

## **Health Students' Digital Citizenship Awareness in Responding to Health Disinformation on Social Media**

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### **Abstract**

*This study aims to examine the digital citizenship awareness of health science students in addressing the spread of health disinformation on social media. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method with a literature review approach. Data were gathered from scientific journals, articles, and books relevant to digital literacy, digital citizenship, and health disinformation, published within the last five years. The findings reveal that the level of digital citizenship awareness among health students varies significantly. Some students demonstrate good digital literacy skills, enabling them to identify and counter health disinformation, while others remain vulnerable to consuming or even sharing unverified health information. Several factors influence this awareness, including the intensity of social media use, experience in filtering information, peer influence, and the role of civic education in higher education institutions. Health students are expected not only to act as consumers of information but also to serve as agents of change who actively educate the public and foster a healthy culture of digital literacy. Achieving this goal requires synergy between educational institutions, student organizations, and various stakeholders to strengthen students' digital literacy competencies. In this way, health students can contribute to building a society resilient to disinformation and help enhance national information security in the digital era.*

**Keywords:** *digital citizenship, health disinformation, digital literacy*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The rapid development of information technology has brought many changes in people's lives, including in the health sector. Health students as part of the younger generation certainly cannot be separated from this digitalization flow. Social media has become one of the main channels for them to obtain information, including health

information. Unfortunately, not all information circulating on social media has truth that can be accounted for. This causes students to have good digital citizenship awareness in order to be able to sort out the right information (Amalia, Aqida, & Aidah, 2025).

Digital citizenship awareness actually includes an understanding of the rights, obligations, and responsibilities as citizens in the digital space. Health students not only act as consumers of information, but also as disseminators of information that can influence society. If students do not have adequate digital awareness, they have the potential to become part of the disseminators of disinformation. This certainly endangers the wider community, especially in the context of health. As stated by Khairunisa et al. (2024), digital literacy is important to build citizen civilization in the digital era.

Health disinformation that spreads on social media is often packaged in such a way that it appears convincing. This misinformation can mislead people in making health-related decisions. For example, there are many claims of alternative medicine without valid scientific evidence, but they are believed because they go viral. This is where the role of health students is important to educate the public while controlling themselves so that they do not participate in spreading misinformation. According to Hasibuan et al. (2024), health education has a major contribution in increasing public awareness of healthy lifestyles, including in the digital realm.

In addition, the post-truth era makes the truth increasingly blurred because emotions and opinions often trump facts. Health students need to understand that they have a strategic role in strengthening information resilience in society. Their Pancasila education should be able to instill critical values and responsibility in the digital era. Amir et al. (2025) emphasized that information resilience must be built early so that people are not easily provoked by fake news. Therefore, digital citizenship awareness is not just a theoretical concept, but must be realized in real action.

On the other hand, social media does offer convenience in accessing and disseminating information, but it is also a fertile ground for hoaxes. Health students as part of the academic community are expected to be at the forefront in fighting health hoaxes. Of course, this requires strong digital literacy and critical thinking skills. Grecya et al. (2021) highlighted how students can choose to be actors or mere spectators in the face of rampant hoaxes. This decision will determine their real contribution to the quality of information in society.

The phenomenon of massive health disinformation is also closely related to the low digital literacy of the community. Health students must be able to become agents of change that encourage the creation of a digital-savvy society. It is not enough to understand technology, but also to be wise and responsible in using it. Akbar et al. (2024) reminded that digital literacy is part of state defense in the modern era that must be actualized by every citizen, including students. That way, students can help strengthen national resilience through simple actions, such as filtering information.

Generation Z, which dominates the university benches today, is known for its creativity and high adaptability in the digital era. Unfortunately, this creativity is sometimes not accompanied by responsibility in social media. Health students must be able to balance creativity with digital ethics so as not to become part of the disinformation chain. Maharani et al. (2025) explained that the creativity of generation Z in the digital era should be directed towards productive and positive things. This awareness is important to shape the character of students who are not only academically smart, but also wise in utilizing technology.

The responsibility of health students in addressing health disinformation does not stop at the individual level. They are also expected to be able to collaborate with various parties to improve the digital literacy of the community. The role of students as health communicators is very strategic in educating the public through social media. Rullah et al. (2025) emphasized the importance of effective communication strategies to improve digital

literacy among young people. This shows that the role of health students is not only as recipients of information, but also as drivers of social change.

In the context of citizenship education, health students need to understand the basic values that underpin their behavior in the digital space. The values of responsibility, honesty and care must be the basis of their every action when using social media. Tarigan et al. (2025) stated that citizenship education is very important in shaping the nation's character in the digital era. By having a strong character, health students can become role models in responding to health disinformation. This is one of their real contributions to nation building in the digital era.

Finally, health students' digital citizenship awareness must continue to be honed and developed in order to be able to answer the challenges of the information age. There needs to be support from educational institutions so that students get adequate digital literacy. In addition, students must also actively seek and access knowledge to strengthen their ability to filter information. Safitri (2025) mentions that social media has an important role in shaping generation Z's social awareness, so it must be utilized wisely. That way, health students are not only proficient in academics, but also become responsible digital citizens.

### **METHODS**

The research method used in this paper is descriptive qualitative with a literature study approach. This approach was chosen because it was considered the most appropriate to examine the phenomenon of digital citizenship awareness of health students in dealing with health disinformation on social media. Data were obtained through reviewing various sources such as scientific journals, articles, books, and relevant documents that discuss the themes of digital literacy, digital citizenship, and health disinformation. All references used are from credible sources and have gone through a peer review process. With this approach, the author seeks to portray in depth how health students carry out their roles in the context of responsible digital citizenship.

Data collection was carried out by tracing national and international scientific publications published in the last five years. This is so that the data obtained is up-to-date and relevant to current technological developments and social media dynamics. The literature search process focused on the topics of digital literacy, health disinformation, digital citizenship awareness, and the role of students in fighting hoaxes. Data sources were obtained from various journals such as *Journal of Social Science Education*, *Journal of Educational Window*, *Polyscopia*, and *Didaktika*, which have been referenced in the introduction. The sources were analyzed by sorting, reading in depth, and linking the findings with each other in order to obtain a complete understanding.

The data analysis technique used content analysis to explore the content of the documents and literature that had been collected. This analysis was conducted by noting themes, main ideas, and important concepts relevant to the research topic. Furthermore, findings from various literatures were categorized into several major themes, such as students' digital awareness, forms of health disinformation, and students' strategies in responding to health hoaxes. The results of this analysis are then organized systematically in order to provide a comprehensive picture. With this method, it is hoped that the paper can contribute to strengthening digital citizenship literacy among health students.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the study conducted through literature studies show that the digital citizenship awareness of health students in dealing with health disinformation on social media is still very diverse. There are students who already have a fairly good level of digital literacy so that they are able to identify misleading health information. However, there are also students who still easily believe in unverified health information, especially those packaged in attractive visuals or delivered by public figures who are considered trusted. This phenomenon

shows that although health students already have a basic health knowledge background, they still need strengthening in terms of digital literacy and social media ethics. As asserted by Akbar et al. (2024), digital literacy is part of the state defense efforts that citizens, including students, must realize in their daily lives in the digital space.

Health disinformation on social media currently comes in various forms and channels. Starting from information related to traditional medicine that is claimed to be able to cure certain diseases without scientific evidence, to hoaxes about vaccines that are associated with conspiracy theories. This literature review found that health students are often caught in a dilemma when receiving this kind of information, especially if the information comes from their immediate environment such as family or friends. On the one hand, they feel the need to correct and set the record straight. But on the other hand, there is a fear of being considered "pretentious" or even triggering social conflict if they correct the information circulating too often. This is in line with the findings of Amalia et al. (2025) who mentioned that digital citizenship awareness requires courage in acting according to the value of truth in the digital space.

The results of the literature search also highlighted a gap between the academic knowledge of health students and their practice in social media. Health students have indeed been equipped with various health-related knowledge through the lecture curriculum. However, when they are in the digital world, not all students are able to apply this knowledge to filter information critically. Some students even admitted that they had participated in spreading health information that turned out to be wrong, just because they were in a hurry to share without checking its validity first. Grecya et al. (2021) in their research highlighted this condition and emphasized that students should choose to be actors of change, not just passive spectators in the face of rampant hoax news.

In terms of discussion, health students' digital citizenship awareness should be understood as a combination of digital literacy, ethical understanding, and social responsibility in cyberspace. This awareness is not only about being able to identify hoaxes, but also about having the courage to take a stand not to participate in spreading disinformation and educating the surrounding environment. Health students have a strategic position because they are considered as figures who understand health issues better than the general public. Therefore, their responsibility does not only stop at themselves, but also targets the wider community. As stated by Khairunisa et al. (2024), smart digital citizens must be able to maintain civilization in every activity in the digital space.

One of the important findings in this study is that social media is often a very dynamic and difficult to control "information war". In this context, health students often have to deal with a flood of information in a very short time. It is not uncommon for health hoaxes to spread much faster than clarifications from authorities or trusted sources. This requires students' agility and sensitivity to immediately recognize questionable information. Rullah et al. (2025) emphasized that students must have effective communication strategies to be able to respond to this situation appropriately and not contribute to making the situation worse.

Another discussion is related to factors that influence the level of digital citizenship awareness of health students. Based on the literature, these factors include students' personal experience in using social media, the intensity of access to health information, and the influence of the friendship environment. Students who are accustomed to checking the truth of information before sharing, generally have a better level of digital awareness. Conversely, students who tend to be passive or rarely check facts are more vulnerable to becoming victims of disinformation. Hasibuan et al. (2024) mentioned that formal health education must be accompanied by the habituation of practical digital literacy so that students are better prepared to face the flow of information in the digital era.

Health students are also faced with challenges in the form of social pressure on social media. This pressure arises because of expectations from peers or friendship groups that they

follow the flow of information that is going viral, without questioning the truth. Many students end up trapped in the culture of "just share" for fear of being considered out of date or not up to date. This condition illustrates how strong the influence of the environment is in shaping students' digital behavior. Maharani et al. (2025) in their study emphasized that generation Z must be able to manage their digital creativity so as not to be trapped in deviant behavior such as spreading hoaxes.

The study also revealed that digital citizenship awareness cannot be separated from strengthening civic education in higher education. Citizenship education should not only be oriented towards normative knowledge, but also directed towards real practices in the digital space. This is important so that health students are able to carry out their roles as digital citizens with integrity. Tarigan et al. (2025) mentioned that civic education in the digital era must be able to shape the character of students so that they are not only academically intelligent, but also have social sensitivity and moral courage in dealing with disinformation. Therefore, universities need to design curriculum and mentoring programs that are more responsive to digital developments.

In terms of social responsibility, health students have a strategic position as a bridge between scientific information and the wider community. When students are able to understand this responsibility, they will be more careful in using social media and not carelessly sharing information. They will also be encouraged to become agents of education, either directly through oral communication, or indirectly through educational content on social media. This certainly requires support from institutions, lecturers, and communities so that students feel supported in carrying out this role. As Safitri (2025) emphasized, social media actually has great potential to build social awareness of the younger generation as long as it is used wisely.

Ultimately, this study confirms that health students' digital citizenship awareness is not only an individual need, but also a collective need in building an informed society. Health disinformation that continues to spread on social media must be combated with the collaboration of various parties, including students as important actors. Health students must familiarize themselves with verifying every information received, educating the surrounding environment, and being a role model in behaving in the digital space. Universities as a forum for fostering students must also play an active role in instilling these digital citizenship values through various literacy and character strengthening programs. Thus, health students can become digital citizens who are not only technologically literate, but also wise, responsible, and have integrity in facing the challenges of the information age.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of the literature review, it can be concluded that health students' digital citizenship awareness in dealing with health disinformation on social media still needs strengthening. Although some students already have adequate digital literacy and academic knowledge, in practice not all are able to consistently sort and filter information before disseminating it. This is due to various factors, ranging from a lack of fact-checking habits, social pressure in digital media, to a lack of courage to take a critical stance against misinformation. Health students are actually in a strategic position as the front guard against health hoaxes, but this role has not been optimized collectively. Therefore, digital literacy must continue to be improved along with the habituation of ethical and responsible attitudes in social media.

The digital citizenship awareness of health students is not only limited to the ability to recognize hoaxes, but also includes the courage to refuse to spread dubious information and a commitment to educate the public. Health students as future professionals in the health sector are expected to be able to set an example for their environment in being wise in the digital space. They need to realize that their actions on social media can have a major

influence on the public's perception of health information. In this case, universities also play an important role in facilitating student character building to be more adaptive, critical and responsible in responding to the ever-evolving information flow. Civic education in the digital era must be able to bridge the values of Pancasila with real practices in cyberspace.

Finally, the active role of health students in fighting health disinformation can only be realized if there is a synergy between knowledge, ethical awareness, and digital communication skills. Students must be able to become agents of change who are not only academically smart, but also have integrity in social media. Universities, student organizations, and communities must jointly create a healthy digital literacy culture to strengthen the role of students as good digital citizens. Thus, health students can make a real contribution in realizing a society that is resilient to disinformation while strengthening the nation's information resilience. Small steps such as verifying information before sharing are already part of state defense in the digital era.

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