

THE ROLE OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN FORMING A LEGAL CULTURE AND DEMOCRATIC ETHICS IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract

This study analyzes how Civic Education can address the decline in legal culture and democratic ethics caused by disinformation and intolerance in Indonesia's digital space. Using a juridical-normative method and a systematic literature review (2021–2026), this article examines the crucial role of a Pancasila-based curriculum in linking ethical awareness and digital citizenship actions. Data indicate low levels of digital civility in the country and the increasing spread of political hoaxes, necessitating an integrative model that combines cyber literacy and civic resilience. Key findings highlight that the internalization of Pancasila values and the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) approach are highly effective in shaping the character of responsible digital citizens, although implementation remains hampered by a lack of teacher competency and uneven technological infrastructure.

Keywords: Digital Citizenship Education, Legal Culture, Democratic Ethics, Civil Resilience, Pancasila Values.

INTRODUCTION

The digital era has brought about a fundamental transformation in the fabric of public life. This phenomenon is marked by a shift in public space to the virtual realm, increasingly fluid patterns of political participation in the digital ecosystem, and the blurring of boundaries between citizens' physical and digital identities. However, this dynamic does not necessarily translate into an improvement in the quality of democracy, given the emergence of various negative residues such as the rise of disinformation, the escalation of hate speech, and the strengthening of digital intolerance. This condition, exacerbated by the declining trend of political participation among the younger generation, serves as empirical evidence that the openness of cyberspace presents complex challenges that can degrade democratic values if not managed with adequate integrity and literacy.¹

By understanding this reality, we can see that digital transformation is not only changing the way society communicates but also impacting deeper aspects. This change is slowly beginning to influence and test the strength of the norms that have long guided the nation. The first factor affected is the integrity of the legal system, where public certainty and awareness are beginning to be disrupted as ethical boundaries in cyberspace become increasingly unclear. Furthermore, this phenomenon is also undermining the values of decency and morality that should be the foundation of the democratic process. Ultimately, this change poses major challenges that, if not addressed immediately, could weaken the fundamental principles that have long been the foundation of national life.

¹ Federico Castiglioni and Alessia Chiriatti, "Civic and Citizenship Education under Scrutiny: A Comparative Analysis of Case Studies across EU and Non-EU Countries," *De Europa* 8, no. 2 (2025), 4MB, <https://doi.org/10.13135/2611-853X/13017>.

Responding to the complexity of these challenges, academics have begun exploring theory from various perspectives. Internationally, Julian Culp has proposed a Rawlsian-based approach, coining the term "cultural turn," in the discourse on digital citizenship education. Culp emphasizes that democratic education in the digital age should not focus solely on improving technical skills. Instead, it should be understood as a cultural endeavor that can substantially foster the development of political values in each individual. This includes cultivating a sense of adherence to public logic and a commitment to maintaining ethical civility in every interaction online.²

The discourse on citizenship education in Indonesia in the digital era has developed rapidly in recent years. Research by Agus et al. found that although secondary school students have a high level of ethical awareness, particularly regarding online safety and misinformation, their participation in online citizenship activities remains low. Educators are implementing critical media literacy methods, but they face significant challenges, such as a lack of training, overly restrictive curricula, and limited institutional support.³ Meanwhile, Damanik and Kedhaton, in their guidance on the 2020 PRISMA protocol, demonstrated that digital citizenship education can enhance ethical awareness, critical thinking skills, and responsible participation in the digital world. Furthermore, civic resilience can be developed through the integration of Pancasila-based learning, which emphasizes the importance of empathy and moral values. However, systemic obstacles remain related to teacher preparedness, technological infrastructure, and curriculum alignment.⁴

² Julian Culp, "Three Rawlsian Rationales for a Cultural Turn in Digital Citizenship Education," *The Review of Politics* 87, no. 3 (2025): 369–92, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670525000038>.

³ Andi Aco Agus et al., "From Awareness to Action: Rethinking High School Civic Education for the Digital Generation in Indonesia," *Cogent Education* 12, no. 1 (2025): 2534156, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2534156>.

⁴ Prince Clinton Immanuel Christian Damanik and Arum Sekar Kedhaton, "Strengthening Civic Resilience through Digital Citizenship Education: A Pancasila-

Based on the above description, it is clear that there is a conceptual gap in digital literature that tends to ignore the connection between cyber literacy and the foundations of national life. Therefore, this research is highly relevant and crucial to comprehensively analyze the role of Civic Education in integrating legal culture and democratic ethics amidst the complexities of the digital era.

As for the aim to be achieved in this paper is to comprehensively examine the role of civic education in shaping the legal culture and ethics of democracy in the digital era and to strive to provide a theoretical basis for the formulation of civic education policies that are more responsive to the challenges of the times, while also providing practical guidance for educators and curriculum developers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a juridical-normative legal research. The primary focus is the analysis of library materials or secondary data. All secondary data used in this study was obtained entirely through library research.

DISCUSSION

A. The Urgency of Establishing a Legal Culture in the Digital Space through Civic Education

The digital era has brought fundamental changes to the legal practices of society. Cyberspace, which should be a vehicle for democratic public participation, has instead often become an arena for legal anomalies, where various forms of violations such as

Based Pathway to SDG 4 and 16,” Proceedings of the National Seminar on Education, Social Sciences, and Law (SENPISHUM) 1, no. 1 (2026), <https://journal.unj.ac.id/unj/index.php/senpishum/article/view/62546>.

cyberbullying, the spread of false information, and hate speech are rampant. Data from the Ministry of Communication and Informatics shows that there were 237 political hoaxes out of a total of 1,923 pieces of hoax content throughout 2024 spread across various digital platforms.⁵In addition, the Microsoft Digital Civility Index report places Indonesia as the country with the lowest level of digital civility in Southeast Asia.⁶This phenomenon indicates that the digital space remains a gray area where freedom of expression, ethics, and the law collide. In this context, the urgency of fostering a legal culture through Civic Education becomes even more pressing.



Source: *voaindonesia.com*

Figure 1. Microsoft Report: Civility, Safety & Online Interactions: Indonesia

Civics education plays a strategic role in instilling legal awareness among the younger generation from an early age. As Agus et al. found, although students' ethical awareness is relatively high, their active

⁵ Ministry of Communication and Digital, “Komdigi Identifies 1,923 Hoax Content Throughout 2024,” January 8, 2025, <https://www.komdigi.go.id/berita/siaran-pers/detail/komdigi-identifikasi-1923-konten-hoaks-sepanjang-tahun-2024>.

⁶ Eva Mazrieva, “Digital Civility Index: Indonesia the Worst in Southeast Asia,” VOA Indonesia, February 26, 2021, <https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/indeks-keberadaban-digital-indonesia-terburuk-se-asia-tenggara/5794123.html>.

participation in digital citizenship activities remains low due to a lack of training support and a rigid curriculum.⁷ If this gap between knowledge and action is not addressed immediately, it has the potential to produce a generation that intellectually understands digital ethics but practically does not contribute to maintaining a democratic and just cyber public space.

The connection between cyber literacy and the foundations of national life is often overlooked in digital discourse. Yet, a legal culture in the digital space cannot be built solely through a repressive approach. A preventative approach through Citizenship Education, which emphasizes understanding the rights and obligations of digital citizens, is essential. Within the framework of digital citizenship, three fundamental principles must be established: respecting oneself and others, educating oneself and others, and protecting oneself and others.⁸ The implementation of digital law in civics learning is crucial considering that the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (ITE Law) often sparks controversy related to its loose provisions and the criminalization of freedom of expression.⁹ Civics Education can act as a bridge between existing regulations and public legal awareness.

B. Civic Education as a Pillar of Digital Democracy Ethics

Indonesia's digital democracy currently stands at a crossroads. On the one hand, the digital space has opened up extraordinary opportunities for public participation, as evidenced by various social movements such as #ReformasiDikorupsi, which have mobilized the participation of millions of netizens. With over 192 million social media users by 2025, Indonesia has significant social capital to strengthen

⁷ Agus et al., "From Awareness to Action."

⁸ Winita Teukeku Priyanto, "Digital Citizens and Digital Citizenship," *Character Building*, 2023, <https://binus.ac.id/character-building/2023/02/warga-digital-dan-kewarganegaraan-digital/>.

⁹ "Komdigi Identifies 1,923 Hoax Contents Throughout 2024."

participatory democracy.¹⁰ However, on the other hand, the freedom of online public space is often restricted through content blocking and the criminalization of public criticism. From Jürgen Habermas' perspective, the digital public space, which should be a forum for rational discussion, is threatened by being controlled by non-discursive interests, whether by the market, power, or algorithms. Meanwhile, philosopher John Stuart Mill emphasized that freedom of expression is only meaningful if it is used to approach the truth, not to harm others.

Amid these contradictions, Civic Education emerges as a crucial pillar in building an ethical digital democracy. The paradigm offered goes beyond teaching technical literacy to instilling substantive democratic values grounded in Pancasila. Damanik and Kedhaton demonstrate that integrating Pancasila values into digital citizenship education can enhance critical thinking skills and responsible participation.¹¹ The fourth principle of Pancasila, which emphasizes "wisdom in deliberation," teaches that freedom must be guided by common sense and moral considerations. Innovative learning models such as project-based learning and online deliberations have proven effective in fostering critical student engagement in digital democracy.¹²

C. Internalization of Pancasila Values as a Cultural Foundation

Pancasila has increasingly strong relevance in the digital era. As the source of all legal sources, Pancasila must be the spirit of every cyber regulation to be effective, just, and humane. At the educational level,

¹⁰ Simon Kemp, "We Are Social & Hootsuite, Digital 2025: Indonesia (London: We Are Social, 2025)," February 25, 2025, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-indonesia>.

¹¹ Damanik and Kedhaton, "Strengthening Civic Resilience through Digital Citizenship Education: A Pancasila-Based Pathway to SDGs 4 and 16."

¹² Agus et al., "From Awareness to Action"; Damanik and Kedhaton, "Strengthening Civic Resilience through Digital Citizenship Education: A Pancasila-Based Pathway to SDG 4 and 16."

the Pancasila Student profile, which emphasizes global competence and behavior consistent with Pancasila values, serves as an important foundation for fostering good digital citizenship. Internalization of Pancasila values can be achieved through a holistic approach encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. In the cognitive aspect, students are encouraged to reflect on how Pancasila values are applied in a digital context. The second principle, Just and Civilized Humanity, serves as the foundation for rejecting all forms of hate speech. The third principle, Unity of Indonesia, reminds us of the importance of maintaining national integrity from the threats of disinformation and polarization.¹³

From an affective perspective, digital citizenship education must foster empathy and social awareness. The concept of the Indonesian Archipelago Insight, which emphasizes unity in diversity, can serve as a foundation for fostering tolerance in digital interactions. From a psychomotor perspective, students are encouraged to actively engage in productive digital citizenship activities, such as digital literacy campaigns and participation in healthy public discussion forums. Research shows that civics education tends to be theory-based, making it difficult for students to understand.¹⁴ It is necessary to develop other learning methods, such as the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, which focuses on Contextual Teaching and Learning, Self-Regulated Learning, and value-based education.

D. Implementation Challenges and Strategies

The implementation of digital citizenship education in Indonesia faces several structural and cultural challenges. At the structural level, teacher preparedness remains a major issue, as many educators lack adequate

¹³ Damanik and Kedhaton, "Strengthening Civic Resilience through Digital Citizenship Education: A Pancasila-Based Pathway to SDGs 4 and 16."

¹⁴ Agus et al., "From Awareness to Action."

digital competencies.¹⁵ An overly compact curriculum leaves little room for pedagogical innovation. Unequal technological infrastructure between urban and rural areas further widens the access gap. Data shows that only 50% of Indonesia's digital talent possesses basic and intermediate digital skills.¹⁶

At the cultural level, the widespread "No Viral, No Justice" phenomenon among students reflects low trust in legal institutions and a tendency to use social media as a trial by public opinion. A study of student perceptions revealed that viral content is seen as a reflection of low trust in legal institutions, raising concerns about selective justice and the risk of misinformation.¹⁷ A holistic implementation strategy includes: (1) curriculum reform that provides greater space for the integration of digital competencies; (2) increasing teacher capacity through ongoing training; (3) developing equitable technology infrastructure; (4) strengthening partnerships between schools, families, and communities; (5) providing a safe and constructive digital participation platform.¹⁸

E. Synergy with Strengthening Digital Civil Resilience

Digital civic resilience is an increasingly relevant concept amidst the complex threats of the digital era. This resilience encompasses not only the technical ability to protect oneself from cybercrime, but also moral and ideological resilience in the face of disinformation and polarization. Pancasila-based digital citizenship education offers a concrete path to

¹⁵ Agus et al., "From Awareness to Action"; Damanik and Kedhaton, "Strengthening Civic Resilience through Digital Citizenship Education: A Pancasila-Based Pathway to SDG 4 and 16."

¹⁶ East Ventures, "Reducing the digital divide: Strategies for achieving equal digital access," July 6, 2023, <https://east.vc/id/berita/insights/mengurangi-kesenjangan-digital-strategi-mencapai-kesetaraan-akses-digital>.

¹⁷ Mazrieva, "Digital Civilization Index."

¹⁸ Damanik and Kedhaton, "Strengthening Civic Resilience through Digital Citizenship Education: A Pancasila-Based Pathway to SDG 4 and 16"; Mike Ribble, *Digital Citizenship in Schools: Nine Elements All Students Should Know*, Third edition (International Society for Technology in Education, 2015).

strengthening this civic resilience. Through integrated learning that emphasizes the importance of empathy and moral values, young people can develop a kind of "digital antibody" that makes them less susceptible to hateful narratives.¹⁹

Damanik and Kedhaton's study clearly demonstrates that a Pancasila-based approach can effectively increase ethical awareness, critical thinking skills, and responsible participation in the digital world.²⁰ However, the study also cautions that systemic obstacles related to teacher preparedness, technological infrastructure, and curriculum alignment remain, requiring immediate address. Digital citizenship education should not stop at the cognitive level but should move toward character development and mental resilience. Young people need to be encouraged to move beyond being passive consumers of digital information to becoming responsible content producers and active agents of change in maintaining the quality of cyberspace. In the long term, investing in quality digital citizenship education will determine the future of Indonesian democracy.²¹

Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that Civics Education plays a central role in shaping legal culture and democratic ethics in the digital era. Through the integration of Pancasila values, critical digital literacy, and strengthening civil resilience, Civics Education can address the challenges of disinformation, hate speech, and polarization that threaten Indonesia's digital democracy. However, this success depends heavily on curriculum reform, improved teacher

¹⁹ Damanik and Kedhaton, "Strengthening Civic Resilience through Digital Citizenship Education: A Pancasila-Based Pathway to SDGs 4 and 16."

²⁰ Damanik and Kedhaton, "Strengthening Civic Resilience through Digital Citizenship Education: A Pancasila-Based Pathway to SDGs 4 and 16."

²¹ Castiglioni and Chiriatti, "Civic and Citizenship Education under Scrutiny"; Culp, "Three Rawlsian Rationales for a Cultural Turn in Digital Citizenship Education"; Damanik and Kedhaton, "Strengthening Civic Resilience through Digital Citizenship Education: A Pancasila-Based Pathway to SDG 4 and 16."

competency, equitable distribution of technological infrastructure, and partnerships between schools, families, and communities. Further research is needed to empirically test innovative digital Civics learning models in various regions of Indonesia.

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