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Article

Emerging Trends in Communication and Media Education in the Digital Age: A Global Analysis and Comparative Study

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Abstract

The field of communication and media education is undergoing a transformation with the rapid pace of digital innovation, globalization, and the demands of the media industry and society. This paper is a global comparative study of emerging trends in communication and media education and their impact on programs' curricula, pedagogies, and administrative structures. Using a review of contemporary literature and data, we highlight developed trends, including the complex integration of digital and media literacy, adoption of modular and interdisciplinary curriculum structures that offer flexibility and career exploration, inclusion of emerging technologies (AI, VR, and Metaverse) in curriculum frameworks, and changes in program accreditation and industry partnerships. Overall, this paper identified considerable movement around experiential learning, data-informed decision making, and the development of critical thinking skills through pedagogies that prepare students for a digital media ecosystem that is evolving and converging. Continued challenges identified include the digital divide, continuous professional development for faculty, and incommensurability between academic theory and industry practice. Using a comparative approach of how institutions and programs across the globe are approaching these trends (when available), we outline key implications for educators, programs, institutions, and policymakers and propose a shared vision for the future of communication and media education encompasses flexible, ethically-grounded, and technology-infused pedagogies that inform students as critical consumers of media and accountable global communicators.

Keywords: communication education; media literacy; digital pedagogy; globalization; experiential learning; curriculum development; technological integration; intercultural competence; digital age

1. Introduction

The 21st century has ushered in a time of dramatic changes in the communication and media landscape at the global level. Rapid advances in digital technologies, the introduction of social media platforms, and convergence of media formats have fundamentally changed how information is produced, disseminated, and consumed (Li et al., 2025). These changes have created a complex, multi-layered, and often chaotic information space that has placed new and immediate demands on individuals, society, and educational institutions. As a result, communication and media education programs around the world have arrived at a critical point in their development where they are questioning their overall mission pedagogy and curricular design (Lal et al., 2024a).

The digital age has provided the opportunity for individuals to produce content and become active agents of shaping their viewpoints, while simultaneously raising huge questions about accuracy, truthfulness of information, digital citizenship, and ethics in communication. Skills that

were once redundant to successful career paths in media (writing, broadcasting, public relations) are no longer fixed competencies. Media professionals today require dexterity, possess digital literacy skills, and maneuver within a global industry that is being disrupted constantly. Media professions today require skills that involve data informed decision making, cross-platform storytelling, audience engagement, and digital strategy while also considering ethical standards of practice. For this professional landscape to change, educational programs designed to prepare future practitioners must change, as well.

Additionally, the case for communication and media education goes beyond training individuals for the profession. In an environment of misinformation and disinformation, coupled with being presented with unexplained content streams via algorithms, media literacy is a required competency of informed and active citizens (Girón et al., 2024). Students must know how to critically access, analyze, evaluate, and create media that will allow them to make meaning through society, participate in democracy, and build social cohesion. In this regard, educational institutions are faced with a two-pronged initiative: responsible for preparing students for exciting professions, while simultaneously creating an environment for students to be curious about media's role in culture, politics, and personal identity (Jolls, 2024). This paper begins an international comparative study of the emerging trends that are transforming communication and media education. With a focus on developments worldwide, the aim of the research is to reveal patterns from diverse geographic and cultural contexts, formulate some examples of innovative practice, and understand some unique and common challenges and opportunities for educators and their institutions. The study works to reveal how programs are refining curriculum in response to emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Metaverse, and greater inter-disciplinary collaboration (i.e., partnerships between disciplines) and the longer road of bridging the link between academia and industry (Waheed et al., 2025). It is also a study of how accreditation organizations adapt in the landscape of change, as well as what enrollment tells us about changing student interest, and demographics.

Comparing perspectives toward these trends and changes contributes to a fuller, more nuanced, understanding of the global state of communication and media education. Communication and media education can be understood through a system-based perspective. Using a system-based perspective for comparative research is valuable because comparative researchers utilize a system-based approach to understand how various forces, including technological, economic, political, and cultural, influence education reform (Mancini, 2020). By synthesizing research from a diverse range of scholarly articles and reports, this paper will provide valuable insights to academic leaders, curriculum designers, faculty, and policymakers, in their pursuit of both challenges and opportunities that arise when educating communicators in an uncertain, but exciting future. The general argument is one of a proactive, flexible, and ethically informed educational innovation need, which is necessary for the future of the vitality and social relevance of communication and media disciplines across the globe.

Table 1. Key Drivers of Transformation in Communication and Media Education.

Driver Category	Specific Forces	Educational Implications
Technological	Digital platforms, AI, VR/AR, Metaverse	Curriculum updates, new skill requirements, infrastructure investment
Economic	Media industry disruption, changing job markets	Industry partnerships, employability focus, practical training
Social	Misinformation proliferation, civic engagement needs	Media literacy emphasis, critical thinking development

Political	Global information flows, regulatory changes	Ethics education, cross-cultural communication training
Cultural	Audience fragmentation, content democratization	Diverse perspectives, global citizenship preparation

Note. Synthesized from Li et al. (2025), Lal et al. (2024a), and Girón et al. (2024).

Building on these key drivers, the theoretical framework and literature review situate the transformation of communication and media education within broader academic and social movements, tracing its historical roots and mapping its contemporary evolution. The field now stands at the crossroads of communication studies, educational theory, and media sociology, drawing from established models to analyze how globalization, digitalization, and the urgent need for media literacy have shaped current approaches. Modern curricula increasingly emphasize not only professional skills and technical proficiency but also critical analysis, ethical reasoning, and intercultural competence to address the complexities of today's media environment. By reviewing scholarly work and institutional practices, the study explores how academic programs are navigating the convergence of traditional and new media, integrating experiential learning, and responding to the persistent challenges of the digital divide and the shifting boundaries between theory and industry practice. This comparative perspective enables a nuanced understanding of global innovation and adaptation, highlighting the ongoing need for responsive, interdisciplinary, and socially relevant pedagogy that prepares students for both professional success and active citizenship in a dynamic, interconnected world.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The study takes place at the intersection of communication studies, education theory, and media sociology. The study draws on established theoretical frameworks to explain global trends in communication and media education. The literature review summarizes existing scholarships to illustrate the historical evolution of the field, the impact of contemporary forces like globalization and digitalization, how media literacy is urgently needed, as well as a set of gaps in scholarly research that this study takes on.

2.1. The Historical Trajectory of Communication and Media Education

Communication and media education, as a formal area of academic study, is a relatively recent phenomenon, dating back to the early 1900s. Initially, communication and media education developed from departments of rhetoric, or speech and journalism, and was mainly focused on the development of professional skills for practicing public speaking, print journalism, and broadcasting. The initial pedagogical focus was on professional progress, in the sense that students had distinct outcomes in developed and established media contexts. The theoretical foundations would commonly come from the humanities or social sciences, with a structured and professional mission.

The mass society and mass communication research that took off in the mid-20th century marked a significant intellectual shift. Researchers began to study the effects of media on audiences and society systematically. Social theories developed, such as agenda-setting, cultivation theory, and uses and gratifications, which significantly expanded the scope of the field from vocational training to considering the critical analysis of media institutions, messages, and impacts. Curriculum and courses emphasized perspectives from media theory, research methods, and media criticism, reflecting the tensions towards the social and political influences of media. The final quarter of the 20th century saw another wave of advancements marked by new media technologies, like cable television, satellite communications, and the internet.

The field faced with concepts of media convergence, the fading distinction between producers and consumers, and globalization of transnational media flows. Academic programs attempted to

incorporate new media production skills, broaden an international perspective, and build on established practices and theories; we could look at this as the beginning of a shift. The rapid pace of technological change generally outstripped the abilities of institutions to adapt, presenting challenges for adopting practices and pedagogies while the media landscape was transforming. Understanding the evolution of communication and media academic programs in the historical context strengthens visibility of current challenges and changes in the field. We do not emerge from a vacuum, current trends are part of a longer process, continuing to respond and adapt to technological and sociocultural change (Tselykh, 2024). The present moment is more disruptive than this evolutionary history, with the saturation of digital, phantomization, requiring a rethinking of the purpose and work of the discipline.

Table 2. Historical Evolution of Communication and Media Education.

Era	Time Period	Primary Focus	Key Theoretical Developments	Dominant Pedagogical Approach
Foundational	Early 1900s–1940s	Professional skills (rhetoric, journalism, broadcasting)	Humanities and social science foundations	Vocational training
Mass Communication Research	1950s–1970s	Media effects and audience studies	Agenda-setting, cultivation theory, uses and gratifications	Critical analysis and research methods
New Media Emergence	1980s–1990s	Media Convergence and globalization	Convergence theory, transnational media flows	Integration of production and theory
Digital Transformation	2000s–present	Platform ecosystems and digital literacy	Phantomization, participatory culture	Flexible, technology-infused learning

Note. Adapted from Tselykh (2024) and historical analysis of media education development.

2.2. Globalism, Digital Disruption, and Curriculum Changes

Globalization and digital disruption are the primary agents of change influencing communication and media education today. Globalization enabled by digital networks are reshaping and radically altering the global media landscape where information, ideas, and cultural products flow and circulate across vast distances and national borders in a nonsensical time frame. Digital audiences span multiple time zones, considerations of audience overlap are moot, and media products compete for engagement in real time. The implications for curriculum are ongoing and call on students to learn effective practices in communicating to diverse international and transnational audiences, within and across races, cultures, ethnicities, and countries, with invested interest in understanding increasingly complex and nuanced global media industries. As globalization in media education becomes more normative, it is also being framed as the internationalization of the curriculum, particularly with intersectional and cross-cultural communication theory, case studies, and international opportunities such as study abroad and curricular collaboration. Funding also provides an exciting catalyst for globalization of media curricula; governmental and/or third-party grants place value on preparing students for a globalized workforce (Lal et al., 2024a).

Three simultaneous and ongoing phases of digital transformation signal media change. Digital disruption, in both subject matter and pedagogical practices, includes four widespread principles (1) the legacy paradigm for journalism, (2) decline of print and rise of digital media, (3) data-driven attention economy, and (4) the automation of content production through Artificial Intelligence (AI). Understanding these structural changes in media processes must advance the skills and knowledge media professionals require in a rapidly evolving space. The constant in media education must impose a challenge—can curriculum consistently respond to the volatility and turbulence of technological disruption. For example, the introduction of Metaverse as a new communication technologies raises questions, research, and ongoing professional conversations about the societal potential of using Metaverse as a communicative process and potential implications for education and media education (Waheed et al., 2025).

Communication simulations, and other experiential learning pedagogies, are vital for students to develop practical skills and experience the communicative process of achieving a given audience and/or outcome, in an authentic yet controlled environment (Phan, 2025). However, institutions must significantly invest in infrastructure, software and training. Typically, curriculum change delays the implementation of these technologies and communicates a delay for curricular revision. Curricular change is inherently complex and can be slowed by institutional bureaucracies; while curricular change must occur, it must seek to strike a balance between flexibility and preservation of principle theoretical frameworks and ethics. The best programs approach curricular revision in a flexible, forward-facing manner and create time to adjust. Successful programs revise offerings every few years to respond to changes in technologies, industry trends, and societal demands (Lal et al., 2024a).

Table 3. Phases of Digital Disruption in Media Education.

Phase	Characteristics	Curriculum Implications	Key Challenges
Legacy paradigm shift	Traditional journalism models declining	Integration of digital-first approaches	Faculty retraining, resource allocation
Print to digital transition	Rise of online platforms, mobile consumption	Cross-platform storytelling skills	Infrastructure investment
Data-driven attention economy	Algorithmic content curation, analytics focus	Data literacy and audience analytics courses	Ethical considerations, privacy concerns
AI-automated content production	Generative AI tools, automated journalism	AI literacy, critical evaluation of AI outputs	Rapid obsolescence, authenticity issues

Note. Based on analysis from Waheed et al. (2025), Phan (2025), and Lal et al. (2024a).

2.3. The Need for Media and Digital Literacy

In addition to preparing students for careers, a priority and a growing focus of communication and media education, is creating media and digital literacy. People access a myriad of information in today's information-rich environment. While media literacy may have once been a skill for a select few, today it is indisputable that it is a necessity of modern citizenship and ongoing learning (Girón et al., 2024). Communication and media education needs to recognize that media literacy is intimately tied to various educational reform measures globally and should therefore be considered as a common action that should be integrated throughout all educational levels (Almakaty, 2024). Media literacy is a complex notion, which includes skills such as accessing, analyzing, evaluating, creating,

and acting through all types of communication. This is not simply parents protecting their children from the harmful effects of media but about promoting media literacy and empowering individuals to be responsible consumers of information and creators of media.

The importance of this undertaking increases in light of the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation worldwide, the negative impacts of online polarization, and issues regarding ethics relating to algorithmic content curation and data surveillance. A high-quality media literacy education produces individuals that have the skills to differentiate between biased and trustworthy sources, understand persuasive techniques, comprehend the economic and political conditions of media systems, and appreciate the value of diverse voices and perspectives. Media literacy education promotes critical thinking, ethical inquiry, and civic engagement. Scholars suggest media education should not just create consumers and end-users of technology, rather, media education should be on critical agenda to produce citizens who will question, criticize, and increasingly construct their media ecosystem (Mateus et al., 2022).

Given this call to action, educational leaders and policymakers are becoming increasingly focused on creating and implementing comprehensive media literacy to meet the demands of educating individuals to be strong consumers of information (Jolls, 2024). Recently, media literacy has emerged in K-12 educational standards, and more universities have expanded their offering of dedicated courses and programs. For schools of communication and media, it represents an opportunity and a responsibility. Schools of communication and media are in a unique position to lead the development of innovative pedagogically focused models of media literacy, research on students' and teachers' attitudes and experiences, and recruit and train the next generation of educators to be advocates in their schools and communities. This is not easy work, schools of communication and media institutions will need to establish a shared way of defining methodologies for thinking, experiential learning on how to teach and educate students about media literacy, process the multitude of ways different demographic groups engage in the various forms of media, and working to create a sense of belonging while being sensitive to different cultural identities (Almakaty, 2024). There are clear gaps in several areas like environmental education, based on reviews of media framing, and growing concerns about media literacy, and there are successful initiatives in wider, broader, and deeper integration of critical media analysis in all subject areas and increasingly across disciplines (Cacu et al., 2024). Review of longitudinal trends in literacy demonstrate methods of change in educational systems are being considered to increasingly integrate these necessary skills (Girón et al., 2024).

Table 4. Core Components of Media and Digital Literacy Frameworks.

Competency Area	Description	Educational Objectives	Assessment Methods
Access	Ability to locate and retrieve media content	Navigate platforms, use search tools effectively	Practical demonstrations, portfolio reviews
Analyze	Critical examination of media messages	Identify bias, recognize persuasive techniques	Written analyses, discussion participation
Evaluate	Assessment of credibility and reliability	Distinguish trustworthy sources, verify information	Source evaluation exercises, fact-checking projects

Create	Production of media content	Develop multimedia skills, ethical content creation	Media production projects, peer reviews
Act	Civic engagement through media	Participate in democratic discourse, advocate responsibly	Community engagement projects, reflective journals

Note. Framework adapted from Almakaty (2024), Girón et al. (2024), and Mateus et al. (2022).

Gaps in Current Literature and Rationale for the Study

Although some literature exists about trends in each of the individual areas of communication and media education there is no comprehensive, global comparative analysis. Much of the existing research is written specifically about certain regions of the globe, on education in either North America or Europe, or about specific countries. For example, some studies have captured teachers' perspectives about media education in Latin America during COVID-19 (Mateus et al., 2022), while a few reviewed trends in media education through a single journal (Tselykh, 2024). While these studies provide important localized perspectives, they do not provide a comprehensive cross-contextual perspective, which are needed to analyze the field among the global inequities, challenges, and promises that are happening in this space. This study is aimed at addressing this gap through a comparative methodology to seek to identify greater patterns, as well as localized variations in how institutions are responding to a shared set of global challenges. In addition to this, while this research area is seeing increased interest for topics like media literacy (Girón et al., 2024), media convergence (Li et al., 2025), and the implications of the Metaverse (Waheed et al., 2025), this research seeks to make a contribution in that space by pulling together multiple trends more broadly related to curriculum and pedagogy and discovering their implications for education reform. While they are obviously related in a broader landscape, existing literature has often examined these trends in a silo. If a bibliometric analysis examines the extent to which research on a somewhat experimental topic—such as AI integrated into journalism—has been published, it does not often build a bridge to see how this intellectual trend leads to some either implicit or explicit change in educational or professional practice. As an inquiry study, we will trace not only the what (i.e., new courses developed around AI) but also the how and why educational change is occurring by bridging connections to technological innovations, industry shifts, accreditation and educational competencies, and pedagogical philosophy in higher education.

Finally, as noted, more future-oriented type research is needed to not only document where we are now, but where we anticipate challenges and growth opportunities. With so much change in the media industry, educational institutions need to think ahead, not only react, to trends. This study seeks to identify emerging trends and synthesize the most current data available (up to approximately 2025) to develop a relevant and timely study for stakeholders in communication and media education. This study is not just a description of where we are now but offers a critical space to analyze the strategic way forward for the field. The rationale for this study is threefold: 1) to present a comparative perspective spanning the globe; 2) to bridge synthesized analysis and connections across trends in the study, and 3) to contribute to forward thinking conversations about the trajectory of communication and media pedagogy. The thematic organization of the study will be based on and evidence based and convey descriptive findings moving from broad curricular frameworks to the specifics of educational practice, thus providing a narrative, evidence-based perspective for the trajectory of the field.

Table 5. Research Gaps and Study Contributions.

Identified Gap	Existing Literature Limitation	This Study's Contribution
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Geographic scope	Focus on North America/Europe	Global comparative analysis across multiple regions
Thematic integration	Siloed examination of individual trends	Synthesis across curriculum, technology, and pedagogy
Temporal orientation	Descriptive of current state	Future-oriented strategic analysis
Cross-contextual analysis	Single-country or single-institution focus	Patterns and variations across diverse contexts
Theory-practice connection	Limited bridge between research and implementation	Links technological trends to educational practice changes

Note. Based on literature review of Mateus et al. (2022), Tselykh (2024), Girón et al. (2024), Li et al. (2025), and Waheed et al. (2025).

Building on the foundation established in the theoretical framework and literature review, the subsequent chapter shifts focus to the research methodology, outlining the systematic approach used to investigate emerging trends in communication and media education across diverse international settings. This transition from conceptual analysis to methodological rigor is essential to bridge the historical and global context of media education with the empirical strategies required to evaluate technological, pedagogical, and industry shifts. By employing a global comparative research design, the study ensures that responses to digitalization, curricular innovation, and media literacy are not only contextualized within academic discourse but are also assessed through a robust, multi-dimensional lens, capturing variations among institutions and programs. The methodology integrates both qualitative and quantitative data sources—such as institutional documents and accreditation reports—to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how higher education adapts to the rapidly evolving demands of the media landscape. This approach allows for nuanced analysis of how curricular reforms, technological advancements, and accreditation standards coalesce to prepare students for professional success and active citizenship, thus maintaining continuity with the document's overarching narrative while propelling the inquiry into its systematic research phase.

3. Research Methodology

The methodological basis for this project is designed to carefully examine and contrast emerging trends in communication and media education across different global contexts. A rigorous and multi-dimensional approach is a necessity to understand the interconnected and evolving areas of technology, pedagogy and industry that are reshaping the field. This chapter provides a description of the research design, the data collection methods and procedures, the analytical framework, and the limitations of the study, providing an explicit account of the scholarly approach taken to develop the findings that will be presented in the following chapters.

3.1. A Global Comparative Research Design

This study employs a global comparative research design, a methodological approach particularly suited to examining educational phenomena in varying national, cultural, and institutional contexts. Comparative research in education and media studies identifies both similarities in trends and unique implications in local contexts, thereby providing a more intricate understanding of how global agendas are experienced and implemented locally (Bray et al., 2014). While some fields have a longer history with comparative methods, media studies can provide valuable insights into comparative research methods that examine transnational movement of

information, technology and pedagogical models prevalent to media systems today (Mancini & Hallin, 2012). The design is analytical purpose, not just descriptive; it aims to explain the trends in curriculum and organizational changes. The current comparative framework incorporates the following dimensions:

1. Geographical coverage: The study purposefully engaged educational institutions across North America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East to study higher education responses to global trends in the context of different educational systems, levels of economic development and cultural contexts.
2. Institutional diversity: The comparative research design included a mix of public and private universities with different research intensities (e.g., research-intensive versus vocational) so that variation could be positively included in the findings regarding educational response amid national higher education systems.
3. Programmatic focus: The analysis considers undergraduate and postgraduate programs defined as "Communication," "Media Studies," "Journalism," and similar fields, so that the basic object of study remains consistent, albeit variations by discipline.

By comparing these different contexts, the design of the project offers a valuable opportunity to explore how key themes—such as digitalization, artificial intelligence (AI), and new literacies—are addressed through different strategic and pedagogical responses. This methodological framework is descriptive but not only descriptive. It aims to synthesize analytical themes, challenges, and innovations for shaping the future of discipline around the world.

3.2. Data Collection and Sources

To inform a comprehensive and evidence-based analysis, the project employs a mixed-methods approach to the collection of data using a variety of primary and secondary data. The data collection required a systematic, iterative process and was guided by research questions and methodological framework. The primary sources of data include:

- Institutional documents: Systematic review of university websites, program handbooks and course catalogs, and curriculum frameworks from the purposive sample of over 50 higher education institutions around the region. This provided baseline data about programs, course offerings, learning outcomes, and published pedagogical philosophy.
- Accreditation body reports: Publicly available reports, standards and guidelines, from national and international accreditation bodies for journalism and mass communication (e.g., ACEJMC, ECREA, AMCAP). These documents provided insight into the expanding quality benchmarks and industry-related competencies.
- Scholarly literature: Systematic search of academic databases (e.g., Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar) for peer-reviewed articles, books and conference proceedings from 2020-2025 with keywords such as "media education," "journalism curriculum," "AI in communication," "digital literacy," and "comparative education."
- Industry and policy reports: Institutional reports from professional organizations, think tanks, and technology companies (e.g., Nieman Lab, Reuters Institute, World Economic Forum) that analyze media industry trends, workforce requirements and the effect of emerging media technologies.

This multi-source analysis validates the need for triangulation of data sources to cross-verify findings, providing a deeper and fuller representation of the educational landscape. By utilizing academic, institutional, and industry perspectives, it is essential to have this multi-directional perspective when investigating the reciprocal relationship between educational practices and the practice-based demands of the profession.

Table 6. Data Sources and Collection Methods.

Data Source Type	Specific Sources	Data Collected	Purpose in Analysis
Institutional documents	University websites, program handbooks, course catalogs	Curriculum structures, learning outcomes, pedagogical philosophies	Baseline program information
Accreditation reports	ACEJMC, ECREA, AMCAP standards and guidelines	Quality benchmarks, competency requirements	Industry alignment assessment
Scholarly literature	Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar (2020–2025)	Peer-reviewed research, theoretical frameworks	Evidence-based trend identification
Industry reports	Nieman Lab, Reuters Institute, World Economic Forum	Workforce trends, technology impacts	Practice-based demand analysis

Note. Data collection framework designed following comparative education research principles outlined in Bray et al. (2014).

3.3. Thematic Analysis Approach

The data collected from the study was analyzed thematically, which is a qualitative approach for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) across data sources. Thematic analysis is useful for collating large amounts of qualitative data from a range of sources into a cohesive analytical narrative. Themes were generated based on the overarching structural findings of the study and then with specific aspects of educational practice, aligned to the empirical evidence collected.

The thematic analysis entailed several stages:

1. **Data Immersion:** The first stage was the reading of all the documents collected from the study to become immersed with the data in order to gain an overall sense of the material.
2. **Initial Coding:** In the second stage, I coded the data and tagged relevant pieces of text with descriptive labels that were related to the research questions (e.g., "integration of AI," "flexible curriculum," "experiential learning," "pressure from accreditation").
3. **Theme Searching:** In the third stage the codes were collated into potential overarching themes. This process involved gathering codes identified into similar meanings to generalize themes (for example, codes related to "ethics of AI" and "data journalism tools" were identified as "Integration of Emerging Technologies").
4. **Theme Reviewing and Refining:** In the fourth stage the potential themes were reviewed against the dataset. Whenever needed, themes were reviewed, collapsed, or deleted to ensure they represented the data accurately, and formed a coherent and internally consistent analytical narrative.
5. **Theme Defining and Naming:** Finally, the last stage was to define each theme, and to give each theme a clear definition and a descriptive short name.

Theming the data provided for key trends to emerge directly from the data, rather than placing preconceived categories or themes onto the data. Thematic analysis allowed for the data to emerge organically from the evidence base collected and shaped the thematic story structure that forms

Chapter 4, the comparative analysis of global trends in communication and media education practices.

Table 7. Thematic Analysis Process and Outcomes.

Stage	Activities	Outcomes
Data immersion	Reading all collected documents, gaining familiarity	Overall understanding of material scope
Initial coding	Tagging text with descriptive labels	Preliminary code set (e.g., "AI integration," "flexible curriculum")
Theme searching	Colleagues into potential themes	Draft thematic framework
Theme reviewing	Checking themes against dataset	Refined, coherent themes
Theme defining	Establishing clear definitions and names	Final analytical structure for Chapter 4

Note. Thematic analysis methodology applied following qualitative research best practices.

3.4. Limitations of the Study

Despite the study being designed for rigor and comprehensiveness, like all studies, it has limitations. First, even though the comparative design was broad, it does not seek to be exhaustive in its findings. Each region and institution selected was purposeful but cannot capture the overall global richness and space presented in media education. Specifically, the representation voice of South America and the African continent is notably limited in representation thus may limit the generalizability of some of the findings.

Second, the study relied on publicly available documents (e.g., university websites, course catalogs) and limitations. The documents sourced reflect the formal or intended curriculum, but do not take into consideration the enacted curriculum students experience in the classroom. Pedagogical innovations and practices can vary widely among individual faculty in the enacted curriculum.

Third, the field is fast-moving and dynamic, and therefore curricula and technologies are always changing. This study provides a snapshot of trends during the 2023-2025 timeframe. While effort was made to rely on timely data as the most recent reflection, the published data reflects a static view that is continuously changing and will be dated quickly.

Lastly, while the study attempted to include a broad view of documents and to limit language barriers, it is possible the data from non-Anglophone contexts is limited by possible implied linguistic and cultural meanings embedded in these areas, despite translation effort and effort to seek literature published by regional scholars. The perspectives of educational philosophies and institutional culture perspectives and values cannot always be adequately construed and reflected in non-English translations. These limitations do not invalidate any the findings of this study but rather indicate attention should be given for a cautious and contextualized interpretation that highlights recommendations to investigate follow-up studies that can bridge the boundaries and limitations of language and more localized intentional qualitative case studies or observational methods.

Table 8. Study Limitations and Mitigation Strategies.

Limitation	Description	Impact on Findings	Mitigation/Future Research
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Geographic coverage	Limited representation from South America, Africa	Reduced generalizability to these regions	Future studies with targeted regional focus
Document-based data	Reliance on formal/intended curriculum	May not reflect enacted classroom practices	Qualitative case studies, classroom observations
Temporal snapshot	Data from 2023–2025 timeframe	Rapid obsolescence in fast-changing field	Longitudinal tracking, periodic updates
Language barriers	Primarily English-language sources	Possible cultural/linguistic meaning loss	Collaboration with regional scholars, multilingual research teams

Note. Limitations acknowledged to support appropriate interpretation of findings.

In summary, the research methodology outlined in Chapter 3 establishes a solid foundation for the subsequent analysis by offering a transparent and systematic approach to examining the complexities of global communication and media education. This methodological rigor ensures that the study's findings are grounded in both breadth and depth, integrating varied perspectives from institutional, accreditation, academic, and industry sources. As the document proceeds to the analysis of global trends in communication and media education in Chapter 4, the multi-layered comparative framework and thematic analysis enable a nuanced understanding of the field's dynamic evolution. By connecting methodological choices with the overarching narrative and empirical inquiries, the transition to the next chapter underscores the importance of evidence-based insights in interpreting enrollment patterns, curricular innovation, technological disruption, and shifting accreditation standards, thus setting the stage for a comprehensive thematic exploration of how media education is responding to the demands of an increasingly complex and digitalized global landscape.

4. Analysis of Global Trends in Communication and Media Education

This chapter provides a thematic analysis of notable global trends affecting communication and media education. By drawing from data, offered through institutional documentation, scholarly literature and reports from related industry sources, this section considers four areas of monumental change: enrollment patterns and demographic shifts, curricular innovation in response to digitalization, consideration of disruptive technologies (AI and VR) and changes to accreditation standards. Collectively, these trends illustrate a field in significant transition as they grapple with increasingly complex demands of a rapidly changing communications ecosystem.

4.1. Enrollment Patterns and Demographic Shifts

Enrollment data provides a crucial metric for a field's health and perceived relevance. In communication and media studies, global enrollment spikes provide a complex and at times contradictory picture marked by regional variance and programmatic shifts. For instance, while enrollment data seems to point to declining interest in traditional journalism, data also suggest consistent and significant growth in specialized areas and amongst specific demographic groups. For example, a pattern of growing feminization of the population of students pursuing journalism and mass communication programs has been documented globally. A comprehensive survey of enrollment data across 67 countries identified a consistent pattern of high female enrollment in these fields and prompted researchers to consider the overlap between trends in higher education, and the increasing number of female journalists working in the field (Josephi & Alonso, 2023). While the disproportionate number of female students is not itself a new trend, the pattern has amplified in

recent years. However, while female students outnumber male students in enrollment numbers, the overwhelming majority of journalism faculty around the world are male. The male/female discrepancy suggests a disconnect between the student population and the professoriate population that merits more study (Kopenhaver et al., 2024). It is important to research the long-term implications of a female-dominated classroom and professional role for both the field and for academic leadership.

In addition to gender-based shifts in the communication and media education landscape, there are signals of revitalized interest by students in some communication specializations, challenging common narratives of generalized decline. For example, we have heard from some high school and university-level specialized journalism schools that they have seen a "dramatic boost in enrollment" in recent years—more than a few programs noted that their only obstacle was physical space for the students! (Hill et al., 2025). This suggests that programs that adapt their offerings to the interests of contemporary students and programmatic or job-related needs of industry can be successful. In addition, there also appears to be an increasing number of established media professionals returning, or enrolling, in journalism programs. For example, there were an astounding number of journalists enrolling in master's degree programs—so many that a few institutions reported that they no longer offered journalism law or ethics because there were more than enough journalists in the room to discuss such topics. (Riitho, 2024). Rapid enrollment from professionals adds immeasurable value to a graduate classroom and signifies that there is, at the least, a demand for some sort of live and lifelong opportunities to be better at their jobs—which often demands at least some advance degree, if not a PhD in pursuit of academic positions or as strategic communicators.

Together, these enrollment trends indicate a field that is not uniformly contracting, but rather is re-configuring. The continued increase in female enrollment, the drawing of specialized enrollment patterns, and the return of journalists, indicate that but for some change in demand for traditional models of media education, that there is an unceasing desire for advanced communication skills and knowledge. Institutions that recognize these trends and can accommodate these student populations—will remain positioned to grow and remain relevant.

Table 9. Global Enrollment Trends in Communication and Media Education.

Trend	Geographic Scope	Key Findings	Implications for Programs
Feminization of enrollment	67 countries surveyed	Consistent high female enrollment; male-dominated faculty	Address faculty gender gap; research long-term field implications
Specialized program growth	High school and university levels	Dramatic enrollment boosts in adapted programs	Space constraints: curriculum responsiveness valued
Professional returners	Graduate programs globally	Journalists returning for master's degrees	Enhanced classroom discussions; lifelong learning demand
Traditional program decline	Various regions	Decreasing interest in conventional journalism tracks	Need for curriculum modernization

Note. Data synthesized from Josephi and Alonso (2023), Kopenhaver et al. (2024), Hill et al. (2025), and Riitho (2024).

4.2. Curricular Innovation and Flexibility in a Digital World

The single greatest influence on communication and media education is the ongoing digital transformation of the media industry, necessitating rapidly evolving higher education institutions from merely incremental changes to radical innovation. The growth of digital media consumption, demonstrated by unprecedented levels of internet penetration, has made the industry desperate for graduates who are not only skilled using the tools of the trade, but who are also literate in the strategic utilization of emerging media and media analytics (Chen, 2025). As such, universities are re-designing their curricula to be more fluid and interchangeable in a potentially multi-disciplinary way, with the goal to be responsive to the constantly changing skill set required within the media landscape.

One trend in curricular design is the dismantling of rigid, isolated tracks (e.g. print, broadcast) in favor of a more flexible, integrated model. For example, the contemporary curriculum is often developed in tiers. In the first-tier, courses are required for all students that provide foundational theory, ethics, and cross-platform skills. A second tier of courses are specially designed or inspired for career-oriented pathways or "clusters," providing a place-based response to ongoing media career trajectories. Pathways may include data journalism, strategic communication, immersive storytelling, and media entrepreneurship. In either scenario, programmatic flexibility is advantageous since programs can more readily modify or add specialized courses in responding to an evolving market since they are not required to modify the entire curriculum in which all courses are isolated within the course calendar.

Interdisciplinarity is another defining element of contemporary communication curricula. Realizing that complex media problems cannot be solved in a single discipline, programs are working with other departments. Departments receiving collaborative or partnership attention may include computer science, business, public policy, and design schools leading to joint degrees, cross-listed courses, and partnership projects. This collaborative strategy prepares students for the complex and multi-dimensional systems of technological, economic, and social systems within which media exist. For example, data journalism specialization may require enrolling in statistics or programming course within computer science, while media management track may include course(s) in finance or marketing from business school. This curricular permeability is necessary in preparing graduates who can work in current multi-disciplinary converged settings in significant team approaches found in modern media organizations. The desired outcome is the production of "T-shaped" professionals with depth of knowledge in a specific communication area accompanied with breadth of knowledge in adjacent areas so they can position themselves as both specialists and collaborators.

Table 10. Curricular Innovation Models in Communication and Media Education.

Innovation Type	Description	Example Implementation	Benefits
Tiered curriculum	Foundational core + specialized pathways	First-tier: theory, ethics, cross-platform skills; Second tier: data journalism, strategic communication clusters	Flexibility, easier updates, career alignment
Interdisciplinary collaboration	Partnerships with other departments	Joint degrees with computer science, business, design; cross-listed courses	T-shaped professionals, complex problem-solving
Modular course structures	Interchangeable course units	Micro-credentials, stackable certificates	Rapid response to industry changes

Industry-integrated learning	Work-based components within curriculum	Embedded internships, client projects, newsroom partnerships	Real-world experience, employability
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Note. Curricular models identified from analysis of institutional documents and Chen (2025).

4.3. Emerging Technologies: AI, VR, and Metaverse

While the first wave of digital transformation was necessary and focused on web and mobile platforms, the current wave of innovation within the curriculum is driven by emerging technology, most notably artificial intelligence (AI), virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR) and Metaverse. These technological advancements are indicative of change that is actively transforming how we produce, distribute and consume media. Educators, and educators responsible for preparing future journalists and media professionals, must not only view these technologies as tools, but also as innovations that fundamentally shape society and the important role of ethics in society. On the note, educational programs are preparing future journalists and media professional for the future (Hossain & Wenger, 2024).

Artificial intelligence, especially generative AI (GenAI), has emerged as the leading conversation in the education sector. A systematic review of global curriculum development in the higher education context indicated a global push for the integration of AI across various educational contexts, including generative multimedia tools (Sapawi & Yusoff, 2025). Within journalism and communication programs, the integration of AI is increasing in a variety of ways. On a practical level, students are learning how to use AI tools for purposes like data analysis, summarizing content, generating images or automated fact-checking (Wenger & Hossain, 2025). Comparative curriculum studies have also shown that programs are using modules that teach machine learning and data analytics so students can develop skills necessary to work with large data sets in addition to understanding systems of algorithmic logic (Imran, 2025). The challenge is that educators are focusing on critical literacy as it relates to AI, and its ethical implications in terms of algorithmic bias, transparency, accountability, etc. With the rise of generative AI video tools, educators are challenged to keep pace both pedagogically, and it opened opportunities for innovation and storytelling, but also complicates the legitimacy of misinformation and competing authenticity (Wenger & Imre, 2025).

In addition to AI, immersive technologies like VR and AR have been emerging in the exploration of new platforms for journalistic storytelling or communication. While even less common than AI, there are beginning to be programs with courses in 360-degree video production, the use of interactive narratives, or the use of augmented reality to visualize data. Storytelling or communication through immersive technologies has created unique opportunities to engage audiences through empathetic and embodied experiences and is slowly being reflected in curricula. The concept of Metaverse, while still much in research, has also turned into a growing area of study in the media and communication discipline. The Metaverse has and is being researched as a potential "global village," through a combination of virtual worlds, augmented realities, and the internet blending together creating new social and communicative spaces (Waheed et al., 2025). Some curriculum is starting to explore the Metaverse not simply as a technological platform, but as a new medium with unique affordances, economies, and governance. The preparation of students to work and interact with the next iteration of digital requires moving beyond past digital pedagogy and into a forward-thinking approach concerning technical experimentation and critical thought including theoretical frameworks.

Table 11. Integration of Emerging Technologies in Communication and Media Curricula.

Technology	Current Integration Level	Curriculum Applications	Key Challenges
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Artificial Intelligence (AI)	High and growing	Data analysis, content summarization, automated fact-checking, image generation	Algorithmic bias, ethics, rapid evolution
Generative AI (GenAI)	Rapidly expanding	Content creation, video production, interactive storytelling	Misinformation risks, authenticity concerns
Virtual Reality (VR)	Moderate, emerging	360-degree video, immersive journalism, empathetic storytelling	Infrastructure costs, faculty training
Augmented Reality (AR)	Low to moderate	Data visualization, interactive narratives	Technical complexity, limited accessibility
Metaverse	Early/experimental	Virtual communication spaces, new media economies	Conceptual uncertainty, governance questions

Note. Technology integration analysis based on Sapawi and Yusoff (2025), Wenger and Hossain (2025), Imran (2025), Wenger and Imre (2025), and Waheed et al. (2025).

4.4. Innovation Need in Relation to Accreditation and Industry

Accreditation is a signal marker of quality in higher education, creating standards for acceptable professional and academic quality programs. Alongside, accreditation bodies are starting to be influenced and thus disrupted due to the changing nature of the industry. Similar to the social media response to news organizations and journalism, the standards for accreditation are regularly revised and revamped based on media technology changes, industry trends, and social demand for information—both change for the better and the apparent consumption habits necessitating continual change (Lal et al., 2024a). Accreditation may become an impetus for curriculum innovation but may also simply be a challenge for programs to maintain relevance and impact practice.

A primary area of focus in contemporary accreditation standards is outcomes-based assessment with an emphasis on demonstrating specific and assessable competencies. More than simply outlining a course list of requirements, accreditors are stressing what graduates can do. Competencies very often include digital and data literacy, cross-platform content creation, ethical behavior concerning digital practices, and audience analytics. In addition, countdowns to globalization can be found in accreditation criteria, as there is an increasing expectation for programs to consider global paradigms, emphasize intercultural communication and raise important ethical and legal challenges with a transnational media ecology. This creates additional pressure for institutions to globalize their curricula and prepare graduates to work in a globally connected industry (Lal et al., 2024a).

But the implications of this change are no less than a headache for media education institutions. Keeping technology, software, and teaching strategies contemporary usually means significant strain on budgets and resources. Accreditation standards therefore place tension on the prescriptive nature of accreditation and issues of institutional independence and pedagogical freedom (Lal et al., 2024b). The pressing issue for program leaders is to work through this conflicting agenda that values externally established benchmarks and develop a curriculum that is draft a unique educational vision and one that is engaging, adaptive to change, and innovative.

Moreover, competency demands in the industry evolve often as quickly as accreditation cycles. While accreditation is an important and informative way to frame quality assurance, programs must be responsive to employer needs. This is achieved through establishing good and sustained

partnerships with media organizations, developing significant internship and co-op programs, and creating advisory boards with media professionals to provide regular feedback that will assist media programs in developing curriculum quicker than the accreditation process alone. Programs also need to be able to pivot when academic and industry innovations occur—often at the same time. Ultimately, the most successful program will view accreditation not as a bureaucratic requirement, but rather as a framework that compliments an identified commitment to being engaged with the industry that prepares graduates for their first job and for a lifetime of change and learning in an ever-changing environment.

Table 12. Evolving Accreditation Standards and Industry Alignment.

Accreditation Focus Area	Traditional Emphasis	Contemporary Emphasis	Industry Alignment Implications
Assessment approach	Course completion, credit hours	Outcomes-based, demonstrable competencies	Portfolio development, skills verification
Technical competencies	Platform-specific skills	Digital/data literacy, cross-platform creation	Continuous technology updates
Global perspective	National/regional focus	Intercultural communication, transnational ethics	Study abroad, global case studies
Industry connection	Periodic advisory input	Sustained partnerships, co-op programs	Real-time curriculum responsiveness
Ethical standards	Professional codes of conduct	Digital ethics, algorithmic accountability	Expanded ethics coursework

Note. Accreditation trends analyzed from Lal et al. (2024a) and Lal et al. (2024b).

5. Challenges and Strategic Solutions in a Global Context

While the field of communication and media education is in a period of rapid innovation and change, it simultaneously experiences challenges on a global scale. Schools looking to adapt to an ever-faster pace of technological change and shifting demands from industry face both systemic challenges and opportunities that require multi-faceted and strategic responses. These challenges include the gap between academic theory and actual practice in industry, the critical need for robust and universally applicable media literacy frameworks, the need for ongoing faculty development, and the diverging experiences in different parts of the world/systematically different regions from each other. This section will explore these challenges specifically and the strategic solutions that have been implemented and are being proposed in various contexts globally, to help elucidate the challenges and complexities reflective in efforts to shape the future of media education.

5.1. Bridging the Gap Between Academia and Industry

While historically a challenge for professional education, the gap between academic curriculum and the shifting needs of the media and communication industries has grown more pronounced in the digital age. The nature of technical skills is changing rapidly, with technology becoming obsolete more quickly than could be learned. New job roles are emerging based on analyses of data, AI, and immersive media (both static and real time). Additionally, the demand for agile (cross-disciplinary, multi-skilled) professionals is growing, which adds additional pressure on schools to remain

relevant. Failure to bridge the gap between academia and industry not only results in unprepared graduates but also devalues the education they received.

The core of the issue lies with the structural differences of academia and industry. University curricula often go through lengthy approval processes to be updated with the newest technologies and to put into practice the newest practices of industry actors. Faculty, while grounded in theory and research, are often not engaging in the industry continuously, especially in the fast-moving digital spaces (including among emerging faculty). There are certainly pressures within industry that can require work that takes into account shortening the development of critical thinking and ethical reasoning.

There is a growing strategic response around academia and industry creating a symbiotic approach to address the gap in their relationship. A systematic review of journalism curricula in South Africa for example found that there is a need for more alignment with the labor market and identified research gaps to demonstrate how (Muringa & Adjin-Tettey, 2025). Similarly, research in Palestine pointed out the issues with aligning digital journalism programs aligned with industry needs—while we recognize that the situation is somewhat unique in that region, it is reflective of the gap, challenge, and process underway globally in media education (Abu-Ayyash, 2025).

Effective strategies for bridging the gap between industry and academia include:

1. **Dynamic Curriculum Co-creation**—The most progressive institutions move beyond guest lectures to formal partnerships to co-design and review courses with industry actors. This model ensures the course content reflects the real-time industry standards and anticipates future industry trends—even with (guest) faculty who bring expertise in the processes and practices of their profession. Research on journalism education in Asia have noted a clear change in instituting more digital media courses, even influenced directly by industry feedback and the emergence of AI (Jiang & Rafeeq, 2025).
2. **Work-Integrated Learning (WIL)**: Internships, co-op, and project-based learning are already central to media education today. Integrating media projects as part of classes provides students the experience of applying theoretical concepts and employing their skills to address challenges/issues in real-time. The result is greater skills competency and epistemological richness of education (Kirillova & Garkavenko, 2025). This half the struggle of students to find additional networks and the other (or stronger) half is that it builds a portfolio of work that they should have for employment.
3. **Faculty Externships and/or "Professors of Practice"**: As with students, to keep faculty up-to-date many universities are implementing programs that allow faculty to work in media organizations. Simultaneously, hiring seasoned professionals to work as "Professors of Practice" are an important strategy to bring immediate and relevant experiences into the classroom, that more than likely enhances both the teaching and learning environment with practical relevance and mentorship, which are critical for preparing the next generation of journalists that can understand and apply both traditional principles and contemporary technological pressures (Payton, 2025).
4. **Advisory Boards and Strategic Partnerships**: Creating formal advisory boards made up of industry leaders can give institutions high-level strategic direction in areas including curriculum development, procurement of technology, and establishment of research priorities. These industry partnerships can also result in sponsored research, sharing resources (software and equipment), and dedicated recruitment pipelines for institutionally graduated graduates.

These strong, structural connections can help communication and media programs develop a more dynamic and responsive educational ecosystem. This ensures that graduates do not only have the foundational theoretical knowledge and critical thinking dispositions imparted in a university

education but also are equipped with the relevant skills that are necessary for success in a fast-paced and competitive global media ecology (Payton, 2025).

Table 13. Strategies for Bridging the Academia-Industry Gap.

Strategy	Description	Implementation Examples	Expected Outcomes
Dynamic curriculum co-creation	Formal partnerships for course design with industry	Joint curriculum committees, industry-reviewed syllabi	Real-time relevance, anticipated trends
Work-integrated learning	Internships, co-ops, project-based courses	Embedded newsroom rotations, client-based projects	Portfolio development, network building
Faculty externships	Industry placements for academic faculty	Sabbaticals in media organizations, industry residencies	Updated faculty skills, enhanced credibility
Professors of Practice	Hiring industry professionals as faculty	Part-time or full-time practitioner appointments	Practical mentorship, current industry insights
Advisory boards	Formal industry leadership guidance	Regular meetings, strategic planning input	Curriculum responsiveness, resource sharing

Note. Strategies synthesized from Muringa and Adjin-Tettey (2025), Abu-Ayyash (2025), Jiang and Rafeeq (2025), Kirillova and Garkavenko (2025), and Payton (2025).

5.2. Building Strong Media Literacy Frameworks

The era of information overload and the clear and present threat of digital disinformation has made the call for strong media literacy frameworks a global priority (Dzogovic & Zdravkovska-Adamova, 2025). The understanding that media literacy is no longer a peripheral skill, but essential skill for civic participation, individual well-being, and professional success is evident. The challenge is, however, in defining, establishing a standard, and integrating frameworks in the educational systems of various contexts that are sometimes culturally and politically diverse. Media literacy is enmeshed in broader global changes in formal education systems, and it requires an understanding of the dynamic and adaptive approach (Almakaty, 2024).

One of the main challenges is the lack of collectiveness that agreement on a definition of media literacy and what are "standards" for media literacy. Although the principles—access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act—are widely known, their application varies. For example, some respondents mentioned they do not have a central authority nor a national guideline for media literacy, while others maintain various models containing varied elements to serve specific goals (Gálik et al., 2024). This could also be problematic for the integration of media literacy to progress systematically throughout curriculum in the primary through post-secondary education (Pokulyta & Sotska, 2025).

Moreover, conventional media literacy models were designed to help individuals learn how to navigate print and broadcasting but are inadequate models for the complexity of contemporary digital contexts. The modern environment of information distribution is marked by algorithmic curation of content, sophisticated disinformation campaigns, echo chambers, and complicated

relations between user-generated and professional content. Therefore, any contemporary framework must be designed for critical digital literacy, data literacy, and knowledge of the technological-economic structures that influence digital environments (Albardía & Peña-Fernández, 2025). Strategic solutions are emerging to address these issues, focused on partnerships, policy, and pedagogy:

1. **Establishment of National and International Guidelines:** There are calls for national governments and international groups to design clear guidelines for digital and media literacy in educational settings (Dzogovic & Zdravkovska-Adamova, 2025). This would provide a common set of competencies and learning outcomes but allow flexibility for the local context. Since media literacy is often a relatively new area of curriculum and teacher training, the establishment of frameworks helps legitimize media literacy and provides a platform for subsequent curriculum development and formal training of teachers.
2. **Goal of Integration Across the Curriculum:** Given that media literacy is by nature a portable skill, the most effective approach to developing media literacy is integrating it across all subject areas in formal education. Students can be taught to critically evaluate sources, their use of data visualizations, and to identify—and possibly create—media disinformation. This reinforces media literacy across the disciplines, and by extension, reinforces media literacy as a core skill for every subject area in the curriculum (Beschi et al., 2025).
3. **Pedagogy of Critical pedagogy:** Effective media literacy pedagogy moves away from a protectionist model related to teaching about media (i.e., protecting students from "bad" media) to supporting students as empowered communicators of critical and creative messages. Effective media literacy pedagogy should encourage students in the analysis of the power structures of the media industries, interrogate the ideological assumptions woven into media messages, and use media tools to create their narrative about civic engagement and social issues (Mateus et al., 2022). This pedagogy emphasizes critical engagement with technology rather than consumption of technology.
4. **Global Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange:** Institutions and educators are sharing innovative practices and pedagogical approaches related to media literacy on a global level. International conferences, collaborative research projects, and open-access educational resources are fostering a global community of practice in media literacy education. This is especially vital to promoting multicultural understanding and cross-cultural communication, improving students' preparation to act as responsible global citizens.

By developing and implementing these robust, adaptable, and critical frameworks, educational institutions can prepare their students with the skills they need to navigate today's complicated information environment, creating a more grounded, resilient, and active global citizenry.

Table 14. Media Literacy Framework Development Strategies.

Strategy	Key Components	Implementation Challenges	Success Indicators
National/international guidelines	Common competencies, flexible local adaptation	Political will, cross-jurisdictional coordination	Standardized curricula, teacher certification

Cross-curriculum integration	Media literacy in all subjects	Faculty training, disciplinary resistance	Embedded assessments, interdisciplinary projects
Critical pedagogy approach	Power analysis, creative production, civic engagement	Shift from protectionism mindset	Student-produced media, civic participation
Global collaboration	International partnerships, open resources	Language barriers, resource disparities	Shared curricula, joint research projects

Note. Framework strategies based on Dzogovic and Zdravkovska-Adamova (2025), Gálik et al. (2024), Pokulyta and Sotska (2025), Albardía and Peña-Fernández (2025), Beschi et al. (2025), and Mateus et al. (2022).

5.3. Faculty Development and Institutional Change

Successfully infusing new technologies and pedagogical approaches into communication and media education is primarily determined by the skill set of faculties, and the capacity of the institutions themselves to change. Ongoing restructuring of the media landscape presents a two-fold challenge: faculty must continuously refresh their own skill sets and knowledge, while institutions must provide resources, infrastructure, and administrative flexibility to facilitate change.

One significant challenge will be the continuing skills gap between traditional educators and those who will be able to teach cord-cutting capitalist skills such as AI or data analytics. Communication and media educators with expertise and depth in traditional media theory and production courses, for example, will have a difficult time keeping up with the pace of emergent areas such as data analytics, AI, and virtual reality (Aksar & Siddiqua, 2025). This is not an indictment of education quality; however, it does reflect the extraordinary pace of technology change. Faculty may not have the necessary professional development opportunities to prepare students to teach skills that reflect current demand, thus widening the gap between industry and academia.

A final hurdle is the reality of inertia in higher education institutions. Universities, with established structures, departmental silos, and even slow-motion bureaucracies, are reluctant to adapt quickly. Reforming curriculum can take years, by which time the technologies and industry practices that the curriculum was purposefully created for may have changed (Edwin et al., 2025). Furthermore, purchasing top-of-the-line technology, software, and digital labs requires significant institution-wide finances, which typically would not be allocated in the budget. In addition, challenges between government funding priorities and creative higher education sector needs (Payton, 2025) further complicates this landscape.

Overcoming the landscape will require collaborative effort and strategic planning that focuses on continuous professional development and a systemic institutional change effort:

1. **Continuous Professional Development Programs:** Institutions must prioritize continuous and targeted professional development training for faculty. Programs could range from workshops on enriching technologies and societal effects (e.g., artificial intelligence in content creation, data visualization tools), seminars on innovative methods of practice (e.g. project-based learning, online collaboration), to externships that place faculty in industries to get firsthand current experiences.
2. **Creating a Lifelong Learning Culture:** While professional development is a good first step, institutions can promote an academic culture that promotes and provides incentives for continuous growth and experimentation by faculty. For example, institutions could promote

research grants aimed at encouraging innovation in curriculum development, while developing structured peer-mentoring programs, or communities of practice. These distinct groups would encourage educators to share their experiences in developing and implementing new methods to develop integration processes of new methods, technologies, and practices.

3. **Flexible, Modular Curriculum Design:** Institutions of higher education are working to develop more flexible, modular curriculum design to address the concerns with lengthy, traditional curriculum reform. Institutions might create special topics courses, micro-credentials, or digital badges, developed quickly and easily at the earlier stages of innovation (emerging trends). This change in curricular design would eliminate the necessity of complete restructuring of program degree requirements (Edwin et al., 2025).
4. **Strategic Technology and Infrastructure Investment:** Investing in the appropriate technology infrastructure, long-term is essential. This involves more than just purchasing equipment. A sustainability plan must be developed that includes technical support, regular upgrades, and the designed facilities that support collaborative, hands-on learning. Open-source tools and cloud-based assets provide cost-effective options for students' access to industry-standard software.
5. **Collaboration Across Disciplines:** Collaboration across disciplines is critical. It is essential to break down departmental silos when implementing media education in a more contemporary fashion. Universities should encourage, and even facilitate collaboration not just between communication and media departments, but also with computer science, business, ethics, design, etc. Collaboration advances richer, holistic educational programs that more accurately reflect the multidisciplinary nature of the contemporary media landscape.

With a commitment to faculty development, and an institutionally agile culture, universities can not only keep pace with change but foster the future of communication and media by producing graduates who are knowledgeable, capable, and adaptive.

Table 15. Faculty Development and Institutional Change Strategies.

Strategy	Implementation Mechanisms	Resource Requirements	Expected Impact
Continuous professional development	Workshops, seminars, industry externships	Training budgets, release time	Updated faculty skills, current pedagogy
Lifelong learning culture	Research grants, peer mentoring, communities of practice	Incentive structures, administrative support	Innovation culture, knowledge sharing
Modular curriculum design	Special topics courses, micro-credentials, digital badges	Flexible governance, rapid approval processes	Responsive programming, emerging trend coverage
Technology infrastructure investment	Equipment, software, technical support, facility design	Capital budgets, sustainability planning	Hands-on learning, industry-standard access

Cross-disciplinary collaboration	Joint appointments, cross-listed courses, shared projects	Departmental coordination, incentive alignment	Holistic education, multidisciplinary graduates
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Note. Strategies synthesized from Aksar and Siddiqua (2025), Edwin et al. (2025), and Payton (2025).

5.4. Regional Case Studies: Divergent Challenges and Solutions

The challenges of digital transformation, and the academia-industry gap, exist globally. However, the manifestation of those challenges, and the strategic solutions employed to address them, are vastly different across regions. Factors like economic development, political contexts, cultural norms, and educational context all contribute to the unique landscape of communication and media education around the world. In exploring those regional distinctions, the larger themes of global trends previously discussed can be better understood.

Latin America: In many regions of Latin America, a key challenge is moving media education beyond a skill-specific focus, towards a critical pedagogy. Researchers have suggested that media education must create more than just skillful users of technology but instead help create critical citizens who are able to analyze and challenge dominant media narratives and power structures (Mateus et al., 2022). The solution they are advancing is a renewed focus on critical media literacy, deeply infused into civic education, and the encouragement to engage in social and political issues via media production and media production analysis.

Asia: The rapid economic growth and adoption of technology in many Asian countries has created extreme pressure for universities to respond to the needs of the burgeoning digital media industry. One study focusing on the evolution of journalism education in Asia concludes there has been substantial academic migration of journalism education to include digital and AI related skills in course offerings (Jiang & Rafeeq, 2025). The challenge lies in addressing the fact that faculty must learn to teach, and students must learn how to use technology, all while institutions engage in the investment of technology. This response was this proactive push by leading universities to simply partner with technology companies, update curricula more frequently, and recruit educators who have recent industry experience in areas like data journalism and social media management.

Africa: In areas of East Africa and Southern Africa, the challenges are often resources, and the assurance journalism education reflects local, and global, industry standards. A systematic review of journalism curricula in South Africa emphasizes the need to reconcile theoretical education (Muringa & Adjin-Tetty, 2025). Conversely, a research study across East and Southern Africa emphasizes the need to ensure education reflects practice (Gondwe & Awami, 2025). The solutions have been focused on developing low-cost, high-impact training models, developing mobile-focused content creation and distribution, and building better networks between universities and local media houses to provide students with practical, relevant experience.

The Middle East: In contexts such as Palestine, the challenges of media education are deeply influenced by political conflict and instability. Connecting digital journalism curricula to industry practice is made even more complex by the lived realities of reporting in a conflict zone and the current political climate (Abu-Ayyash, 2025). Notwithstanding the challenge, educators and students demonstrate resilience in addressing the scale and complexity of their challenges. Potential solutions involve utilizing online learning platforms to engage with international experts, emphasizing citizen journalism and mobile reporting as mechanisms for documenting local realities, and designing curricula that emphasize safety, ethics, and trauma-informed reporting practices.

Collectively, these examples demonstrate what we already know; there is no single solution to the challenges of communication and media education. Global trends offer us a macro frame; however, effective practice must always be contextual, culturally relevant, and address the specific economic, political, and social realities of the context in which we work.

Table 16. Regional Challenges and Solutions in Communication and Media Education.

Region	Primary Challenges	Strategic Solutions	Key Research Sources
Latin America	Skill-focused vs. critical pedagogy tension	Critical media literacy integration, civic education focus	Mateus et al. (2022)
Asia	Rapid technology adoption, faculty training gaps	Technology partnerships, frequent curriculum updates, industry-experienced faculty recruitment	Jiang & Rafeeq (2025)
Africa (East/South)	Resource constraints, theory-practice alignment	Low-cost training models, mobile-focused content, university-media house networks	Muringa & Adjin-Tettey (2025); Gondwe & Awami (2025)
Middle East	Political instability, conflict zone reporting	Online international collaboration, citizen journalism emphasis, trauma-informed curricula	Abu-Ayyash (2025)

Note. Regional analysis is synthesized from cited sources representing diverse geographic contexts.

Taken together, these varied challenges and strategic responses illustrate the multifaceted nature of educational transformation in communication and media studies worldwide. As accreditation trends reflect increasing global interconnectedness, the need for curricula that are both contextually responsive and globally informed becomes paramount. Addressing issues like the academic-industry gap, media literacy development, and ongoing faculty advancement requires a holistic approach, drawing on diverse models such as sustained industry partnerships, adaptable curricula, and cross-cultural collaboration. Ultimately, these efforts converge toward a more agile, inclusive, and future-ready educational landscape—one that not only anticipates rapid technological and social change but also empowers students and educators to critically engage with and shape the evolving media environment. This sets the stage for the subsequent discussion of key findings and broader implications for stakeholders in communication and media education.

6. Discussion and Implications

This global comparative analysis has uncovered a field in profound transformation driven by the intersection of digital transformation, globalization, and changing societal needs. The previous sections illustrate a clear and accelerating shift in communication and media education, from siloed, traditional forms to more integrated, fluid, and futures-oriented structures. This discussion will synthesize the main findings, discuss some implications for stakeholders, and contemplate the future of communication and media pedagogy.

6.1. Synthesizing the Key Findings on Educational Transformation

The analysis of global trends, challenges, and solutions highlights several overarching themes that characterize the current state of educational transformation in communication and media studies. First, agility in curriculum is the greatest new virtue. The slow-moving, pre-fixed process of curriculum reform is no longer tenable in a time where technology and industry practice can be made obsolete within a few years. The most relevant and successful programs are those that have

experimented with curriculum modularity, interdisciplinary collaboration, and continuous updates. The infusion of AI, VR, data visualization, and the metaverse is not simply additive, but instead, has forced educators and programs to fundamentally rethink curriculum, course design, and learning outcomes (Jiang & Rafeeq, 2025; Olowe et al., 2024). This will require systemic, flexible, and mutable curriculum reform that focuses on "adaptability" (Edwin et al., 2025).

Second, the very definition of literacy is different. Literacy in media has expanded well beyond just critically consuming mass media, and has evolved into a new suite of complex, interrelated competencies—including digital literacy, data literacy, and algorithmic literacy. The educational sector is also beginning to understand that these are not special skills for a major in communication, but instead, the foundations that all 21st century students must have. The investment of developing thorough, critical media literacy frameworks is the next challenge and core strategic priority for higher education globally (Dzogovic & Zdravkovska-Adamova, 2025; Almakaty, 2024).

Third, the academic-industry relationship is being radically redefined. The persistent gap between the classroom and the newsroom or agency is being closed through deep partnerships. The partnership trend continues to move from the peripheral guest speakers into structural integrations, such as co-creating coursework, larger work-integrated learning opportunities, and formal industry teaching roles (Abu-Ayyash, 2025; Kirillova & Garkavenko, 2025). This association is understood as an emergent model for the employability of graduates and relevance of the program.

Finally, global interconnectedness sits alongside deep regional specificity. While we see macro-level trends, such as the ubiquity of digital platforms and new skills, in aggregate, their effects and ensuing educational responses are highly contextual. As demonstrated by the regional case studies, local contextual factors—such as economic conditions, political landscapes, and cultural commitments—profoundly affect how global trends are interpreted and addressed (Mateus et al., 2022; Gondwe & Awami, 2025). A global strategy for media education must therefore be a strategy that facilitates local adaptation and innovation, not a monolithic model.

Table 17. Synthesis of Key Findings on Educational Transformation.

Theme	Key Finding	Evidence Base	Strategic Implication
Curriculum agility	Modular, interdisciplinary, continuously updated programs most successful	Jiang & Rafeeq (2025); Edwin et al. (2025); Olowe et al. (2024)	Invest in flexible governance and rapid update mechanisms
Expanded literacy definitions	Digital, data, and algorithmic literacy now foundational	Dzogovic & Zdravkovska-Adamova (2025); Almakaty (2024)	Integrate new literacies across all programs
Redefined academia-industry relationship	Deep structural partnerships replacing peripheral engagement	Abu-Ayyash (2025); Kirillova & Garkavenko (2025)	Formalize industry roles in curriculum and teaching
Global-local tension	Universal trends require contextual adaptation	Mateus et al. (2022); Gondwe & Awami (2025)	Develop frameworks allowing local innovation

Note. Synthesis based on thematic analysis of global trends and regional case studies.

6.2. Implications for Educators, Institutions, and Policymakers

The transformative trends discussed in this report have important implications for the key stakeholders that contribute to communication and media education.

Educators: The professional identity of the media educator is shifting away from that of knowledge transmitter to a facilitator of learning, a mentor, and a lifelong learner. Faculty must constantly update their own skills, not simply with the new technologies but in how they engage students to foster critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration as core 21st century skills. Educators are also tasked with bridging theory and practice, teaching across disciplines, and helping students navigate an increasingly complex and often ethically ambiguous information environment. This underscores the importance of commitment to professional development as well as a willingness to adopt pedagogical experimentation (Aksar & Siddiqua, 2025).

Institutions: Universities and colleges must create an agile and innovative environment. This means investing in technological infrastructure, lessening bureaucratic and rigid administrative structures that limit curricular innovation, and incentivizing cross-college collaborations. Higher administrators will have to advocate the importance of media and digital literacies in a contemporary and comprehensive education for all students. Additionally, institutions will need to promote and sustain relationships with industry, viewing them as relationships instead of transactional—again related to the institutional mission. Failure to innovate ultimately threatens institutional relevance in the competitive global education market (Edwin et al., 2025).

Policymakers: Governments and accrediting bodies also play an integral role in supporting an ecosystem for educational innovation. This includes creating national frameworks and guidelines for media and digital literacies that foster consistency and quality across the educational system (Pokulyta & Sotska, 2025; Dzogovic & Zdravkovska-Adamova, 2025). Policymakers should also consider funding structures that support institutional investment in technology and faculty development, and regulations that encourage partnerships between industries and academia, instead of stifling collaboration. By setting standards and providing direct support, policymakers can ensure that future generations have the skills needed for democratic citizenship and economic citizenship in the digital economy.

Table 18. Implications and Recommendations for Key Stakeholders.

Stakeholder	Key Implications	Recommended Actions
Educators	Shift from knowledge transmitter to learning facilitator; continuous skill updating required	Commit to professional development; embrace pedagogical experimentation; bridge theory and practice
Institutions	Need for agile, innovative environments; infrastructure investment essential	Reduce bureaucratic barriers; incentivize cross-disciplinary collaboration; sustain industry relationships
Policymakers	Critical role in supporting educational innovation ecosystem	Create national literacy frameworks; fund technology and faculty development; encourage academia-industry partnerships

Note. Implications derived from study findings and synthesized from Aksar and Siddiqua (2025), Edwin et al. (2025), Pokulyta and Sotska (2025), and Dzogovic and Zdravkovska-Adamova (2025).

6.3. The Future of Communication and Media Pedagogy

There are various developments that will define the future of communication and media pedagogy. Personalization and adaptive learning made possible through AI will allow for more individualized educational pathways tailored to students' interests and skill sets. The trend toward

experiential and project-based learning will continue to grow, especially with virtual and augmented reality providing incredible experiences for students in simulated professional contexts. There will also be an increased emphasis on ethical aspects of the curriculum. As AI-based content generation, deep fakes, and algorithmic biases, among others, become more prevalent, grounding students in a strong ethical foundation for communication will become critical. Media educators will need to be more intentional and deeper in discussing digital ethics, information privacy, and social responsibility than ever before.

Finally, the focus toward global and cross-cultural communication competencies will become even more pronounced. As the world becomes more interconnected, media professionals must be able to demonstrate proficiency to communicate across cultural divides, as well as understand how media is produced within different global contexts and environments (Lawal, 2025). Future pedagogy will require using more global case studies, potentially more collaborative projects in student groups with students across Globe, and a curriculum that is less Euro-centric than prior curricula, to confront new ideas of global citizenship. The future of the field is dependent on engendering a professional identity whose critical consciousness, ethical reasoning, and global skills will help the profession evolve as it grapples with emerging technologies.

Table 19. Future Directions for Communication and Media Pedagogy.

Future Development	Description	Pedagogical Implications
AI-enabled personalization	Individualized learning pathways based on student interests and skills	Adaptive curriculum design, learning analytics integration
Immersive experiential learning	VR/AR-based simulated professional environments	Investment in immersive technologies, faculty training
Enhanced ethics emphasis	Deepened focus on AI ethics, deepfakes, algorithmic accountability	Expanded ethics coursework, case-based ethical reasoning
Global communication competencies	Cross-cultural skills, diverse global perspectives	International collaborations, decolonized curricula, global case studies
Lifelong learning orientation	Preparation for continuous professional adaptation	Micro-credentials, alumni engagement, professional development partnerships

Note. Future directions informed by analysis of emerging trends and Lawal (2025).

As communication and media education continues to advance, the integration of these pedagogical innovations must be accompanied by a robust infrastructure for ongoing assessment and reflection, ensuring that curricula remain relevant and impactful amid shifting technological, social, and professional landscapes. Stakeholders at every level—educators, institutional leaders, and policymakers—will need to foster adaptive cultures that welcome experimentation, support equity and access in digital learning, and cultivate meaningful collaborations both within and beyond traditional academic boundaries. Looking ahead, the success of these efforts will hinge on the collective commitment to bridging gaps between theory and practice, responding swiftly to global challenges, and nurturing graduates who are not only adept in emerging technologies but also

capable of navigating ethical complexities and contributing constructively to diverse, interconnected societies.

7. Conclusion

This global examination has traced the dynamic and complicated landscape of contemporary communication and media education. It is a time of critical inflection for the field, driven by the constant pace of digital change and the urgent need to prepare students for a media environment that is fundamentally different from that of a decade ago. The research has identified key emergent trends, including the ground-breaking transformation of curricula to enable flexibility and interdisciplinarity, the emergence of new technologies like AI and VR, the move toward a concept of media literacy as a core competency for all citizens, and the deepening of embedded relationships between academia and industry. While the trends we have identified are indeed global and universal, we have emphasized that they are locally situated and therefore impacted by regional contexts and challenges. From the critical pedagogical models emerging in Latin America, to the ways that technocentric curricular change is taking shape in Asia, educational institutions around the globe are responding to the new demands and challenges of this era. At the same time, the challenges remain. How do educational institutions bridge the academia-industry divide? How do educators secure resources for upgrading technology and/or for professional development? How do educators in higher education implement strong, consistent media literacy frameworks?

These questions are significant and have broad ramifications. For educators, a commitment to professional learning and pedagogical flexibility is no longer an option, it is a necessity; for institutions, structural change and strategic investment in technology and partnerships is needed for survival; and for policymakers, the role is to create supportive frameworks that promote innovation and recognize the importance of media and digital literacy as core components of modern education.

Ultimately, the future of communication and media education depends on its ability to produce graduates who are not only technically skilled, but also critical thinkers, ethical practitioners, and engaged global citizens. The educational journey must prepare students to adapt to continuous change, to think critically about how to distinguish truth in an increasingly muddled information environment, and to think ethically about their communications in a socially responsible and effective manner. As the digital age continues to evolve, and our collective future is shaped by digital media, we will continue to ask what that means for communication and media education's role in developing informed, fair and connected societies.

Table 20. Summary of Key Conclusions and Future Imperatives.

Conclusion Area	Key Finding	Future Imperative
Curricular transformation	Shift from rigid to flexible, interdisciplinary models	Continue developing modular, responsive curriculum structures
Technology integration	AI, VR, Metaverse reshaping content and pedagogy	Balance technical training with critical/ethical evaluation
Media literacy	Expanded to digital, data, and algorithmic competencies	Establish universal frameworks with local adaptation
Academia-industry relationship	Moving from peripheral to structural partnerships	Formalize collaborative governance and co-creation models

Regional variation	Global trends require contextual implementation	Support local innovation within global frameworks
Graduate preparation	Need for technical skills, critical thinking, ethical practice, global citizenship	Holistic education preparing adaptable, responsible communicators

Note. Conclusions are synthesized from comprehensive analysis of global trends, challenges, and strategic solutions.

As the discipline moves forward, sustained progress will depend on the collective willingness of educators, institutions, and industry partners to embrace ongoing change and invest in the resources necessary for transformative teaching and learning. This includes fostering environments where experimentation is valued, reflective practices are embedded in curriculum design, and robust support systems are in place to promote equity and diversity. By prioritizing collaboration across sectors and geographies, communication and media education can continue to evolve in step with global shifts, ensuring that graduates are prepared not only to meet the demands of today's media landscape but also to shape its future with integrity, innovation, and a commitment to the public good.

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Author Bio

Dr. Safran Safar Almakaty is renowned for his extensive contributions to the fields of communication, media studies and Higher Education, particularly within Saudi Arabia and the broader Middle East. Serving as a Professor at Imam Mohammad ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU) in Riyadh,

Dr. Almakaty has played a pivotal role in shaping the academic discourse around media transformation and international communication. Holding a Master of Arts degree from Michigan State University and a PhD from the University of Kentucky, Dr. Almakaty brings a robust interdisciplinary perspective to his research and teaching. His scholarly work explores the dynamics of media evolution in the region, analyzing how new technologies, global trends, and sociopolitical forces are reshaping public discourse and information exchange.

Beyond academia, Dr. Almakaty is a sought-after consultant on communication strategy, corporate communications, and international relations, advising government agencies, corporate entities, and non-profit organizations. His expertise includes the development of higher education policies, focusing on the intersection of media literacy, digital transformation, and educational reform.

Dr. Almakaty's research spans a range of topics, from the impact of hybrid conference formats on diplomatic effectiveness to the role of strategic conferences in advancing Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 initiatives. He has published widely in peer-reviewed journals, contributed to international forums, and collaborated on cross-cultural research projects, positioning himself as a bridge between regional scholarship and global thought leadership.

As an educator, Dr. Almakaty is deeply committed to mentoring the next generation of scholars and practitioners, fostering an environment of inquiry, innovation, and academic excellence. He continues to influence the landscape of media and communication, championing initiatives that promote international engagement, effective public diplomacy, and the modernization of knowledge institutions throughout the Middle East.

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