ABSTRACT

How Discrepancies Between General and Digital Health Literacy Leave Indonesian Young Adults Vulnerable Online

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Background : Indonesian young adults are among the most connected populations, with national internet penetration reaching 80.66% in 2025. Health information increasingly reaches them through social media, where misinformation is widespread, reaching up to 87% of posts in some topics. Health literacy is commonly measured with general instruments, yet navigating online health information requires distinct eHealth literacy skills. Whether these two literacies align among young adults remains unclear, and health promotion media are rarely designed from such evidence.

Objective : To compare general and digital health literacy among Indonesian young adults (18–24 years), identify predictors of low eHealth literacy and poor verification, and map media preferences.

Research Methods: A cross-sectional online survey was conducted with 410 young adults aged 18–24 years in Indonesia via KoboToolbox using HLS-EU-Q16, Indonesian eHEALS, and a media questionnaire, analysing data with multivariable logistic regression.

Results : Although 82.7% showed sufficient general health literacy, 80.2% had low eHealth literacy (65.6% showed this gap). TikTok was consulted almost as frequently as healthcare professionals (53.2% vs 56.1%), despite lower trust (45.4% vs 99.5%). Overall, 41.7% rarely verified health content. Using social media $\ge$5 hours daily increased odds of low eHealth literacy (AOR 1.85; 95% CI 1.11–3.09) and poor verification (AOR 1.65; 95% CI 1.08–2.51). Preferred formats were 30–60-second conversational videos (48.5%–55.1%) viewed evenings (74.3%).

Conclusion/Lesson Learned : General health literacy masks digital vulnerability, driven by heavy social media use rather than limited access. Interventions should embed verification training into short, evening conversational videos fronted by trusted health professionals.

Keyword : health literacy; eHealth literacy; social media; young adults; health promotion media