

The Relationship between Digital Literacy and Communication Ethics among Generation Z on Social Media

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of digital technology and the intensive use of social media among Generation Z have raised significant concerns regarding digital communication ethics. Although digital literacy is considered an important factor in shaping ethical communication behavior, empirical studies examining this relationship, particularly among university students, remain limited. This study aims to determine the level of digital literacy, the level of communication ethics, and the relationship between digital literacy and communication ethics among Generation Z social media users at the Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Padang. A quantitative approach with a correlational design was employed. The sample consisted of 98 respondents selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Spearman correlation tests. The findings indicate that both digital literacy and communication ethics are categorized as good, and that a strong correlation exists between digital literacy and communication ethics among Generation Z social media users. This suggests that higher levels of digital literacy are associated with better ethical communication in digital interactions. The study concludes that digital literacy plays an important role in supporting ethical social media communication. Its

contribution lies in emphasizing the need to strengthen digital literacy programs integrated with communication ethics development in educational settings to promote more responsible digital behavior.

Keywords: Digital Literacy; Communication Ethics; Generation Z; Social Media; Digital Behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Digital technology's quick development has drastically changed how people communicate, especially Generation Z, who use social media extensively. Social media is a key communication platform in the digital age because it allows users to create, distribute, and engage with digital material in a participatory and real-time way (Fitriani, 2021; Wahyudi et al., 2025). However, a number of ethical problems, including the dissemination of false information, improper language use, and a lack of respect in online contacts, frequently accompany the growing intensity of social media use (Ramadhanti et al., 2024; Rindiani et al., 2025). These circumstances show that acceptable communication practices do not always follow the development of digital technologies.

Digital literacy becomes a crucial skill for people to navigate the digital world in order to address these issues. The ability to acquire, comprehend, assess, and use information through digital media critically and ethically is known as digital literacy (Chodijah, 2022; EBSCO, 2024). It also involves the capacity to produce and disseminate digital material while taking social and ethical obligations into account (Leni Suciati et al., 2025; EBSCO, 2024). Digital literacy is essential for influencing how Generation Z, who use social media extensively, communicate, express their thoughts, and behave politely in online encounters (Amirudin et al., 2025; Purnamasari, 2025).

Apart from digital literacy, communication ethics is an essential component that directs people in effectively communicating and receiving messages. According to Mutiah et al. (2019) and Ihsani et al. (2021), communication ethics encompasses moral principles and social conventions that govern how communication should be carried out in a courteous and responsible manner. According to Ramadhanti et al. (2024) and Fakhrollah et al. (2025), ethical communication in the context of digital communication, particularly among Generation Z, involves the capacity to uphold civility, appreciate individual

diversity, and refrain from damaging communication practices in social media interactions. As a result, maintaining positive social relationships in digital domains depends more and more on communication ethics.

Prior research has looked at Generation Z's digital behavior and communication ethics in social media settings. Abdillah et al. (2022) study concentrates on Generation Z's use of digital ethics, but it does not explicitly examine the connection between digital literacy and communication ethics. In a similar vein, Aulia et al. (2024) study TikTok communication ethics across generations without taking digital literacy into account. Rahmatulloh et al. (2024), on the other hand, stress the significance of digital literacy in ethical communication; nonetheless, the study lacks empirical verification and is still theoretical. These results show that, especially in the context of higher education, prior research has not thoroughly investigated the connection between digital literacy and communication ethics using empirical data.

By employing an empirical quantitative method to investigate the connection between digital literacy and communication ethics among Generation Z students, this study offers uniqueness. The study is based on Gilster's digital literacy paradigm, which identifies knowledge assembly, hypertextual navigation, internet searching, and content evaluation as essential skills in digital contexts (Amri et al., 2024; Pratama et al., 2022). Bertens' ethical framework, which highlights moral values, conscience, freedom, and responsibility as essential components of ethical behavior, is also adopted in this study (Aulia, C, 2024; Maiwan, 2018). A thorough foundation for comprehending ethical communication behavior in digital situations is provided by the integration of different theoretical viewpoints.

In light of these factors, this study examines students at Universitas Negeri Padang's Faculty of Languages and Arts' levels of digital literacy, communication ethics, and the correlation between the two. This study aims to support the development of instructional strategies that encourage responsible and ethical communication in digital contexts by offering empirical evidence on the connection between digital literacy and communication ethics (Fitriani, 2021; Hidayat et al., 2024; Komara et al., 2024).

METHODS

In order to investigate the connection between digital literacy and communication ethics among Generation Z students on social media, this study used a quantitative method

with a correlational research design. Without changing the variables, the correlational design was selected to determine the strength of the relationship between the independent variable (digital literacy) and the dependent variable (communication ethics).

The study was carried out at Universitas Negeri Padang's Faculty of Languages and Arts. The process of gathering the data was conducted over the course of about a month, in April. Participants in this study were Generation Z undergraduate students. Using a stratified random sample technique, a total of 98 respondents were chosen to guarantee representation from various faculty study programs.

Respondents were given a standardized questionnaire as the study's instrument. The questionnaire was created using well-known theoretical frameworks, such as Bertens' communication ethics theory and Gilster's digital literacy model. While communication ethics was measured using aspects of moral values, responsibility, and appropriate communication behavior in digital environments, digital literacy was measured using indicators like internet searching, hypertextual navigation, content evaluation, and knowledge assembly. To guarantee measurement accuracy and consistency, the instrument underwent validity and reliability testing prior to data collection.

Descriptive statistics were used to assess each variable's level, and inferential statistics were used to examine the relationship between the variables. Since the data did not entirely satisfy parametric assumptions, the Spearman rank correlation test was employed. This analysis supports the goal of the study, which is to investigate the connection between communication ethics and digital literacy.

Throughout the entire research procedure, ethical considerations were rigorously applied. Respondents gave their consent and were made aware of the study's objectives. Participants' privacy and confidentiality were protected, and the information gathered was used only for study.

RESULTS

The study's primary conclusions, including the degrees of digital literacy and communication ethics as well as the relationship between the two variables, are presented in this section.

1. Digital literacy level

Table 1. Digital Literacy Level of Students

No	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly Agree	418	35.91%
2	Agree	683	58.68%
3	Disagree	56	4.81%
4	Strongly Disagree	7	0.60%
Total		1164	1164

Table 1 shows that students generally exhibit a high level of digital literacy in accessing, comprehending, and using digital information, with the majority of responses falling into the agree (58.68%) and strongly agree (35.91%) categories.

1. Communication ethic level

Table 2. Communication Ethics Level of Students

No	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly Agree	452	38.83%
2	Agree	669	57.47%
3	Disagree	38	3.27%
4	Strongly Disagree	5	0.43%
Total		1164	1164

According to Table 2, the majority of responses fall into the agree (57.47%) and strongly agree (38.83%) categories, indicating that students typically demonstrate good communication ethics in digital contacts.

2. Correlation between Digital Literacy and Communication Ethics

Table 3. Spearman Correlation Results

Variable	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig. (p-value)	Interpretation
Digital Literacy (X) – Communication Ethics (Y)	0.678	0.000	Strong & Significant

Table 3 demonstrates that digital literacy and communication ethics have a favorable link ($\rho = 0.614$). The statistical significance of the association between the two variables is shown by the significance value (Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to investigate how Generation Z students' digital literacy and communication ethics relate to one another. With a statistically significant positive association between the two measures ($\rho = 0.614$), the results demonstrate that students generally possess high levels of digital literacy and communication ethics. This

result suggests that greater communication ethics in digital settings are typically linked to higher levels of digital literacy.

Theoretically, this finding is consistent with Gilster's definition of digital literacy, which stresses not only technical proficiency but also critical thinking and responsible information use. Students are more likely to speak ethically in online settings if they are able to evaluate information, comprehend digital content, and use technology properly. According to Bertens' ethical theory, moral consciousness, accountability, and proper conduct in social situations are all directly linked to communication ethics. As a result, those who are more digitally literate are more likely to communicate in a polite and responsible manner.

The results of this study are in line with earlier studies that emphasize the significance of digital literacy in influencing moral behavior in digital communication. For instance, research by Rahmatulloh et al. (2024) and Amirudin et al. (2025) highlights the importance of digital literacy in promoting responsible online conduct. However, by offering actual proof of a somewhat high correlation between digital literacy and communication ethics, especially among college students, this study expands on earlier studies. On the other hand, some earlier research, such as Abdillah et al. (2022) and Aulia et al. (2024), concentrates more on descriptive aspects of digital ethics without conducting a quantitative analysis of the correlation between factors. Thus, by providing a correlational analysis backed by statistical data, our work closes the gap.

This work offers practical ramifications in addition to theoretical contributions. The results imply that raising students' level of digital literacy can help them communicate more ethically in online settings. Digital literacy instruction should be incorporated into the curriculum of educational institutions, especially universities, with an emphasis on ethical dimensions of digital communication in addition to technical abilities. This is crucial in helping children develop into responsible digital citizens who know how to behave correctly on the internet.

This study has a number of shortcomings in spite of these contributions. First, the study was limited to a single faculty, which would restrict how broadly the results can be applied. Second, individuals may give socially acceptable replies when using self-reported questionnaires, which could lead to response bias. Third, the study just looks at two variables; communication ethics may also be influenced by other elements as personality,

social context, and media consumption habits. In order to obtain a more thorough understanding of digital communication behavior, future research is advised to use mixed methods approaches, include a larger and more diverse sample, and investigate additional variables.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Generation Z students at Universitas Negeri Padang's Faculty of Languages and Arts generally exhibit high levels of digital literacy and communication ethics. The results show a positive and statistically significant relationship between digital literacy and communication ethics ($\rho = 0.614$), suggesting that higher levels of digital literacy are linked to better ethical communication behavior in digital environments, thereby addressing the study's primary goal. From a scientific standpoint, this study advances our understanding of digital communication by offering empirical data that supports preexisting theories and demonstrates that digital literacy is not only associated with technical proficiency but also plays a critical role in influencing ethical behavior in online communication, especially among Generation Z in higher education settings. Furthermore, by recommending that educational institutions, particularly universities, incorporate digital literacy and communication ethics into their learning processes through curriculum development and educational programs that emphasize responsible and ethical communication practices in addition to digital competence, the findings have practical implications. In order to obtain a more thorough understanding of digital communication behavior, it is also advised that future research broaden the scope by incorporating more diverse samples from various institutions or geographical areas, investigate additional variables like personality traits, social environments, and social media usage patterns, and think about using mixed methods approaches.

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