

## **DIGITAL LITERACY: UNDERSTANDING NORMS AND ETHICS IN THE ONLINE REALM**

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### **Abstract**

This research discusses the importance of digital literacy in understanding and applying norms and ethics online. With the increasing use of digital technology, the ability to access, evaluate and use information effectively has become crucial. Digital literacy involves not only technical skills but also ethical understanding and the ability to interact sensibly in digital spaces. This study highlights the role of digital literacy education and training as a tool to empower individuals to face the challenges of misinformation and unethical behaviour. Through this approach, collective efforts are expected to create a safer and more productive online environment, in line with social norms and global policy values. This research recommends collaboration between governments, educational institutions and non-profit organisations to strengthen people's digital literacy competencies."

**Keywords:** Digital Literacy, Understanding Norms, Ethics in the Online Realm.

### **Introduction**

In this fast-paced digital era, digital literacy is a very important competency for every individual to have. Digital literacy is not only about the technical ability to use digital devices, but also includes an understanding of online norms and ethics. Digital literacy is an individual's ability to understand, use and evaluate information through various technology platforms and digital content (Warschauer, 2011) . It includes the technical ability to use digital devices such as computers, smartphones, and tablets, as well as more in-depth skills such as critical thinking, understanding digital context, and information governance. Digital literacy also includes an understanding of online safety, privacy and social responsibility in digital spaces. Overall, digital literacy enables individuals to participate fully in digital society and utilise information technology effectively and ethically (Belshaw, 2011) .

The importance of digital literacy cannot be overstated in this increasingly connected era. With digital literacy, individuals can better navigate the challenges of the online environment, including identifying accurate information from fake news, avoiding digital scams and protecting themselves from various cybersecurity threats. Digital literacy also plays a vital role in supporting education, careers and social inclusion. For example, in the modern world of work, digital skills are a prerequisite for

almost every job (Jenkins, 2006) . In addition, digital literacy supports active participation in social and political life, enabling individuals to engage in public discussions and advocacy online. As such, digital literacy is not just a technical competence, but also part of the life skills essential for the success and well-being of individuals in the modern world (Buckingham, 2007) .

Internet access has a significant impact on improving digital literacy, as it is the main gateway for individuals to acquire the digital skills required in the modern era. With adequate access, a wide range of digital educational resources and materials are within easy reach, allowing people to learn and practice new skills independently through online platforms, tutorials and online courses. In addition, internet access enriches opportunities to collaborate and share information globally, supporting collaborative learning and the development of digital skills needed in everyday life and the world of work (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008) . However, without adequate internet access, efforts to improve digital literacy are hampered, creating knowledge and skills gaps that can limit individuals' ability to actively participate in the digital economy and society. Ensuring affordable and quality internet access is therefore key in efforts to strengthen digital literacy across society (Mahmoudi et al., 2014) .

One of the main problems that arise is the low awareness of digital ethics. Many internet users, especially teenagers and young people, do not fully understand, or even ignore, the importance of behaving ethically in communicating and interacting online. Phenomena such as cyberbullying, the spread of fake news (hoaxes), and privacy violations are becoming increasingly troubling issues. [Previous research] shows that around 40% of internet users have experienced or witnessed forms of unethical or aggressive behaviour online (Hargittai ., 2010)

This ignorance or disregard for digital norms and ethics can have significant negative impacts. In addition to harming individual victims, unethical behaviour online can also undermine social order and public trust in digital platforms. Not only that, violations of digital ethics can also have legal implications, given that many countries have regulations governing online behaviour (Livingstone & Haddon, 2012) .

Therefore, digital literacy, which includes an understanding of online norms and ethics, needs to be improved. Digital literacy education should be enriched with materials that emphasise the importance of ethical and responsible behaviour when interacting in the digital world. Thus, it is hoped that people can be wiser in using technology, and can create a healthy, safe and productive digital environment.

## **Research Methods**

The study in this research uses the literature method. The literature research method, or literature review, is an approach that involves collecting, analysing and interpreting data from various written sources relevant to the research topic. The process begins by identifying and accessing various references, such as books, journal

articles, research reports, and credible electronic sources. The researcher then reviews and filters the information to find schemes, themes, or patterns that can help answer the research questions or hypotheses that have been set (Okoli, 2015) ; (Randolph, 2009) . In-depth analysis of existing literature allows researchers to understand the theoretical context, methodologies that have been used in previous studies, as well as discover existing knowledge gaps. Through this method, research can build on existing knowledge foundations, avoid duplication, and encourage relevant and innovative new contributions within a particular field of study (Grant & Booth, 2009) .

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Public Understanding of Online Norms and Ethics**

Online norms and ethics refer to a set of rules and moral principles that govern how individuals should behave online. Norms include unwritten social expectations about behaviours that are considered acceptable or not, while ethics are guiding principles that help determine right or wrong in the context of digital activities. Given the rapid adoption of technology and the internet, people's understanding of online norms and ethics has become increasingly critical (Sefton-Green, 2003) .

A good understanding of online norms and ethics is essential to creating a safe, friendly and productive digital environment. When internet users understand and adhere to online norms and etiquette, it can prevent various negative behaviours such as cyberbullying, identity theft and spreading false information. Online etiquette also includes respecting the privacy of others, protecting oneself and others from digital fraud, and contributing positively to online discussions and collaboration (Hobbs, 2015) .

People's level of understanding of online norms and etiquette varies depending on factors such as age, education level, access to information, and experience in using the internet. Younger generations who have grown up with the internet tend to be more exposed to online norms and etiquette through formal and informal education. Meanwhile, older generations may face challenges in adopting new norms that did not exist in the pre-digital era (Jenkins, 2006) .

Education and awareness-raising are key in building a deep understanding of online norms and ethics. Schools, higher education institutions and non-governmental organisations can play an important role by integrating materials on digital ethics in their curriculum. Public awareness campaigns can also help spread knowledge about the importance of ethical behaviour online and how to avoid and overcome various digital threats (Tapscott, 2009) .

Social media platforms have a huge responsibility in upholding online norms and ethics. They can create and enforce policies that encourage positive behaviour and punish criminal and unethical behaviour. Reporting tools, content moderation, and user education through community guidelines are some of the many ways in which these

platforms can contribute to shaping ethical behaviour online (Livingstone & Haddon, 2012).

One of the main challenges is the rapid development of technology that often has not been matched by sufficient understanding of its ethical implications. Adapting to new technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality requires constant updates on digital norms and ethics. Solutions to this challenge include collaboration between the government, private sector and civil society to establish clear regulations and guidelines on responsible digital behaviour. A holistic approach that includes continuous education, adaptive policies, and active participation from all stakeholders is key to ensuring that people can navigate the digital world ethically and responsibly (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2002).

In addition to education and awareness, law enforcement and regulatory arrangements also play an important role in upholding online norms and ethics. Laws governing online behaviour must be effectively implemented to protect users and ensure that violations of digital ethics do not go unpunished. Governments need to promptly respond to digital threats with relevant regulations and ensure their enforcement through co-operation with online platforms as well as law enforcement agencies (Ito et al., 2009).

However, there are significant challenges in enforcing laws in cyberspace due to the borderless nature of the internet. For example, cybercrime often involves perpetrators from different countries, requiring strong international coordination to tackle it. The legal system must also keep up with the rapid and ever-changing technological developments. Therefore, collaborative efforts between countries and international institutions are essential to create a global legal regime that is effective in enforcing online norms and ethics (Brown, 2021).

Each individual also has a responsibility to uphold and promote online norms and ethics. Internet users should strive to continuously improve their digital literacy, understand the risks and threats, and play an active role in creating a positive digital environment. Sharing truthful information, respecting the privacy of others, and avoiding harmful behaviour are some of the simple steps that every internet user can take (Sefton-Green, 2003).

Overall, public understanding of online norms and ethics is an important foundation for a healthy and safe digital ecosystem. Education, awareness-raising, social media platform policies, and effective law enforcement are key elements in achieving this goal. Despite the challenges, collaboration between governments, digital platforms, educational institutions and individual citizens can create a more ethical and responsible online environment. With a deep understanding of the importance of norms and ethics online, we can collectively shape a better and safer digital future for everyone.

## **The Impact of Lack of Digital Literacy on Online Norms and Ethics**

Digital literacy involves the ability to find, evaluate and use digital information effectively and ethically. Without this ability, internet users have a high potential to absorb misinformation, spread hoaxes (fake news) and engage in unethical behaviour. For example, the inability to identify reliable sources of information can result in the dissemination of inaccurate information, which in turn can damage the reputation of individuals or institutions and create information chaos in society (Rheingold, 2012) .

In addition, a lack of digital literacy can cause users to behave unethically or even break the law without realising it. Users who do not understand privacy rules or digital communication ethics may share other people's personal information without permission or engage in cyberbullying. For example, someone who does not understand the adverse effects of spreading rumours or gossip on social media may cause emotional and social harm to the victim. The inability to participate ethically in digital spaces can exacerbate social tensions and reduce mutual trust in online communities (Ribble & Bailey, 2007) .

Lack of digital literacy also potentially increases the risk of cybercrime. Users who are unaware of basic security practices such as using strong passwords, two-step verification, or avoiding phishing links are more likely to fall victim to hackers or identity theft. This not only harms the individual but can also threaten wider data and information security. For example, an attack on an individual with access to sensitive data could pave the way for the theft of critical information from a company or organisation (Selwyn, 2004) .

In the workplace, a lack of digital literacy can affect productivity and professional reputation. Inability to understand the etiquette and norms of digital communication can lead to miscommunication or disputes among colleagues. Additionally, employees who lack adequate digital literacy may struggle to utilise technology tools and platforms that are increasingly common across industries today. This can negatively impact job performance and opportunities for advancement in their careers (Warschauer, 2011) .

Awareness of the negative impact of lack of digital literacy has fuelled the need for comprehensive and sustainable digital education. Educational institutions, governments and non-profit organisations should work together to provide digital literacy training that covers not only technical skills, but also ethical and legal aspects of technology use. These educational programmes should cover a wide range of age groups and socio-economic backgrounds to ensure that all members of society have equal opportunities to acquire the necessary digital literacy (Green, 2008) .

Overall, improving digital literacy is an important step in creating a safe, ethical and productive digital environment. With a better understanding of the responsible use of technology, we can minimise the negative impact of a lack of digital literacy on online norms and etiquette. This will not only benefit individuals, but also strengthen social bonds as well as the overall health of society in this digital age.

## Conclusion

Digital literacy is key to understanding and complying with online norms and ethics. By having adequate digital literacy, individuals are not only able to access and use technology effectively, but can also participate ethically and responsibly in the digital world. This minimises the risk of misinformation, unethical behaviour and cybercrime that can damage reputations and social relationships.

Improving digital literacy in society is a shared responsibility between individuals, educational institutions, governments and other organisations. Through comprehensive education and training, we can shape a society that is more aware and wise in using technology. By doing so, we can create a safer, more harmonious and productive digital environment for everyone.

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