

Strengthening digital literacy and political culture for Gen-Z through Pancasila education learning in higher education

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Abstract

This article reviews the importance of political culture and digital literacy for Generation Z as a prospective demographic group. It examines how Pancasila education contributes to the development of Gen-Z's political culture and literacy in higher education. Using a mixed-method research approach with a sequential transformative strategy model, the study transforms one type of data into another after collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data independently. Research findings indicate that trending topics, viral hashtags, FYP, news feeds, CC, and social media algorithms form the foundation of Gen-Z's digital political literacy and culture. This illustrates that, despite avoiding direct practice, Gen-Z exhibits a keen interest in digital politics. Consequently, Pancasila education provides Gen-Z members with opportunities to become competent political players and participants. The study also shows how Pancasila education incorporates digital-based political literacy and culture by emphasizing civic duties and integrating more "real" materials and ideals. The findings suggest that Pancasila education can enhance Gen-Z's digital political literacy and culture by making the curriculum more relevant to their daily lives and digital experiences. This approach not only strengthens digital literacy but also instils a deep understanding of ethical and responsible citizenship, aligning with the context of nationalism and Indonesian identity. The study concludes that integrating Pancasila values into digital political education is crucial for developing critical thinking skills and fostering civic awareness among Gen-Z, preparing them to navigate the complex digital landscape responsibly.

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Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have transformed how the younger population, particularly Gen-Z, engages with politics. According to Wijaya & Amalia (2024), over three-quarters of Gen-Z Indonesians (79%) access social media daily, considering it their primary information source, politics included. Information and opinion exchanges occur on



Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, essential for engagement (Jati, 2024; Solihat, 2024). However, engaging with digital political issues does not translate into participating in political activities. Casula & Wong (2025) study shows that merely 30% of Gen-Z actively participate in politics by voting or engaging in face-to-face political activities. This indicates a discrepancy between interest in the digital realm and offline political engagement.

To resolve this gap, this research applies the Civic Education Model as a framework of analysis on how Pancasila Education can strengthen Gen-Z consciousness, involvement, and participation in democratic life. The Civic Education Model, based on political socialisation and participatory democracy theories (Agus et al., 2025; Kiess, 2022; Ribeiro et al., 2017; van Ingen & van der Meer, 2016), pays particular attention to values, knowledge, skills, and participation in civic learning. It holds that youth will not act as responsible citizens unless civic education deliberately teaches the critique of public issues, fosters dialogue, and provides practice in the skills of democracy in and outside of the classroom (Haste, 2010; Wheeler-Bell, 2014). For this reason, Pancasila Education should not just be theoretical but somewhat empathetic and practical in terms of digital reality today.

At the same time, this study is also informed by the Digital Literacy Framework as stated by Keykha & Rezaie Kahkhajaleh (2024) and Tomczyk (2025) regarding information evaluation, digital ethics, communication, and participation. Tomczyk (2025) and Martínez-Bravo et al. (2022) note that digital literacy encompasses more than just accessing technology; it involves sophisticated actions such as analysing, verifying, creating, and responsibly participating in digital arenas. This framework is fundamental for fostering critical awareness for Gen-Z, who are introduced to politically relevant issues through trending topics and viral hashtags. Thus, an interdisciplinary approach incorporating civic education into digital literacy pedagogy is needed to enhance digital political literacy, especially at the tertiary level (Tiara et al., 2025).

The preliminary evidence suggests that Pancasila Education still has a long way to go. Wijaya & Amalia (2024) report indicates that only 40% of students perceive Pancasila Education as relevant to their lives, particularly in contemporary politics and digital culture. Most of the material is still quite theoretical. It does not integrate contemporary social media or news algorithms that are part of Gen-Z's everyday life, or the dynamics of viral phenomena. These factors reduce the relevance of the Pancasila Education material and even diminish its ability to cultivate the political competencies students require to become active, responsible citizens.

Enhancing the digital literacy and political culture of higher-education Gen-Z students poses a challenge regarding their skill sets in filtering out information, identifying hoaxes, and participating ethically and responsibly in the digital realm. Generation Z tends to consume information through trending topics, viral hashtags, and social media-driven autocomplete algorithms, which focus on popular content, rather than factual content. According to Nazlım & Özgen (2025), around 64% of Gen-Z use social media as their primary source of news, which significantly increases their likelihood of consuming misinformation. Their inability to critically evaluate pieces of information has the potential to foster a superficial understanding of political issues and subsequently erode their political literacy skills, which are essential for nurturing an ethical and civic-minded political culture (Kranich, 2024). Programs that foster digital literacy at the tertiary education level are imperative for guiding Gen-Z towards developing strong analytical skills and a well-defined ethical framework.

The principal objective of this research is to assess the function of Pancasila Education in promoting the digital literacy and political awareness of Gen-Z. This research adopts a convergent approach based on the Mixed Method Strategy. This design utilises quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse how Pancasila Education influences the growth of digital political culture among Gen-Z. This integrative strategy applies an interdisciplinary lens that combines the study of digital literacy with political culture and promotes nurturing active citizenship through Pancasila education. This study integrates digital political literacy with civic duty grounded in media literacy through the lens of Pancasila values. Such orientation deepens

the understanding of active citizenship concerning the scale of Indonesian nationalism and identity. These findings affirm the Pancasila's fundamental principles. Similarly, Bukhari et al. (2024) underscore the need to strengthen instruction on citizenship and digital literacy due to their role in fostering constructive scepticism, political engagement, and civic participation.

The current research aims to contextualise Pancasila Education pedagogy in Pancasila, which familiarises Gen-Z with current viral phenomena like hashtags and algorithms. Engage constructively with digital politics as moral citizens and assume a participatory posture to transform the world responsibly. Recreationally cultivate ethical positions from or about socio-political realities. Nurdin et al. (2025) claim that more than 80% of Indonesian Gen-Z possess social media accounts, and many use social media as the primary source of politically related content, often encountering unreliable but popularised information. This educational approach fosters critical information curation skills. Embrace modern concepts of citizenship and literacy as complex social-emotional undercurrents. To effectively shape civic participation and foster literacy concepts, education frameworks need to embrace contemporary developments (Borhan, 2025; Tiara et al., 2024).

Method

Beginning with the subject of mixed-method research, this study incorporates the Sequential Transformative Strategy model. This orchestrated model merges qualitative and quantitative approaches to understand the role of Pancasila education in elevating the digital literacy and political participation among Gen Z. The first phase of the research is capturing and defining the problems regarding the digital literacy and the political culture of Gen Z concerning education in Pancasila. Subsequently, we conducted a research design, which included capturing quantitative data through surveys on students' digital political literacy levels and their understanding of Pancasila values; during these surveys, students were asked about their political literacy and mastery of the Pancasila values. In addition to and to deepen the survey responses, we conducted qualitative in-depth interviews. This method is in accordance with the suggestions of Creswell (2017), Costa (2024) and other recent studies on digital literacy assessment (Wallwey & Kajfez, 2023).

This study applied a survey made up of 20 closed-ended questions divided into three major areas: (1) digital political knowledge, (2) information filtering ability, and (3) participation in online discussions. Every question was marked on a 5-point Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." As with most survey instruments, the questions were based on validated instruments of digital literacy, such as those by the National Association for Media Literacy Education, but were contextualised through a pilot study involving 20 local students (Nogueira et al., 2022).

The qualitative aspect of the study was conducted using semi-structured interviews which were guided by a set of questions revolving around three core areas: (1) students' lived experiences and problems with obtaining political information from the internet, (2) students' reflections on Pancasila Education and its relevance in a digital world, and (3) recommendations on how civic learning can be enhanced through the use of digital technologies. A triangulation approach was adapted to achieve validity and relied on data collected from students, lecturers, and practitioners. At the same time, member checking was used to validate that the interview interpretation was accurately presented to the interviewees.

A sample of 100 students was drawn from various majors through purposive sampling to capture different levels of digital engagement experience. This figure is justified in Creswell (2017), considering that mixed-method studies, including qualitative data, need only scant representation for preliminary analysis in exploratory research. For the qualitative part, 10 lecturers of Pancasila Education were included based on teaching experience—at least three years teaching the subject—while five educators known for their active participation in developing the curriculum, or in broader initiatives on digital civic education, were selected to provide valuable perspectives on integrating digital political literacy into higher education practices.

The study's informants consist of 100 respondents who take Pancasila Education, a compulsory subject for students of varying faculties, with 10 lecturers teaching the subject and five educators specialising in curriculum design for political education. One of the quantitative data collection methods involves distributing closed-ended questions online using survey-based platforms like Google Forms. Furthermore, we conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers and students to extract their perspectives and experiences regarding learning Pancasila and cultivating political literacy in a digital format. Fetterman (2023) was cited in the executive report for using interviews to illustrate different perspectives around social issues in research, having framed this particular approach. Because formal education dominates political socialisation, we will use other sources accompanying tertiary institutions' curriculum documents, syllabi, and instructional materials (Bertulesi, 2024).

Results and Discussion

Fostering digital literacy and the political awareness of Gen Z learners in the current age of information is crucial and very challenging at the same time. This research highlights the use of Pancasila Education in higher learning institutions as one of the strategic approaches to cultivating digitally-conscientized political literacy and ethical digital citizenship. This work examines the perceptions of students, lecturers, and education professionals on political literacy vis-à-vis digital culture. It analyses the impacts of teaching Pancasila values from a mixed methods perspective.

As the data from the research shows, Gen-Z reported emerging difficulties with parsing political content uploaded on social media because the algorithms and trends often alter the narrative. Integrating digital issues into Pancasila Education pedagogy seeks to address the gaps in citizenship education by empowering students to engage and take responsibility in the digital public sphere. The overall findings of this study underscore the need for curriculum renewal and teaching methodology in higher education to capture the shift towards more active, modern, engaged, and contextual pedagogical practices that promote participation in the educational processes.

The Level of Digital Political Literacy Among Gen-Z Students

Table 1 summarises the results concerning the degree of digital political literacy of Gen-Z students. Table 1 contains data on the degree of digital political literacy of Gen-Z students concerning three main criteria: knowledge of political issues, filtering skills, and participation in online discussions. Such results depict the percentage distribution of respondents who classify themselves into five literacy levels: very low, low, moderate, high, and very high. This information gives a broad impression of the student's understanding of emerging political issues, how they filter information from multiple sources, and their activity level in political discussions on digital platforms. This comprehension is crucial with Gen-Z's information overload in today's digital society. As we analyse this table, our primary focus is on the enhancement of the Pancasila Education curriculum along with pedagogical approaches that foster political literacy among students.

Table 1.

Digital Political Literacy Levels of Gen-Z Students

No	Criteria	Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High	Total (%)
1	Knowledge of political issues	5%	15%	40%	30%	10%	100%
2	Ability to filter information	8%	12%	35%	25%	20%	100%
3	Participation in online discussions	10%	20%	30%	25%	15%	100%

Sources: Research Data, 2024.

The table illustrates that while 40% and 35% of students fall into the moderate range of comprehending political issues and the ability to filter information, respectively, only 10% of

students possess an advanced understanding of political issues. Furthermore, students’ participation in online discussions is low, with 30% classified as moderate participants. This indicates that even though Gen-Z seem quite active on social media, their ability to engage in “digital politics” is still lacking (Jati, 2024; Venus et al., 2025).

Based on the information, only 20% of students fall into the very high category concerning information filtering ability, while 35% are in the moderate category and 12% in the low category. In comparison, 8% of students demonstrate very low information filtering skills. Through the decades of soft-information radio waves flooding the world’s daily life, the ability to filter through the information is essential. The significant number of students in the moderate category indicates some relevant information can be identified, but there is room to grow. If these skills are developed, Gen-Z students will be more adept at discerning credible information and distinguishing the boundless misinformation and disinformation that saturates social media.

Research indicates that 15% of learners exhibit very high levels of engagement in online discussions, while 30% are moderately engaged. In contrast, 10% and 20% of students fall into low and low categories, respectively. Engagement in online discussions indicates students’ interest in political and social activities. The large student body falling into the moderate category suggests that even though those students partake in discussions, they are not fully active participants. This lack of activity could stem from a lack of self-assuredness in voicing their opinions, inadequate knowledge, or a fear of being ridiculed by other social media users. Hence, these findings underscore the need to foster an environment where students feel secure and self-assured enough to discuss political topics.

Understanding Digital Political Literacy of Gen-Z Students

The insights provided by students, lecturers, and education practitioners through interviews have been integrated into a qualitative framework that analyses the difficulties and possibilities of enhancing digital political literacy among Gen-Z students via Pancasila education. During this interview, the informants provided insights into the awareness of political issues, critical information evaluation skills, and active participation in online political dialogues. In their statements, students noted their realisation about the less discussed topic of distinguishing valid information from invalid, as well as the need to talk more about current issues. Their preliminary interviews revealed broad gaps between the students’ knowledge and the expected discussion level, so more engaging methodologies need to be employed. From the education practitioners and lecturers’ sides, deeper interactivity and relevance of lessons taught to students added to their pedagogical suggestions to foster students’ readiness and enthusiasm for engaging in the learning activities. Remarkably, this qualitative evidence captures not only the conditions concerning the issues at hand but also suggests strategic considerations concerning formulating an adaptive curriculum framework for Pancasila education that addresses the needs of digital political literacy in contemporary society.

Table 2.

Understanding of Digital Political Literacy Among Gen-Z Students

Dimension	Main Findings from the Interview
Understanding Political Issues	A significant number of students comprehend that the information available on social media is often misleading and is based on clickbait. They want more debates on contemporary problems in Pancasila education so that students have a better grasp of political issues. To construct a solid comprehension of critical issues, teaching professionals along with lecturers highlight the necessity of guiding learners to credible sources of political information.
Ability to Filter Information	Students often encounter difficulties determining the credibility of materials available to them on social media. They often accept information at face value without confirming its credibility. Educators and professionals put forward the importance of critical digital

	literacy within the framework of political education and underline that this need to be incorporated in Pancasila Education.
Participation in Online Discussions	Even though students show interest in taking part in online discussions related to politics, they tend to be less confident in voicing their opinions as they lack adequate information. Instructors have highlighted the need to teach students about communications and ethics as areas which make students comfortable and responsible in actively engaging in civic spaces in the digital environment.

Sources: Research Data, 2024.

The reasoning behind the curriculum reconstruction suggests that Gen-Z students seem to follow politics, but only at a superficial level gleaned from social media. Many learners expressed needing more teaching that directly connects Pancasila Education to contemporary Indonesia (Ediyono et al., 2025; Jayanti et al., 2025). They constantly receive information which tends to be more viral rather than factual. This is also supported by teachers and other education stakeholders who highlight the importance of providing pupils with reliable sources of information to help them grasp important political issues. Unfortunately, students' ability to navigate through the overflowing digital information is limited. This poses the challenge that most content is taken at face value, indicating low basic literacy skills. In this context, voids claim that governmental and civic education should increasingly focus on fostering political literacy for all levels of education (Bennett, 2013; Strandbrink, 2017). Such a skill set is necessary to differentiate between reality and fabrication, enabling learners to respond more intelligently to political matters.

Digital political literacy and culture based on Civic Duties

The gaps concerning the digital literacy levels and political culture of Gen-Z students are defined by four dimensions: comprehension of civic responsibilities within governance, public concern via social media, active engagement in campaigning as a civic duty, and understanding of responsibilities in the digital realm. The results show the variation in students' understanding of the concepts of 'digital politics' and 'e politics', with most students falling into the 'Moderate' category across all indicators—the gaps under "high" and "very high" concern active participation in civic duty-based campaigns. Clearly, with better teaching strategies in the Pancasila Education, students can learn the deeper concepts of the discipline while simultaneously cultivating skills of various political culture ethics throughout different levels of political education, as illustrated in the graph.

Understanding Civic Duties in Politics reveals that the most significant percentage of students, at 35% are at the "Moderate" level. The two areas of "High" and "Very High" are 25% and 15% respectively, meaning that the students have a pretty good understanding of civic duties in digital politics. The proportions of "Very Low" 10% and "Low" 15% still show some students fail to grasp this civic duty, so there is a gap in understanding. This evidence reflects the need to increase the teaching of civic duties within the political education framework. Students seem to be sitting at a "moderate" 30% and "high" 28% regarding participation in social problems presented through social media. 18% remaining in the "Low" and 12% "Very Low" suggest a worrying lack of concern for public issues on social media. These materials will help address the social responsibility gap and create informed citizens.

Regarding the level of participation in campaigns that depict the exercise of civic responsibilities, most students fall within the "moderate" category (30%). The participation "high" and "very high" levels are relatively low, at 15% and 10%, respectively. On the other hand, "Very Low" and "Low" categories have higher percentages (20% and 25%). The levels of reported participation show that more innovative approaches are needed to encourage students to actively engage in campaigns or social activities that showcase Civic Duties values. About digital media responsibility, most students fall in the categories of "moderate" (37%) and "high" (25%), indicating a diverse range of positive perceptions. However, the "very high" level only reaches 10%, whereas the "low" and "very low" levels are at 20% and 8%,

respectively. The findings depict that although the level of awareness of digital responsibility is commendable, there is a greater opportunity to enhance understanding so that more learners appreciate the significance of ethics and responsibility in the digital context.

This research is anchored on the need to enhance the digital political literacy and culture among Gen-Z using an educational approach grounded in Pancasila values. As described by (Salman Salleh @ Abdul Latif et al., 2023), political literacy refers to a person's capability to obtain, analyse and appraise political information. Such capability is important in the context of the ever-changing democracy existing today. Findings from the research indicate that Gen-Z students, at best, have a moderate grasp of digital political literacy and require additional motivation regarding active participation and awareness of civic duty. This is comparable to what Guess & Munger (2023) conclusively argue that a favourable understanding of digital political literacy will likely increase youth political participation. Herein lies the problem this study seeks to address, considering the myriad of politically biased information Gen-Zs encounter in the digital age. Other scholars also tackled the obstacles and the solutions to enhance the digital skills of Gen-Z with a specific focus on integrating digital literacy in educational programs, which are relevant to this study (Jia & Huang, 2023).

A study by Buckingham (2019) notes how younger generations receive information from social media, but cannot identify credible sources. This research found that Gen-Z students' lack of information filtering abilities and lack of awareness of civic responsibility place them into the moderate to low skill categorisation. According to Memon et al. (2018) research, a lack of information evaluation skills directly correlates with low levels of political engagement for the younger age groups. These findings illustrate the need for more focused attention on digital political education that accounts for knowledge, critical thinking, and analysis skills. This research develops new teaching strategies by introducing Pancasila values to the digital political literacy curriculum. It seeks to cultivate responsible citizenship while aligned with Dewey's concept that education advances reasoning and participation in societal activities (Lee, 2021).

This argument is further validated by previous studies suggesting that educational frameworks grounded on the Pancasila values system can help develop digital skills alongside civic engagement as a form of students' self-awareness. Moreover, another study by Bowyer & Kahne (2020) proposed that citizenship education fosters students' understanding of their societal roles and responsibilities. They advocate for an approach that adds social issue projects into the curriculum, improving theoretical knowledge and enhancing student engagement in actual civic activities in practice. These findings align with research from Shek et al. (2020), which highlights the relationship between active participation in social projects as a contributing factor to civic consciousness and social responsibility in the younger generation. In this case, the problem includes the development of innovative educational restructures like reinforcing Pancasila Education, which will allow interactive and project-based learning. Students could use this through discussion, policy simulations, or digital campaigns for civic responsibilities to gain civic skills and enhance community life participation.

This is consistent with the findings of Stellmann & Song (2024), who claim that digital ethics teaching aids in comprehending responsible actions in the digital space. Moreover, the study conducted by Shahi & Chaudhary (2025) demonstrated that comprehension of digital ethics may aid in cultivating a technology-friendly disposition. Within the framework of Pancasila education, providing Pancasila principles as the roots of ethics in the digital sphere may assist learners in appreciating responsible conduct and the observance of integrity as fundamental principles in online engagements. The application of citizenship values in digital education, according to Sarid & Goldman (2021), advances the character development of the younger generation. In support of this, Hasanah & Nurha (2025) underscore the need for media education and digital literacy to enable learners to actively engage in information analysis and participation in the digital realm.

Additionally, Paltiel et al. (2023) conducted a study that found embedding digital ethics into higher education curricula encourages students to participate more actively in

deliberations on their obligations concerning social issues within the context of the digital world. These studies suggest that fostering digital political literacy involves designing a curriculum that integrates the cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains. This supports findings by Lin (2015), which report that a comprehensive approach to citizenship education improves students' grasp of civic responsibilities.

Integrating Pancasila values into digital learning facilitates students' civic responsibility (Virgiawan & Sundawa, 2022), propels ethical engagement in political processes, and enables learners to adapt to an ever-evolving social media environment. Farias & Balardini (2019) emphasise that considering the social environment as a context within which students operate enhances their grasp of the ethical implications of their actions and real-life decisions. Also, Gadsden et al. (2019) illustrate how learning geared towards inactive participation and critical thinking adds value to political activities among young people. In this context, research by Kaplan & Nowlan (2024) stresses that education anchored on inclusiveness and social values fosters responsibility and active citizenship. Therefore, this strategy is intended to enhance the learning experience and empower students to assume responsible citizenship in the digital world.

Conclusion

Enhancing the digital political literacy of Gen-Z students has become a dire requirement in mitigating the challenges of the contemporary information age. Studies have shown that even though students possess a fundamental concept of digital political literacy, they do not have the skill to sift through information and engage actively in civic responsibilities. Additionally, the findings suggest that political literacy and culture based on the internet, complete with values and more pragmatic, even "realistic" materials depicting civic duty, should be regarded as significant constituents in Pancasila education pedagogy. The incorporation of Pancasila values into political education in a digital format can enhance civic literacy and aid in the development of the complex critical thinking required in the digital environment. Such an integration widens the scope of civic education beyond the traditional approaches, preparing 21st-century learners to fulfil their obligations within society in an ethically responsible way. The research paints a picture where educational institutions turn to an interactive approach using projects to refine responsibility and logical participation in politics, fostering positive political participation. Thus, all educators and members of society should work together towards the definitional understanding of digital political literacy to enhance proactivity towards being change agents in the digital world.

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