



JAMBURA JOURNAL CIVIC EDUCATION  
<http://ejurnal.ung.ac.id/index.php./jacedu>  
E-ISSN : 2798-4818  
P-ISSN: 2808-2249

## Political Education And Digital Literacy: Strategies To Counter Disinformation In Public Space

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Submitted: April 2026

Accepted: Mei 2026

Published: Mei 2026

#### Keywords:

Political Education,  
Digital Literacy, Digital  
Citizenship

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### ABSTRACT

The development of digital technology has transformed the public sphere into an open and massive arena for political communication, but it has also increased the spread of political disinformation on social media. This situation highlights the importance of strengthening political education integrated with digital literacy in building digital citizenship resilience. This study aims to analyze the integration of political education and digital literacy as a strategy to counter disinformation in the digital public sphere. The research used a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. The study took place at the Pancasila and Citizenship Education (PPKn) Study Program at Pamulang University. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. The research informants consisted of PPKn lecturers, students, and digital literacy practitioners selected using purposive sampling. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman model, which included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results indicate that students possess strong digital operational skills, but lack the critical thinking skills to verify political information in digital media. Political education in higher education also tends to be theoretically oriented and has not been optimally integrated with digital literacy practices. The integration of political education and digital literacy through current issue-based learning, political hoax analysis, critical social media discussions, and information verification training has been proven to improve students' cognitive abilities, ethical awareness, and participation in the digital public sphere. This research produces a novel integrative framework for political education and digital literacy as a strategy for building digital civic resilience in the face of disinformation in the era of digital democracy.

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### INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has transformed the public sphere into an open, rapid, and massive arena for political communication. Social media has become not only a means of political participation but also a primary medium for the spread of disinformation, potentially undermining the quality of democracy. This phenomenon is

global and has drawn the attention of academics and international institutions due to its impact on declining public trust in political institutions and increasing social polarization (Nugroho, 2026).

In the context of modern democracy, civic literacy and digital literacy are crucial foundations for maintaining the quality of public discourse. Research shows that low civic literacy correlates with increased public vulnerability to political disinformation, particularly in digital democracy systems (Lilja et al., 2024). Therefore, political education is no longer sufficient in a conventional manner; it must be integrated with strengthening digital literacy.

In Indonesia, the transformation of the digital public sphere is increasingly visible during political events such as general elections and regional elections. Social media has become an arena for contesting political narratives, often characterized by the spread of hoaxes and information manipulation. This phenomenon indicates that digital democracy faces serious challenges in the form of systematic and structured disinformation (Nugroho, 2026).

The main problem that arises is the public's low ability to verify political information circulating in the digital space. Studies of voters in Indonesia show that some people, especially first-time voters, tend to accept and disseminate information without adequate verification processes (Fernandes & Akbar, 2025). This demonstrates the weak integration between political education and digital literacy in building public information resilience.

Generation Z, as a digital native group, has extensive access to information, but this is not always matched by adequate political literacy capacity. Other research shows that although Generation Z is digitally active, their level of critical political literacy still needs to be strengthened to navigate the complexities of online political communication (Sulaiman & Fauzi, 2024). This situation poses a strategic challenge in developing participatory democracy. Based on generational groups, summarized from the Indonesian Digital Literacy Index report (2022–2023) by the Ministry of Communication and Informatics of the Republic of Indonesia in collaboration with the Katadata Insight Center.

Table 1. Indonesian Digital Literacy Across Generations (2022–2023)

Generation	Age Range (±)	Index Score
Z	17–26 years	±3,55
Milenila	27–42 years	±3,50
X	43–58 years	±3,35
Baby Boomer	59+ years	±3,10

Based on Table 1 of Indonesian Digital Literacy Across Generations in 2022–2023, differences in digital literacy levels are evident across each generational group. In general, younger generations have higher digital literacy scores than older generations.

Generation Z ranks highest with a digital literacy index score of ±3.55, in the good category. This indicates that Gen Z has superior abilities in using digital technology, particularly in terms of digital skills, speed of technology adaptation, and intensity of social media use. As a generation born and raised in the digital era, Gen Z tends to be more accustomed to various digital platforms and the rapid flow of information.

Millennials came in second with a score of ±3.50, which falls into the moderate-good category. This group possesses a fairly strong ability to utilize technology for productivity and digital economic activities. While not as intense as Gen Z in their use of social media, Millennials are relatively adaptable to digital technology developments in their daily lives and the workplace.

Next, Generation X scored ±3.35, which is in the moderate category. This generation is considered quite adaptable to digital technology, but their level of engagement and intensity of social media use is still lower than that of younger generations. This is influenced by differences in social experiences and technological developments during their formative years.

Meanwhile, Baby Boomers scored the lowest, at ±3.10, which is in the moderate category. Although access to digital technology is increasing, this group still faces challenges in technical skills and digital security. This low ability to adapt to technological developments is one factor influencing this generation's digital literacy level.

Overall, the table shows that the high level of digital operational skills among the younger generation is not always accompanied by critical thinking skills, digital ethics, and resilience to disinformation. Therefore, strengthening political education and digital literacy is crucial.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design to analyze political education and digital literacy strategies in addressing disinformation in the public sphere. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand social phenomena in depth within a natural context (Creswell, 2014). The case study design was used to comprehensively explore political education and digital literacy practices within a specific context (Yin, 2018).

This research was conducted in 2025 at the Pancasila and Citizenship Education (PPKn) Study Program at Pamulang University in several digital communities and educational spaces active in digital literacy activities. The selection of research locations was based on the consideration that PPKn students are part of the digital generation actively involved in the digital public sphere and civic education.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with 12 informants: 3 PPKn lecturers, 7 students, and 2 digital literacy practitioners. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, selecting informants deemed to have experience, knowledge, and direct involvement in political education and digital literacy activities (Sugiyono, 2019). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore experiences, perceptions, and strategies for political education and digital literacy in building digital citizenship resilience (Moleong, 2018).

In addition to interviews, participant observation was conducted for approximately three months, from January to March 2025. Observations included learning activities, student digital discussions, social media use, and information literacy practices in digital public spaces. These observations aimed to understand digital interaction patterns and informants' responses to the phenomenon of political disinformation.

Secondary data was obtained through a documentary study of Civics (PPKn) curriculum documents, learning modules, national digital literacy policies, digital learning guides, scientific articles, national digital literacy reports, and other supporting documents relevant to political education, digital literacy, and disinformation. The documentary study was used to strengthen the research's conceptual and contextual analysis (Bowen, 2009).

Data collection techniques were conducted in three stages: (1) semi-structured interviews, (2) participant observation, and (3) documentation study. Data validity was tested using source and method triangulation techniques to increase the credibility and validity of research findings (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Data analysis was conducted interactively, referring to the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014). The analysis process was carried out simultaneously from the data collection stage to the final interpretation of the research. During this process, researchers identified key themes related to digital political education patterns, digital literacy levels, forms of disinformation in the public sphere, and educational strategies that can be implemented to strengthen digital citizenship resilience. Through this approach, the research is expected to produce the formulation of a digital literacy-based political education strategy that is integrative, contextual, participatory, and adaptive in responding to the challenges of disinformation in the era of digital democracy.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

The research findings indicate that the integration of political education and digital literacy plays a crucial role in building students' digital citizenship resilience in the face of disinformation in the public sphere. Based on interviews, observations, and documentation studies, it was found that most students possess the technical skills to use digital media, but still face difficulties in critically verifying political information.

Observations indicate that students tend to obtain political information through social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, X, and YouTube. The high intensity of

social media use makes students readily absorb various political information, but not all of it is accompanied by the ability to critically analyze the validity of that information. In several student digital discussions, a tendency to share information without thoroughly checking the source was observed. One Civics student stated:

"Sometimes viral political information is immediately believed because it's widely shared on social media. After checking, it turns out that some of it has been cut or is out of context." (Diska, February 2025).

These findings indicate that students' digital operational skills are not fully accompanied by critical literacy skills in dealing with political disinformation. This situation demonstrates that the main challenge for the digital generation is not only access to information, but also the ability to sort and critically evaluate information.

According to interviews with Civics lecturers, political education has tended to focus on theoretical aspects such as democracy, citizen rights and obligations, and political systems, but has not been fully integrated with digital literacy practices in the online public sphere. One lecturer stated:

"Students are actually digitally active, but political learning hasn't been much directed at how they deal with hoaxes, digital propaganda, or political information manipulation." (RA, January 2025).

This statement indicates the need for a renewed political education strategy that is more contextual to the development of the digital public sphere. Political education is no longer sufficient to emphasize conceptual understanding; it also needs to develop information verification skills, digital ethics, and critical awareness of the flow of political information.

Furthermore, digital literacy practitioners explain that the spread of disinformation on social media is influenced by digital platform algorithms that create echo chambers and filter bubbles. Emotional and provocative information tends to spread more quickly than factual information. One digital literacy practitioner stated:

"Many social media users read information solely from headlines or video clips without checking the original source. This is what allows political hoaxes to spread quickly." (PH, March 2025).

The research findings also indicate that integrating political education and digital literacy can be achieved through current issue-based learning, critical discussions on digital media, social media content analysis, and information verification training. During learning observations, students were observed to be more active and participatory when presented with case studies related to political hoaxes circulating on social media.

The research findings demonstrate that an integrative approach between political education and digital literacy can strengthen three key dimensions of digital citizenship: cognitive, ethical, and participatory. The cognitive dimension is evident in students' increased ability to understand and analyze political information. The ethical dimension is reflected in students' awareness to be more careful in disseminating digital information. Meanwhile, the participatory dimension is evident in students' increased involvement in more critical and responsible digital public discussions.

These findings emphasize that disinformation in the era of digital democracy cannot be addressed solely through technological approaches but require strengthening digital citizenship capacity through digital literacy-based political education. Therefore, the integration of political education and digital literacy is a crucial strategy for building digital civic resilience amidst the increasing flow of political disinformation in the digital public sphere.

## **Discussion**

The research findings indicate that the integration of political education and digital literacy plays a strategic role in building students' digital citizenship resilience in the era of digital democracy. The research findings show that students, predominantly from Generation Z, as digital natives, possess fairly good technological operational skills, but lack the critical thinking skills to verify political information in digital media. This condition aligns with Gilster's concept of digital literacy, which states that digital literacy relates not only to the ability to use technology but also to the ability to critically understand, evaluate, and process information in a digital environment.

The research findings indicate that students tend to obtain political information through social media such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. The high intensity of social media use results in political information being quickly accepted without adequate

verification. This phenomenon is relevant to the echo chamber and filter bubble theories, which explain that social media algorithms create a homogenous information space, allowing users to more frequently receive information that aligns with their preferences and affiliations. As a result, political disinformation is more easily accepted and spread due to emotional factors and ideological affinities.

Interviews with students indicate that viral political information is often believed at face value due to the high intensity of its distribution on social media. This situation demonstrates that students' digital technical skills have not been matched by critical literacy skills. This finding supports Buckingham's (2015) assertion that while the younger generation is familiar with digital technology, they do not necessarily possess the critical skills to understand media messages and the political interests behind digital information.

Furthermore, this study found that political education in higher education still tends to be theoretically oriented and has not been fully integrated with digital literacy practices. However, in the context of digital democracy, political education needs to be directed at strengthening information analysis skills, awareness of digital ethics, and the ability to verify facts. This finding is relevant to Paulo Freire's critical education theory, which emphasizes that education must foster critical consciousness so that students do not become objects of information manipulation but are instead able to be reflective and participatory in their responses to social realities.

The integration of political education and digital literacy in this study also demonstrates a strengthening of the digital citizenship dimension. According to Ribble, digital citizenship encompasses an individual's ability to use technology responsibly, ethically, and participatively. In this study, students who received learning based on digital media analysis and information verification demonstrated an increased awareness of being more selective in receiving and disseminating political information. The research findings also indicate that learning strategies based on current issues, critical social media discussions, and political hoax analysis can increase students' responsible participation in the digital public sphere. This demonstrates that the integration of political education and digital literacy not only strengthens cognitive aspects but also shapes students' ethical and participatory awareness as digital citizens.

Theoretically, the results of this study reinforce the concept of digital civic resilience, namely the ability of citizens to confront disinformation through a combination of digital literacy skills, political awareness, and democratic participation. Digital civic resilience is crucial because the challenges of modern democracy relate not only to access to information but also to the public's ability to sort, evaluate, and respond to political information critically and responsibly.

Based on the discussion, it can be concluded that political disinformation in the digital era cannot be addressed solely through technological or regulatory approaches but requires strengthening digital citizenship capacity through the integration of political education and digital literacy. Political education integrated with digital literacy can improve students' critical thinking skills, digital ethical awareness, and democratic participation in the digital public sphere. Thus, the integration of political education and digital literacy is an important strategy in building digital civic resilience to face the challenges of disinformation in the era of digital democracy.

## **CONCLUSION**

The integration of political education and digital literacy plays a strategic role in building digital civic resilience in the era of digital democracy. Students, as digital natives, possess considerable skills in using technology and social media, but they lack the critical thinking skills to verify political information circulating in the digital space. This leaves them vulnerable to the spread of political disinformation.

Research shows that political education in higher education tends to be theoretically oriented and not fully integrated with digital literacy practices. However, the development of the digital public sphere demands learning that develops students' skills in information analysis, fact verification, digital ethics awareness, and critical participation in the online public sphere.

The integration of political education and digital literacy through current issue-based learning, political hoax analysis, critical social media discussions, and information verification training has been proven to improve students' ability to understand, evaluate, and respond to political information more critically and responsibly. This approach also strengthens the cognitive, ethical, and participatory dimensions of students as digital citizens.

Thus, this study confirms that political disinformation in the digital era cannot be addressed solely through technological or regulatory approaches, but requires strengthening digital citizenship capacity through the integration of political education and digital literacy. The novelty of this research lies in the development of an integrative framework of political education and digital literacy as a strategy for building digital citizenship resilience in facing the challenges of disinformation in the digital public sphere.

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