics. These findings not only fill the gap in international literature related to the context of Southeast Asia and Islamic universities but also offer policy implications in the form of the urgency of institutional journalistic media literacy that is critical, ethical, and sustainable.

### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that journalistic media continue to hold a strategic position within the academic ecosystem, although their utilisation manifests differently across academic roles. Students and lecturers at UIN North Sumatra and the University of North Sumatra demonstrate distinctive yet complementary patterns of engagement with

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journalistic media. Overall, journalistic media functions not merely as a channel for information dissemination but as an intellectual resource that supports academic reasoning, identity formation, and participation in public discourse. The implications of this study are twofold. Theoretically, the findings reinforce the relevance of classical communication theories such as Uses and Effects, Diffusion of Innovations, Agenda Setting, and Digital Media Interactivity while demonstrating their adaptive applicability in contemporary digital-academic contexts.

This study highlights that media effects are not linear but are mediated by literacy, values, and institutional culture. Practically, the results imply that higher education institutions need to strengthen journalistic media literacy as an integral component of academic development, emphasising critical evaluation, ethical reasoning, and epistemological awareness in navigating digital information environments. This research is subject to several limitations. First, the scope of the study is limited to two higher education institutions within a single urban context, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Second, the qualitative approach prioritises depth of interpretation over statistical representation, meaning that variations across disciplines, age groups, and institutional types may not be fully captured. Third, this study focuses primarily on journalistic media and does not extensively examine the influence of algorithm-driven platforms or non-journalistic digital content. Future research is therefore encouraged to expand the institutional scope to include private universities, non-formal education, and different regional contexts in Indonesia.

Subsequent studies may also integrate quantitative or mixed-method approaches to measure the relationship between journalistic media use, academic performance, and susceptibility to misinformation. In addition, incorporating perspectives from media ecology, algorithmic governance, and artificial intelligence in news distribution would provide a more comprehensive understanding of media consumption dynamics in the Society 5.0 era. For the general public, this research contributes to a broader awareness of the importance of journalistic media literacy as a civic competence. By emphasising critical, ethical, and reflective media engagement, the study underscores the role of higher education not only as a centre of knowledge production but also as a guardian of credible public discourse in an increasingly complex digital information landscape.

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