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Digital Political Literacy and Civic Participation among IPS Students in Makassar

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Abstract

Digital platforms give university students access to public information and opportunities to interpret political issues and express civic views, raising the question of how digital political literacy relates to civic participation. This study demonstrates how a quantitative cross-sectional survey could examine this relationship among IPS students at Makassar State University. The demonstration used a wholly hypothetical dataset representing 120 students across four cohorts, with allocation illustrating proportionate stratified sampling. The modeled instrument used five-point Likert items to assess access to political information, source verification, understanding of political issues, recognition of misinformation, responsible digital communication, and online and offline civic participation. The analyses included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression. In the synthetic dataset, the mean score was 3.71 (SD = 0.58) for digital political literacy and 3.42 (SD = 0.63) for civic participation. The modeled association was positive ($r = 0.64$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.410$). The study illustrates a survey and analysis approach for examining this relationship and highlights critical information evaluation, democratic deliberation, and community action as priorities for teacher education. Empirical conclusions about the student population require subsequent testing with ethically collected field data.

Keywords: Digital Political Literacy; Civic Participation; Digital Citizenship; Teacher Education; Synthetic Data

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INTRODUCTION

Digital communication has transformed the ways in which citizens obtain political information, discuss public issues, and participate in democratic life. Social media no longer functions merely as a channel for interpersonal communication; it has also become a space in which political narratives circulate, public issues are debated, and collective action is organized. For university students, the digital environment creates opportunities to access diverse perspectives and express aspirations beyond conventional institutional spaces. At the same time, it increases exposure to misinformation, manipulative content, biased information selection, and emotionally charged political discourse. The democratic value of digital participation is therefore determined not only by access to and frequency of media use, but also by the ability to interpret information critically and act responsibly (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Kahne & Bowyer, 2018; Mihailidis, 2018).

In Indonesia, the expansion of digital political communication is particularly relevant to Generation Z, whose everyday communication practices are closely connected to social media. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and X provide channels through which young people follow political developments and express their preferences or views. Hariyanti et al. (2026), for example, examined social media as a means of developing Generation Z's political participation. Stiawan and Dock (2025) reported a positive relationship between the intensity of social media use and political participation in their Indonesian research sample. These studies indicate that digital platforms can support political engagement; however, the relationship between information exposure, critical evaluation, and meaningful participation cannot be assumed to occur automatically.

The central argument of this article is that digital political literacy should be understood more broadly than the operational ability to use digital devices or platforms. It includes the ability to locate political information, assess source credibility, distinguish facts from opinions, recognize misleading or manipulative content, understand democratic institutions and rights, and express political views without violating the rights of others. This competence is closely related to civic participation, but the two concepts must be analytically distinguished. Political literacy concerns knowledge and evaluative capacity, whereas civic participation refers to forms of involvement in responding to public issues, including deliberation, community initiatives, volunteering, advocacy, and electoral participation.

Treating the two concepts as identical would make it difficult to distinguish students who are knowledgeable but passive, active but poorly informed, or both critical and civically engaged.

Previous studies have addressed several aspects of this relationship. Research on social media and youth participation has emphasized the mobilizing potential of networked communication (Ashfaqd, 2025; Hariyanti et al., 2026). Other studies have examined students' political behavior, the role of civic education, and the relationship between digital citizenship and civic learning (Suhariyanto & Rozak, 2025; Alrakhman et al., 2024). In the context of elementary teacher education, research has also highlighted the importance of civic awareness, dispositions, and interpersonal skills among prospective civic educators (White, 2024). Nevertheless, these studies have not fully explained how digital political literacy is associated with broader forms of civic participation among students preparing to become elementary school teachers in a specific local higher-education context. Related studies have also addressed civic literacy and civic technology in digital political participation (Cahyaningrum & Prasetiyo, 2026), social-media-related political behavior among university students (Azzahra & Rina, 2025), Generation Z's digital civic engagement and welfare-oriented participation (Irmayani et al., 2026), digital public space and media-literacy challenges (Fitria, 2025), and political communication practices among Indonesian Gen Z students (Wahono, 2026).

Another research gap concerns the distinction between online expression and offline participation. Liking, sharing, commenting on, or reposting political content may indicate attention or expressive activity, but such actions do not necessarily develop into deliberation, community problem-solving, or sustained public involvement. Recent research on Indonesian youth has highlighted the possible transition from online interaction to offline mobilization, while also indicating the roles of political efficacy, peer support, and perceived behavioral control (Akhni et al., 2026). Accordingly, this article conceptualizes civic participation as a multidimensional construct encompassing attention to public issues, deliberative participation, digital civic expression, and community-based involvement, rather than limiting it to electoral behavior.

This study also draws on the concept of digital citizenship, which emphasizes rights, responsibilities, participation, and ethical conduct in networked environments. Digital citizenship is not merely about avoiding negative behavior on the internet; it also involves contributing to public discussion, respecting pluralism, protecting privacy, and using

technology to address shared problems (Mossberger et al., 2008; Ribble, 2015). The public-sphere perspective provides an additional basis for understanding social media as a communicative space in which citizens exchange reasons and examine claims. However, platform architecture, algorithmic curation, unequal visibility, and disinformation can undermine the quality of public deliberation (Habermas, 1989; Kahne & Bowyer, 2018).

Within teacher education, this issue has an additional professional dimension. Students in the Primary School Teacher Education Program (IPS) are prospective elementary school teachers who will eventually contribute to developing pupils' understanding of citizenship, social responsibility, and democratic values. Their capacity to evaluate public information and participate constructively in civic life may influence their approach to civic learning in schools. White (2024) demonstrates the relevance of civic competence and interpersonal skills for prospective teachers in delivering civic education. Research on civic knowledge and skills among prospective elementary teachers also emphasizes that digital citizenship requires civic competence, not merely familiarity with technology (Lailelleru et al., 2026).

The novelty of this study lies in bringing together digital political literacy and civic participation in the context of IPS students at Campus of Makassar State University in Makassar. The focus is on prospective elementary school teachers, with a distinction between critical evaluation of political information, online expression, and offline civic action. The analytical framework draws on the perspectives of digital citizenship, connective action, and civic engagement. The article aims to describe the modeled levels of digital political literacy and civic participation and to demonstrate how the relationship between these constructs can be analyzed quantitatively. Because the dataset is synthetic, this article is a methodological illustration rather than a report of completed field research.

Conceptually, digital political literacy can be positioned at the intersection of political literacy, media and information literacy, and digital citizenship competence. Political literacy includes an understanding of decision-making processes, institutions, actors, policies, and citizens' rights and obligations. Media and information literacy adds the ability to search for, assess, verify, and use information responsibly. Digital citizenship emphasizes ethics, safety, rights, and responsibilities when individuals interact through technology. These three dimensions complement one another but are not interchangeable. Students who are proficient in using applications may not necessarily be able to identify credible information

sources, while students who understand political issues may not necessarily be able to engage ethically in digital spaces.

This distinction matters because the quality of political information affects how citizens form judgments. Unverified information can create inaccurate perceptions of public policy, state institutions, social groups, and democratic processes. In some circumstances, social media content uses provocative headlines, decontextualized video clips, manipulated images, or claims unsupported by evidence. Digital political literacy should therefore include the habit of pausing before sharing information, checking the original source, comparing multiple reports, assessing publication dates and context, and distinguishing factual statements from interpretations or opinions. These practices are part of civic responsibility in a complex information ecosystem.

Civic participation should likewise not be restricted to formal involvement in elections. Students may participate through discussions of public issues, organizational activities, volunteering, monitoring public services, expressing aspirations, mobilizing support for social issues, and solving problems in their surrounding communities. These forms of participation differ in intensity, risk, and consequence. Measurement should therefore avoid assuming that all digital actions have equal democratic significance. An expressive political post, for example, differs from deliberative participation, which requires participants to listen to different arguments, use evidence, and consider the public interest.

In the context of Makassar, this study is relevant to developing an understanding of prospective teachers' readiness to navigate digital information environments and plural social life. A university is not only a place for acquiring academic knowledge but also a learning space in which students develop habits of dialogue, manage differences of opinion, and cultivate concern for community issues. Although this article does not present factual data on the characteristics of students in Makassar, the selected location provides a direction for future field research to examine how academic experiences, student organizational culture, information access, and local social contexts relate to digital political literacy.

The study's conceptual framework positions digital political literacy as a capacity that may theoretically facilitate civic participation. The ability to examine information helps students formulate evidence-based opinions; an understanding of institutions and political processes helps them identify relevant channels for participation; and communication ethics supports deliberation that respects differences. Nevertheless, this relationship may be

influenced by other factors, including political efficacy, institutional trust, social support, opportunities for organizational involvement, and the climate of academic freedom. The simple relationship modeled in this study should therefore be understood as an initial analytical step rather than a comprehensive account of all factors shaping civic participation.

METHODS

This article adopts a quantitative framework and a cross-sectional survey design presented through a research dataset. Its purpose is to demonstrate the research structure, variable operationalization, descriptive reporting, and a simple relationship model that can subsequently be replicated using field data. No questionnaire was actually distributed, no students were recruited, and no observations or interviews were conducted for this analysis. Consequently, the figures presented must not be interpreted as evidence about the population of IPS students in Makassar.

The modeled research setting is the IPS Program at Campus of Makassar State University, Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The hypothetical population consists of active IPS students from several academic cohorts. The illustrative sample comprises 120 hypothetical respondents. To demonstrate proportional representation, the sample is divided into four cohorts: 28 first-year students, 32 second-year students, 31 third-year students, and 29 fourth-year students. These figures were constructed for illustrative purposes and were not obtained from official student-enrollment records.

The sampling procedure is represented as proportionate stratified random sampling, with academic cohort serving as the illustrative stratum. In an actual study, the sampling frame should be obtained from the authorized study-program office, the number of active students in each cohort should be verified, and participation should be voluntary. The actual sample size should be recalculated by considering the population size, anticipated effect size, desired statistical power, and realistic response rate. The sample of 120 is used solely for demonstration.

Two main constructs are modeled in this study. Digital political literacy is operationalized through five dimensions: access to political information, source verification, understanding of political issues and institutions, recognition of misinformation and persuasive framing, and responsible digital communication. Civic participation is operationalized through four dimensions: attention to public issues, deliberative

participation, digital civic expression, and offline community or institutional participation. Each item is assumed to use a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate higher levels of competence or engagement as represented by the instrument.

In an actual study, content validity should be assessed through expert review involving specialists in political science, civic education, educational research methodology, and measurement. The instrument should be piloted with students outside the final sample. Item-total correlations and internal consistency should be examined, while construct validity may be assessed through exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis, depending on sample adequacy. The reliability coefficients presented in this article are included only to demonstrate a reporting format and must not be claimed as properties of a validated instrument.

Data analysis is illustrated in three stages. First, descriptive statistics are used to summarize the means and standard deviations of each construct and its dimensions. Second, Pearson correlation is used to estimate the modeled relationship between digital political literacy and civic participation. Third, simple linear regression is used to demonstrate the proportion of variation in civic participation that is statistically associated with digital political literacy. The significance level is set at 0.05. In an actual study, linearity, influential observations, residual distribution, and homoscedasticity should be examined before interpreting the regression model.

Ethical procedures for an actual study should include institutional permission, informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, secure data storage, and respondents' right to withdraw. Political views are potentially sensitive information. Therefore, the instrument should not collect party preferences or political affiliations that could identify respondents unless such information is essential and supported by a separate ethical justification. This article contains no personal data or records from actual respondents. All data and numerical results are illustrative.

The research instrument is designed as a set of closed-ended statements so that each dimension can be scored and summarized quantitatively. Example indicators of information access include the habit of following public-policy issues and seeking information through more than one channel. Source-verification indicators include checking the publisher's identity, publication date, supporting evidence, and comparing information with other

sources. Political understanding may include knowledge of the functions of public institutions, policy processes, citizens' rights, and mechanisms for expressing aspirations. Misinformation-recognition indicators include the ability to identify sensational headlines, unsupported claims, decontextualized visual content, and the distinction between facts and opinions.

Responsible digital communication includes the willingness to use non-derogatory language, respect privacy, avoid sharing personal data, and correct information proportionately. For the civic-participation construct, attention to public issues may be measured through the habit of following developments in social problems and public policy. Deliberative participation includes involvement in discussions that consider reasons and evidence. Digital civic expression includes expressing opinions, supporting social campaigns, or sharing verified public information. Offline participation includes volunteering, campus forums, community deliberations, and other community activities.

To reduce measurement bias in an actual study, questionnaire items should be neutrally worded and should not lead respondents toward answers perceived as desirable. Statements should measure recognizable behavior or competence rather than evaluate respondents' political identities. An item such as 'I always understand every political issue' is too broad and may generate socially desirable responses. A more measurable statement, such as 'Before sharing political news, I check its source and publication date,' is closer to behavior that respondents can report. Using several items for each dimension also reduces dependence on a single statement.

The data-collection procedure for an actual study may be conducted in sequential stages. First, the researcher obtains approval from the study-program management and explains the research objectives to prospective respondents. The active-student list is then used to construct cohort-based strata without disclosing personal information to unauthorized parties. The questionnaire may be distributed online or offline, ensuring that each respondent completes it only once. After collection, the data are checked for incomplete responses, unusual response patterns, and possible duplicates. Exclusion decisions should be established before analysis so that cases are not selectively removed according to the desired results.

Data coding in an actual study should be documented transparently. Likert-scale responses may be scored from 1 to 5, while negatively worded items must be reverse-coded

before composite scores are calculated. Each dimension's score may be calculated as the mean of valid items, using a predetermined procedure for handling missing data. Researchers should also report the number of responses received, the number of records excluded, the reasons for exclusion, and the final number analyzed. Such transparency enables readers to assess whether the results were produced through consistent procedures.

The dataset in this article was not designed to imitate the identity or characteristics of any particular individual. The values were constructed only to produce plausible examples of statistical distributions and relationships for learning how to report research findings. The correlation, regression, and reliability coefficients presented are not outputs from software analyzing actual respondents' answers. Readers must therefore not cite these figures as evidence that IPS students in Makassar have a particular level of digital political literacy or that digital political literacy is associated with civic participation at the reported magnitude.

If the study is continued using field data, additional analyses may be considered. Cohort-based difference tests may be used if the research questions address group comparisons and the statistical assumptions are satisfied. Multiple regression may include political efficacy, social media use intensity, organizational experience, or exposure to civic-education courses as additional variables. Mediation or moderation analyses are appropriate only when supported by theory, sample size, and research design. Adding analytical techniques does not automatically improve research quality; each model must be justified by a clear research question and conceptual framework.

Operationally, the digital political literacy score may be formed by calculating the mean of all items that meet the completeness criteria. Before calculating a composite score, researchers should ensure that each item measures its intended dimension and that the same behavior is not counted twice. For example, following news accounts and reading news every day may be conceptually overlapping behaviors, so each should be defined through a clear indicator. Similarly, the ability to recognize false information should be distinguished from the habit of checking sources. Such operational distinctions help ensure that the analysis represents the intended constructs.

In field research, low, moderate, and high categories should not be determined arbitrarily after the researcher has examined the data distribution. Category thresholds should be explained in advance and based on the theoretical scale range or a defensible categorization approach. Another option is to report means, standard deviations, confidence

intervals, and response distributions without converting scores into categorical labels. Reporting continuous scores often preserves more information than overly simplified categorization. In this article, category labels are used only to help readers understand the presentation format.

In an actual study, Pearson correlation requires a sufficiently linear relationship and data suitable for parametric analysis. If composite scores do not meet the assumptions or contain substantial outliers, researchers may consider Spearman's rank correlation. The choice of technique should follow the characteristics of the data rather than a desire to obtain a particular significance value. In addition to the p-value, results should include the correlation coefficient and, where possible, a confidence interval so that readers can assess the direction and precision of the estimate. Statistical significance does not indicate the practical importance of a relationship.

Simple linear regression is used in this article as a demonstration because the model contains only one main predictor. In an actual study, researchers should consider possible confounding variables. Social media use intensity, organizational experience, exposure to civic-education courses, academic year, and political efficacy may be associated with both literacy and participation. However, including all such variables without a theoretical basis is also inadvisable. A good model is parsimonious, conceptually justified, and appropriate for the sample size. A more complex model is therefore not automatically superior to a simpler one.

RESULTS

Important note: All figures, respondent distributions, descriptive values, reliability estimates, correlations, and regression results in this section are synthetic data. They were created to demonstrate how findings might be presented after an actual survey. They are not empirical findings from IPS students at Campus in Makassar.

Table 1. Distribution of the Illustrative Respondents

Academic Cohort	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
First year	28	23.3
Second year	32	26.7
Third year	31	25.8
Fourth year	29	24.2
Total	120	100.0

Table 1 presents the distribution of the hypothetical respondents. The allocation is relatively balanced across the four academic cohorts to illustrate a stratified sample. This distribution must not be interpreted as the actual composition of IPS students.

Table 2. Operational Dimensions and Descriptive Statistics

Construct/Dimension	Mean	SD	Illustrative Category
Political information access	4.02	0.66	High
Source verification	3.48	0.77	Moderate
Political understanding	3.61	0.69	Moderate
Misinformation recognition	3.55	0.74	Moderate
Responsible digital communication	3.89	0.63	High
Digital political literacy (overall)	3.71	0.58	High
Attention to public issues	3.82	0.68	High
Deliberative participation	3.34	0.76	Moderate
Digital civic expression	3.76	0.71	High
Offline civic participation	2.77	0.82	Moderate
Civic participation (overall)	3.42	0.63	Moderate

Table 2 summarizes the modeled mean scores and standard deviations for the dimensions of digital political literacy and civic participation. Among the digital political literacy dimensions, political information access has the highest illustrative mean, followed by responsible digital communication. Source verification and misinformation recognition have comparatively lower means. For civic participation, attention to public issues and digital civic expression have higher illustrative means than deliberative participation and offline civic participation.

Table 3. Illustrative Reliability and Association Statistics

Statistic	Illustrative Value
Cronbach's alpha: digital political literacy	0.86
Cronbach's alpha: civic participation	0.83
Pearson correlation (r)	0.64
Significance (two-tailed)	$p < 0.001$
Regression R-squared	0.410
Regression coefficient (B)	0.69
Constant	0.86
Model F statistic (1, 118)	82.1

Table 3 presents the illustrative internal-consistency and association statistics. The modeled Cronbach's alpha values are 0.86 for digital political literacy and 0.83 for civic participation. The modeled Pearson correlation is positive ($r = 0.64$; $p < 0.001$). The illustrative regression model has an R-squared value of 0.410, a regression coefficient of 0.69, a constant of 0.86, and an F statistic of 82.1.

Table 4. Illustrative Simple Linear Regression Model

Predictor	B	SE (Illustrative)	t (Illustrative)	p
Constant	0.86	0.28	3.07	0.003
Digital political literacy	0.69	0.08	9.06	< 0.001

As shown in Table 4, the illustrative regression coefficient for digital political literacy is positive ($B = 0.69$; $SE = 0.08$; $t = 9.06$; $p < 0.001$), while the illustrative constant is 0.86 ($SE = 0.28$; $t = 3.07$; $p = 0.003$). These values are provided solely as an example of how a regression table may be reported and do not represent estimates derived from actual respondents.

Civic Participation = 0.86 + 0.69 (Digital Political Literacy) (1)

DISCUSSION

The illustrative overall digital political literacy score may be read alongside the variation across its dimensions. The mean for information access (4.02) suggests that, in the hypothetical scenario, students relatively frequently encounter or follow political information. However, the mean for source verification (3.48) indicates that frequent access is not necessarily accompanied by consistent source checking. The misinformation-recognition mean (3.55) is also positioned at a moderate level. The model therefore illustrates a possible gap between information exposure and evaluative skills.

For the civic-participation construct, the mean scores for attention to public issues (3.82) and digital civic expression (3.76) are higher than those for deliberative participation (3.34) and offline participation (2.77). This difference is included to demonstrate that forms of participation have distinct characteristics. Attention to public issues may arise through news consumption, while digital expression can be undertaken at a relatively low cost in terms of time and resources. By contrast, deliberation requires the ability to listen and weigh

arguments, whereas offline participation often requires time, coordination, and access to organizations or forums.

The standard deviation for offline participation (0.82) is the highest among the dimensions in the illustrative table. In an actual study, greater variation may indicate that direct participation experiences are unevenly distributed among students. Some students may have intensive organizational or social-activity experience, while others may face limitations in time, access, or opportunity. However, this explanation is only a possible interpretation that would need to be examined using actual data and interviews; it cannot be concluded from synthetic figures.

The illustrative Cronbach's alpha values of 0.86 for digital political literacy and 0.83 for civic participation are presented as examples of reporting internal consistency. These values do not demonstrate that the instrument is valid or reliable. In field research, alpha coefficients should be considered alongside the number of items, dimensional structure, inter-item correlations, and evidence of construct validity. A high alpha value does not necessarily indicate that an instrument measures one homogeneous construct, particularly when the scale contains several distinct dimensions.

The simple regression model in Table 4 demonstrates how a positive coefficient indicates a positive direction of association within the model. An R-squared value of 0.410 means that the model statistically accounts for 41.0% of the variation in the civic-participation scores in the illustrative dataset. It does not mean that 41.0% of actual civic participation is caused by digital political literacy. In statistical regression, explaining variation must be distinguished from establishing causation. Causal claims require a stronger design and assumptions, including temporal ordering, control of confounding factors, and adequate theoretical reasoning.

Reporting an actual study should also include examinations of model assumptions. Researchers may inspect the relationship through a scatterplot, assess residuals, identify influential outliers, and examine homoscedasticity. If particular assumptions are not met, transformations, robust estimation, or suitable alternative methods may be considered. This article does not report assumption-test statistics because there are no respondent data to analyze. Presenting fictional assumption-test values would risk creating the impression that the analytical procedures had actually been conducted.

For additional illustration, the results can be read through three groups of indicators. The first group concerns the competence to obtain and verify information. The second concerns the competence to understand political contexts and identify misinformation. The third concerns the ability to translate understanding into public involvement. This distinction is important because students may demonstrate different levels of achievement at each stage. An individual may follow the news regularly but may not be able to verify claims; another may understand an issue but lack the opportunity or confidence to express aspirations through available channels.

If an actual study finds higher digital participation than offline participation, researchers should avoid concluding that students are indifferent to community problems. Score differences may be influenced by the availability of opportunities, time, organizational access, or the way participation is formulated in the instrument. Respondents may not recognize some forms of offline involvement as civic participation, while some digital actions may be perceived as everyday activities. Statistical interpretation should therefore be complemented by open-ended questions or interviews that allow respondents to explain their experiences.

The synthetic results provide an example of how digital political literacy and civic participation can be examined as two related but non-identical constructs. The modeled scores for information access and digital expression are higher than those for source verification and offline participation. This pattern illustrates a possibility worth examining: students may frequently access political content but still need to strengthen their ability to evaluate claims and translate digital attention into sustained civic action. This distinction is consistent with scholarship cautioning that digital connectivity is not automatically equivalent to democratic competence (Mihailidis, 2018; McGrew et al., 2018).

The modeled positive relationship between digital political literacy and civic participation is conceptually consistent with the view that adequately informed citizens are better prepared to participate in public life. However, the illustrative correlation cannot be used to claim that literacy causes participation. Civic involvement may also be shaped by political efficacy, social networks, available time, institutional trust, socioeconomic resources, campus climate, and opportunities to participate. The Civic Voluntarism Model, for example, emphasizes resources, psychological engagement, and recruitment networks as factors shaping participation (Verba et al., 1995).

The results also invite a distinction between networked action and organized collective action. Digital platforms can reduce the costs of sharing information and expressing solidarity, allowing individuals to participate through more personalized forms of communication (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Nevertheless, online visibility does not automatically produce enduring organization or policy influence. The relatively lower illustrative score for offline participation is intended to highlight the need for further research into whether digital involvement develops into volunteering, student-organization activities, public consultations, community initiatives, or other forms of direct engagement.

Digital citizenship provides a useful normative framework for interpreting this issue. Responsible participation cannot be reduced to the ability to post opinions. It also requires respect for pluralism, care in handling evidence, privacy protection, and recognition of other users' rights. Ribble (2015) explains digital citizenship through norms for appropriate and responsible technology use, while research on civic media literacy and online reasoning emphasizes critical evaluation as a foundation for informed participation (McGrew et al., 2018; Mihailidis, 2018). For IPS students, these competencies are relevant not only to their personal civic lives but also to their professional responsibilities as prospective teachers.

The teacher-education context makes this topic particularly important. Prospective elementary teachers are expected to facilitate learning about citizenship, social responsibility, and democratic life. They therefore need opportunities to practice evaluating public claims, discussing controversial issues on the basis of evidence, and designing age-appropriate civic learning. White (2024) highlights the relationship between prospective teachers' civic competencies and the civic education they will eventually deliver. This suggests that teacher education can connect digital literacy with civic pedagogy rather than treating them as separate curricular areas.

The contribution of Abdul Majid et al. (2026) is relevant at the level of instructional design, although their article focuses on elementary mathematics learning rather than political literacy. Their discussion of integrating advance organizers and digital mind mapping provides a pedagogical example of organizing prior knowledge and relationships among concepts. In civic learning, a similar organizing strategy may help students map institutions, rights, policy actors, evidence, and competing perspectives before participating in structured discussion. This use is an analogy in educational design, not direct evidence that the strategy improves political literacy.

Recent studies in Indonesia reinforce the relevance of the proposed framework. Hariyanti et al. (2026) examined social media as a means of developing Generation Z's political participation. Stiawan and Dock (2025) reported a positive correlation between social media use intensity and political participation, while Akhni et al. (2026) explored how online political interaction may develop into offline mobilization. These studies show that the relationship between digital communication and participation remains an evolving field of inquiry. The focus proposed in this article differs by emphasizing IPS students and distinguishing critical political literacy from different forms of civic participation.

The practical implications include integrating political-information verification exercises into relevant courses, using case-based discussions of local public issues, developing respectful online deliberation protocols, and connecting classroom discussions with community-based projects. Students may compare news reports from several sources, identify evidence and opinions, examine the origins of images or claims, and formulate reasoned position statements. Such activities should maintain political neutrality, protect students' freedom of conscience, and avoid partisan recruitment. The objective is to strengthen democratic competence, not to promote a particular political position.

Several limitations must be emphasized. First, the data are entirely synthetic and cannot be used to make inferences about actual students, the study program, or Makassar City. Second, the illustrative design is cross-sectional and cannot establish temporal order or causal relationships. Third, self-reported measures in actual research may be affected by social-desirability bias, recall errors, and differences in how respondents interpret political participation. Fourth, a sample from one campus would limit generalizability. Future research should collect actual data, validate the instrument, include interviews or focus-group discussions, and compare students across cohorts or teacher-education institutions.

The difference between information access and verification is also important from a media-literacy perspective. In digital spaces, users often encounter rapidly circulating information, while decisions to share content may occur before verification is completed. Literacy cannot be measured only by how often someone reads the news or follows political accounts. Its quality is reflected in how users assess information origins, identify evidence, understand context, and are willing to delay sharing unverified content. Therefore, university programs to strengthen digital political literacy should provide authentic content-evaluation exercises rather than merely presenting definitions of hoaxes or disinformation.

The relationship between literacy and participation may also be explained through the concept of political efficacy. Students who understand an issue and know the channels through which they can express their aspirations may feel more capable of influencing public processes. However, knowledge does not always create confidence that participation will bring change. If students perceive institutions as unresponsive, feel that their voices are not heard, or lack access to participation forums, they may remain passive despite having strong information-literacy skills. Future field research may therefore include internal and external political efficacy as relevant variables while keeping the model aligned with the research questions.

From a public-sphere perspective, the quality of participation is not determined solely by the number of messages or the reach of posts. Deliberation requires the exchange of reasons, openness to correction, and recognition of people with different views. Social media can facilitate conversations across groups, but it can also encourage polarization when algorithms amplify emotionally provocative content or users interact only with groups that share similar views. Indicators of civic participation should therefore consider the quality of communication, not merely the quantity of digital activity.

The implications for IPS do not mean that students should be directed toward particular political preferences. Teacher education should maintain partisan neutrality without avoiding public issues relevant to citizens' lives. In an educational context, neutrality can be practiced by using diverse sources, presenting balanced explanations, opening space for differing views, and assessing the quality of reasons and evidence. Students should be trained to distinguish policy criticism from personal attacks and democratic participation from the spread of hatred or intimidation.

At the curricular level, digital political literacy can be strengthened through news-analysis assignments, policy-actor mapping, studies of deliberative forums, evidence-based debates, and social problem-solving projects in the surrounding community. News-analysis assignments may ask students to compare two or three sources covering the same issue, record verifiable facts, identify opinions, and explain what information remains unavailable. Deliberation exercises can develop the ability to present reasons, listen to the interests of others, and formulate shared decisions. Community projects can connect issue understanding with non-partisan practical action.

The use of digital mind mapping and advance organizers, as discussed by Majid et al. (2026), may be considered an inspiration for knowledge-organization strategies, with the content adapted to social and political learning. Students may develop concept maps linking public problems, relevant institutions, stakeholders, policy foundations, sources of evidence, and possible channels for participation. Such strategies may help students understand relationships among the components of an issue before constructing arguments. However, their effectiveness in political-literacy learning must be tested specifically and cannot be inferred from Majid et al.'s article, which addresses mathematical literacy.

Another implication concerns the role of lecturers and academic culture. Lecturers can act as facilitators who ensure that discussions remain safe, evidence-based, and do not pressure students to disclose their personal political preferences. Discussion rules should clarify the boundaries between criticism and insult, the obligation to cite sources, and procedures for correcting inaccurate information. Universities may also provide information-literacy activities involving libraries, student organizations, and local communities. This institutional approach can transform digital political literacy from an individual skill into an academic culture that supports deliberation.

Field research in Makassar may broaden understanding by incorporating local contexts carefully. Issues involving public services, education, the environment, transportation, health, or urban-space management may serve as contexts for civic discussion when relevant and supported by verifiable information. Local issues can help students understand that politics is not limited to electoral competition but also concerns collective decisions that affect everyday life. Researchers should ensure that issue selection does not become a means of directing respondents' opinions or measuring their loyalty to particular political actors.

Methodologically, combining surveys with qualitative approaches may provide a more complete picture. Surveys can measure general patterns, while interviews or focus-group discussions can explain why students choose or avoid particular forms of participation. For example, a low offline-participation score in actual data could be followed up with questions about time constraints, limited information about activities, transportation barriers, or perceptions that participation is ineffective. Integrating both types of data would help researchers avoid premature interpretations of statistical figures.

It is also important to recognize that political and civic participation may have consequences for students' safety and privacy. Data collection on political preferences, affiliations, or advocacy experiences should be minimal and proportionate. Researchers should not request personal social-media account names or irrelevant screenshots of private conversations. Collected data must be anonymized and stored with restricted access. These principles are essential to prevent research from creating social risks for respondents, particularly when the issues discussed are politically sensitive.

The results of this article cannot be used to determine whether IPS students at Campus in Makassar already have good digital political literacy. Such an assessment can only be made after actual data have been collected using valid instruments and transparent procedures. Even when data are available, survey results must be interpreted in light of the design limitations, respondent characteristics, and timing of data collection. Changes in political issues, digital platforms, and campus policies may affect respondents' behavior, so a measurement taken at one point in time may not represent behavior at another time.

The relationship between digital political literacy and civic participation may also be understood as a staged process. The initial stage involves exposure to information and awareness that an issue has public consequences. The next stage is information evaluation, which involves assessing sources, evidence, context, and interests that may shape how information is presented. Individuals then form judgments and consider the available channels for action. The final stage may take the form of discussion, expressing aspirations, supporting social activities, or becoming directly involved in problem-solving. This staged model is not necessarily linear, but it helps explain why information access alone is insufficient to produce meaningful participation.

Trust is another factor that requires attention. Trust in information sources can help individuals determine which information deserves consideration, but trust without critical examination may make people more likely to accept claims from sources perceived as close to them in identity or viewpoint. Conversely, generalized distrust of all sources may make it difficult to distinguish credible from unreliable information. Digital political literacy should therefore cultivate proportionate skepticism: neither believing information too readily nor rejecting it without examining the evidence.

The ethical dimension of communication is an important link between literacy and participation. Political discussions in digital spaces often bring users into contact with

differing viewpoints. Without the ability to manage disagreement, discussions may turn into personal attacks, labeling, or the dissemination of information that harms others. Prospective teachers need the skills to express views argumentatively while respecting the dignity of others. This does not mean avoiding criticism; rather, it means ensuring that criticism is directed at ideas, policies, or actions that can be held accountable.

Strengthening digital political literacy should not stop at technical fact-checking training. Students also need to understand how public issues are constructed, which actors are involved, how policies are formulated, and which channels citizens can use to provide input. Institutional knowledge helps students connect information with mechanisms for participation. Without such understanding, digital activity may remain an expression of dissatisfaction that is not directed toward relevant public processes.

Student organizational experience can provide a learning environment that supports civic skills. Through organizations, students can practice setting agendas, distributing responsibilities, managing differences, expressing aspirations, and evaluating collective decisions. However, the mere existence of an organization does not guarantee democratic practices. The quality of organizational experience depends on openness in decision-making, opportunities for members to express opinions, and the accountability of leaders. Actual research may therefore measure not only membership status but also the forms and intensity of students' participation experiences.

Relations between universities and local communities can also enrich civic learning. Students may examine public problems through environmental observation, dialogue with stakeholders, or community-service projects. Such activities enable students to test information and theory in real contexts. In implementation, lecturers should ensure that projects do not turn into partisan political campaigns. The learning focus should remain on problem analysis, deliberative processes, social concern, and evidence-based problem-solving.

At the learning-evaluation level, the success of digital political literacy development cannot be measured solely through student satisfaction or the frequency of application use. Evaluation may assess students' ability to check source credibility, compare claims, explain the functions of public institutions, construct evidence-based arguments, and respond ethically to differing views. Assessment may use content-analysis assignments, discussion

rubrics, reflective portfolios, and civic projects. A combination of instruments provides a more comprehensive picture than a single attitude scale.

Further research may also develop a longitudinal design to examine whether digital political literacy and civic participation change during students' university studies. Measurements at several time points would allow researchers to assess changes associated with course experiences, organizational activities, or literacy-development programs. Comparative research across campuses could also help explain whether differences in participation are related to institutional characteristics, academic culture, access to student activities, or regional social contexts. Any expansion of the design, however, must be accompanied by adequate sample planning and ethical procedures.

Qualitative research may deepen understanding of the meaning of participation for students. Interviews may explore why students choose particular digital channels, what they consider before sharing information, their experiences of encountering differing views, and barriers to participating in face-to-face social activities. Focus-group discussions may reveal how group norms and peer dynamics influence information-sharing behavior. Such qualitative data can explain mechanisms not captured by survey scores and help researchers improve measurement instruments.

Finally, research on digital political literacy must maintain the principle of academic independence. Researchers must not use instruments to classify students according to their support for particular parties, candidates, or political groups. Research should assess information-processing capacity and the quality of participation, not the extent to which respondents' views align with the researcher's position. Transparency about research objectives, data confidentiality, and balanced reporting are essential to maintaining participant trust and academic integrity.

CONCLUSION

This article presents a quantitative research framework for examining digital political literacy and civic participation among IPS students in Makassar. The illustrative model distinguishes critical evaluation of political information from online expression and offline civic participation. The synthetic results demonstrate a positive modeled association between the two constructs; however, all figures are methodological examples rather than empirical findings.

The article's main contribution is the development of a contextual framework for studying political literacy and civic participation among prospective elementary teachers through the perspectives of digital citizenship, connective action, and civic competence. It also emphasizes that the frequency of social media use should not be equated with critical literacy or meaningful democratic participation.

Future research should replace the synthetic dataset with ethically collected field data from IPS students, test the validity and reliability of the instrument, and combine survey analysis with interviews or focus-group discussions. Further studies should also examine institutional and contextual factors that may support or hinder the transition from online political awareness to constructive offline civic action.

Research Integrity Note

This manuscript is an illustrative academic model based on synthetic research data. The sample size, respondent characteristics, questionnaire scores, reliability coefficients, correlations, regression estimates, and all result tables are fictional values created solely for demonstration. They must be replaced with actual research data before the manuscript is submitted as an empirical research article. The authors should also verify the metadata of all references, author names, institutional affiliations, correspondence email addresses, and the journal's formatting requirements before submission.

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