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Original Article

The Influence of Digital Literacy on Student Political Participation: A Case Study of Student Movements in Responding to Public Policy

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Abstract

The aim of this research focuses on digital literacy, which has a broad influence on students' political participation and helps create movements for change in response to policies directed at the public. The method used includes a literature review and a qualitative approach. In addition, to strengthen the theoretical basis and arguments, a second method is applied through direct interviews, aiming to build a comprehensive understanding of how digital literacy works and how students participate in responding to public policy. The findings show that there are many opportunities, such as using social media, expressing aspirations, and critically examining various information. However, the digital era also presents challenges that require students to improve their digital literacy, especially in relation to political issues. As the future of the next generation, students are expected to have political activity and criticism of the policy. In addition, it is been brought into the light the role of the digital literacy both in reflection and in deeping the reflections on the responsibility of fitting the course of the digital progression that is being designed by the digital literacy.

Keywords: Digital Literacy, Political Participation, Public Policy Response, Social Media Engagement, Student Movements.

1. Introduction

Politics in Indonesia has a long history of influential student contributions, especially during the fight for independence. Today, Indonesia is experiencing a rise in young successors, often referred to as Gen Z, who make up 27.94 percent of the population. According to BPS data, 69.68 percent of Indonesia's population is within the productive age group, meaning more than half are of working age, and a significant portion of that group is not Gen Z. Based on this data, Indonesia holds strong potential to develop into an advanced nation. However, the lack of sufficient training and inadequate cognitive and holistic development among youth presents a significant challenge.

Among university students, there has been a decline in political awareness. Even though information is readily available, this has led to a literacy crisis, especially in digital literacy (Juwandi et al., 2019). If empowered properly, Indonesia's youth could help the country become more advanced (Komarudin et al., 2024). However, there is currently a crisis in political literacy among the younger generation.

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Recently, young people around the world have become increasingly active in protests to express dissatisfaction with social and political conditions. In Indonesia, there have been demonstrations by students and pupils in several cities concerning the passing of controversial laws such as the Omnibus Law. Besides students, other activists have also joined these protests. While the media celebrates these actions, the reality on the ground is different (Raharjo & Winarko, 2021). Many members of Gen Z face challenges such as unemployment, low wages, and poor political and environmental conditions. Nevertheless, these protests can have a positive impact, reflecting the younger generation's belief in the need for change (Syahputri & Katimin, 2024) .

Another form of student criticism can be seen through the abundance of political information accessed via digital platforms. This highlights the need for public dialogue. Students often express their views and criticisms on platforms such as Instagram, X, and others (Widiastuti & Sulistyandari, 2024). These expressions often receive responses and real-world impacts beyond just demonstrations. Digital literacy, which involves the understanding of political issues and the strengthening of critical thinking in such situations, is essential (Handoko et al., 2015). Therefore, students need to master this aspect of digital literacy. The changes driven by critical student perspectives reflect the participation of the younger generation as pioneers and agents of the change that society hopes to see.

Based on this introduction, we as authors seek to address the place of digital literacy in supporting students' political engagement in the digital age. This involves examination of cause, effect, and "how digital literacy can be influential for young people trying to cultivate political engagement " associated with public policy.

2. Literature Review

Joel Stein, in his article in Time magazine, stated that the internet has transformed into a platform full of aggression and violence (Stein, 2013). In the past, the internet was used for accessing information and communication, but now it is filled with antisocial individuals who enjoy insulting and spreading hatred. Further, He highlights the presence of trolls who have turned the internet into a frightening place, where negative actions are carried out for entertainment.

Digitalisation, according to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia, is the process of utilising digital systems. With the advancement of technology, nearly all social interactions now rely on digital technology. Message delivery, which was once manual, can now be done quickly and inexpensively. Digitalisation has changed media and technology, including telephone network automation and more efficient data processing.

In using digital media, digital literacy is essential, as it helps prevent the kind of hostile and aggressive platform described by Joel Stein above. Literacy is defined as the ability to read and write, but in today's context, that is no longer sufficient (Budyastuti, 2021; Irianto & Febrianti, 2017). Many people can read and write but lack the ability to engage socially. Therefore, literacy now includes skills in communication and understanding the social environment (Kurnia, 2021). Literacy evolves according to context and includes various types, such as political literacy and digital literacy (Hidayat et al., 2024).

Indonesia, as a country governed by law and heavily influenced by political dynamics, naturally has many policies that affect the lives of its citizens. Public policy, from a disciplinary perspective, is multidisciplinary, encompassing fields such as politics, economics, sociology and psychology. Simon (2017) stated that policy research is seen as a field of study that can integrate with other social sciences. This view is supported by Lasswell (1970), who stated that

policy science is a branch of knowledge linked to other disciplines. In addition to functioning as a discipline, public policy is also known as the outcome of legislation. Public policy produces various legal products that are hierarchically listed in the Laws of the Republic of Indonesia. As a legislative product, according to Browne (1998), public policy should align with the interests of the people. Therefore, public policy includes the process of selecting and determining the best alternatives to solve specific societal problems. It involves problem identification, determining solutions, policymaking, implementation and evaluation.

Another example of an important public policy is the Indonesian government's effort to integrate artificial intelligence (AI) into public services. Over the past few years, AI has become a major driver of innovation across various sectors, including government and public policy (Paunov et al., 2019). One area that needs attention from the government is the creation of a "responsive and adaptive system" through the empowerment of available technologies such as intelligent systems. This intelligence is considered valuable for the public and could lead to improvements in systems that are more responsive and adaptive. Over the past four years, AI has yet to be fully mastered by the government. The implementation of AI policies still faces challenges, such as a shortage of skilled workers in the communication technology sector and inadequate digital-based development.

This significant challenge is clearly illustrated by global data on artificial intelligence in 2023, where Indonesia ranked among the bottom 50 out of 62 listed countries. This shows that the implementation of AI systems in our country remains limited compared to others. To address these challenges, the government has formulated a 25-year national strategy for artificial intelligence, starting from 2020, to serve as a reference for systematic development and implementation of AI. One of the goals in sustainable economic development requires a strong commitment from the government to support digitalisation through these efforts. Building collaboration around the latest AI innovations can boost the success of public policy. It is not just the government, but also the private sector and the wider public that need to be involved. Full collaboration among all relevant stakeholders in AI development communities is necessary to create progress that is both beneficial and equitable.

The digital world has a strong influence on politics, with the media presenting political issues. While it facilitates access to information, it also reveals that Indonesia still demonstrates weaknesses in democracy. Five years ago, a report by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), which observes global economic, political and business developments, recorded Indonesia as ranking 64th out of 167 countries with a democracy index score of 6.30. EIU's indicators included electoral process and pluralism with a score of 7.92, government function at 7.50, political participation at 6.11, political culture at 4.38, and civil liberties at 5.59.

These results reflect how public trust has begun to erode due to recurring issues involving political officials, creating negative perceptions about politics. Such cases reflect the public's response to feelings of betrayal by their representatives, which leads to political apathy. According to Arifin, political participation is influenced by an individual’s awareness and trust in the government. Based on a 2021 political monitoring survey, public trust in state institutions varied. The lowest was political parties, at around 54 percent. The House of Representatives (DPR) had an average trust level of 56 percent, the Attorney General's Office 65 percent, the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) at 69 percent, the Police at 67 percent, the President at 72 percent, and the military (TNI) also at 72 percent. This data cannot conclusively indicate that Indonesia has a high level of trust in its government. In nations that are currently advanced, public trust in government serves as a key benchmark.

3. Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the influence of digital literacy on students' political participation, particularly in the context of student movements responding to public policies related to the values of Pancasila.

3.1. Data Collection Techniques

Data for this research was collected through two main methods: literature review and in-depth interviews. The literature review was used to establish a theoretical foundation and to compare field findings with previous studies. Sources included academic journals, research reports, and articles relevant to the topic. Meanwhile, interviews were conducted directly with five active university students from different academic programmes. The respondents were selected purposively, based on the criterion that they had experience in activities or research related to digital literacy and political participation. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured technique to allow for broader exploration of the respondents' experiences, perspectives, and understanding.

3.2. Data Analysis Techniques

Data obtained from the literature review was analysed using a descriptive-qualitative approach, focusing on patterns, the distribution of information, and relevant percentage averages to support the field data. Interview data was analysed using an interpretative approach, grounded in the social context, experiences, and narratives shared by the respondents. This analytical process involved data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, in order to construct a complete and in-depth understanding of the phenomena studied. By combining both literature review and in-depth interviews, this research aims to build a comprehensive understanding of how digital literacy affects students' political engagement, and how Pancasila values are reflected in students' practices and responses to public policy.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. The Role of Digital Literacy in Enhancing Student Political Participation in the Digital Era

As students living in the digital era, the respondents stated that digital literacy plays an essential role in efforts to increase political participation among university students today. Digital literacy is not only about the ability to access information, but also the ability to understand political situations deeply and critically. With digital literacy, students can filter and select political information that is valid and trustworthy. This is crucial, as in today's world, political information is easy to find, but not all of it is accurate or accountable.

Through digital literacy, students become more active in various political activities, both in discussions and in concrete actions such as demonstrations. For example, when attending campus discussions or organisational forums, students are able to present accurate data and facts, not just empty opinions. This makes discussions more meaningful and impactful. In addition, digital literacy increases students' sensitivity to widespread political issues and trends, allowing them not just to be spectators, but also contributors who take part in change.

Respondents also felt that digital literacy is a sign of their concern and love for the country. With this ability, students are encouraged not to remain silent and instead to speak up about political issues that deserve to be addressed. Digital literacy enables students to think

critically, filter information, and avoid the influence of misleading hoaxes. In this way, the quality of student political participation improves and becomes more meaningful.

Moreover, digital literacy helps students become agents of education within their social environments. Students can correct public misconceptions about politics, especially when society is often misled by inaccurate information. Thus, digital literacy is not only about individual awareness, but also about how to contribute to building a more informed and critical society.

4.2. Factors Influencing the Relationship Between Digital Literacy and Student Political Participation

According to the respondents, several factors influence the relationship between digital literacy and political participation among students. The most important supporting factor is the willingness of students themselves to read, learn, and be politically aware. Without that willingness, digital literacy cannot function effectively. Awareness of the importance of our role as the nation's future also serves as a strong motivation to continue improving digital literacy.

The campus and social environment also have a significant influence. Environments that support critical discussion and active organisations greatly help students use digital literacy effectively. On campus, for instance, the existence of discussion forums, seminars, and student organisations that focus on political issues trains us to manage digital information in a healthy and critical way. Friends who are politically engaged also help foster enthusiasm for being more active and critical.

However, the respondents also noted several significant obstacles. Many students still spend time simply scrolling through social media without engaging with meaningful content. This habit makes students vulnerable to hoaxes and political manipulation. Additionally, the phenomenon of burnout or mental fatigue due to excessive exposure to political information is also a challenge. At times, students feel bored or apathetic about the constant stream of political issues. Trends of blindly following political movements on social media without proper understanding also present a problem. Sometimes, students simply go along with popular opinions without knowing the real substance of the issues. Therefore, strong principles and critical attitudes are essential for students to filter the influence of their social environments and to use digital literacy constructively and responsibly.

4.3. The Influence of Digital Literacy on Student Political Participation in Responding to Public Policy

In the context of responding to public policy, the respondents noted that digital literacy is particularly helpful for students today. With this ability, students can quickly and critically understand government policies. Through broad access to various information sources and discussion forums, students are able to view policies from different perspectives and verify the accuracy of information before reacting.

This allows students to provide data- and fact-based critiques and oversight of public policy. For instance, when a new bill is proposed or when a policy directly impacts society, students can discuss and assess the policy constructively, rather than merely joining in without a solid basis. Social media and digital platforms serve as important spaces for students to voice opinions and discuss such policies.

Digital literacy also increases student awareness about participating in a democratic system. Students feel more responsible and motivated to take an active role in public decision-making. As a result, students do not merely act as observers but become active participants in safeguarding the quality of government policies.

4.4. The Impact of Social Media and Digital Platforms on Student Movements in Expressing Political Aspirations

The use of social media and digital platforms has significantly changed the way students express political aspirations. In the past, students had to take to the streets to voice their opinions and demands. Now, by simply making a post, using a hashtag, or signing an online petition, student aspirations can spread quickly and go viral in a short time.

Social media speeds up the dissemination of information and opinions, reaching a much wider audience and providing a safer space for students to speak up. It also allows students to find like-minded individuals. Nevertheless, students are aware that social media also presents its own challenges.

According to one respondent, the risks of hoaxes, intimidation, and pressure from certain parties often hinder efforts to express opinions. Moreover, the misuse of social media, such as cybercrime, must also be taken seriously. The trend of short videos and instant information on platforms like TikTok encourages pragmatic and shallow thinking. This potentially hampers critical and analytical political participation, as many people tend to draw conclusions quickly without properly examining the information.

Therefore, students must use social media wisely and ensure their own safety. This is important to ensure that political movements led by the younger generation remain effective, maintain integrity, and are not easily swayed by misleading information. Students also need to continuously improve their digital literacy so they can filter information effectively and become agents of positive change.

Overall, digital literacy serves as a foundational element in building student political participation that is healthy, critical, and responsible in this digital era. With digital literacy, students are able to understand political issues clearly, participate actively in discussions and actions, and respond intelligently to public policies. The effectiveness of social media in voicing political aspirations is undeniable, as long as it is used wisely and with awareness. It is certainly a challenging journey, due to various pressures from both the social environment and the nature of digital platforms. However, with strong principles, a willingness to learn, and support from a conducive environment, digital literacy can continue to grow and bring positive change to the nation's political life.

5. Conclusion

As university students who hold a broad role in society, from being agents of change to serving as critical voices and social watchdogs, it is essential for them to strengthen their development of digital literacy. This has become a basic need that can influence student political participation. Moreover, digital literacy encourages students to be critical when receiving information, by observing and processing data more deeply. In this way, students can become more active in various political activities, particularly when responding to political issues with data and facts they have obtained.

The contribution of students to political issues, supported by digital literacy, creates meaningful benefits. It reflects not only care and nationalistic spirit, but also the courage to act and follow through on issues that need to be addressed. When students are able to filter information and respond to political matters in society, it contributes to building a more informed and critical community. Education then extends beyond the self and into wider society, demonstrating that digital literacy has a comprehensive impact, especially in the political realm.

There are several factors influencing the relationship between digital literacy and political participation among students. Internal factors serve as the primary driver, particularly the personal willingness to read, learn, and develop political awareness. Recognising their role as the future generation of the nation is a key motivation every student should possess. External factors also play a significant role, especially the surrounding environment. The campus and wider community, including discussion forums, seminars, public lectures, and student organisations focused on political issues, help students become accustomed to managing information in a healthy and critical way. The influence of peers and the wider social environment can enhance digital literacy and foster a spirit of active and critical engagement.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that there are also inhibiting factors in the digital age. While students may be technologically literate, they do not always use this capability in ways that reflect true literacy. Activities such as endlessly scrolling through social media for entertainment, without engaging with quality information, can expose students to hoaxes and political manipulation. Additionally, students may experience mental fatigue from the overload of political content, leading to confusion, boredom, and ultimately apathy towards current political issues. Sometimes, students prioritise trends over understanding the substance of a political matter. By merely following the crowd, they risk becoming easily intimidated and losing their capacity for critical thinking, which is essential for the digitally literate future generation to use technology constructively and responsibly.

In Indonesia, policymaking requires public dialogue, as policies created ultimately become public policies. In this context, digital literacy plays an important role. With fast and widespread access to information in the digital era, students are able to provide criticism and oversight based on data and facts focused on public policy. For students, social media and digital platforms are crucial spaces for voicing opinions and engaging in discussion about existing policies.

It is important to understand that the positive impact of using social media will only emerge when it is used wisely and with attention to personal safety. This is essential to prevent the rapid spread of information from backfiring. Furthermore, a significant impact of social media is its ability to help students expand their audience of supporters when expressing political opinions. With just a post, a hashtag, or an online petition, student aspirations can spread widely and go viral in a short amount of time.

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