



Digital Media Literacy and Hoax Prevention among University Students in the Era of Social Communication

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of digital media literacy in preventing hoaxes among university students in the era of digital social communication. The rapid development of social media has increased the rapid and massive exchange of information, but on the other hand, it has also increased the spread of hoaxes, misinformation, and disinformation in the digital space. As a digital-native generation, university students are a highly active group using social media, resulting in high exposure to various digital information that may not be valid. This study used a mixed methods approach with an explanatory sequential design to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between digital media literacy and students' hoax-prevention behavior. Quantitative data were obtained through a questionnaire survey of active student social media users, while qualitative data were obtained through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). The results indicate that students have fairly good technical skills in using digital media, but their ability to evaluate the validity of information varies. High intensity use of social media such as TikTok, Instagram, X, and YouTube increases students' exposure to hoaxes, especially viral and emotional information. This study found that critical thinking skills, information verification habits, and awareness of digital ethics significantly influence hoax-prevention behavior. The higher the level of digital media literacy of students, the better their ability to recognize and prevent the spread of false information. This study emphasizes the importance of strengthening digital media literacy education in higher education to foster a culture of critical, ethical, and responsible digital communication.

Introduction

The development of digital technology has brought about major changes in the communication patterns of global society. The transformation of communication from conventional to digital media has created a new social space that enables the exchange of information to occur quickly, massively, and without geographical boundaries (Nugroho et al., 2020). The presence of the internet and social media has not only facilitated access to information but also changed the way individuals build social interactions, acquire knowledge, and shape public opinion. In this context, digital media has become an integral part of the daily lives of modern society, especially the younger generation and students, as the groups most actively using digital communication technology (Stoian, 2019).

The era of digital social communication is marked by the increasing use of various social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, X, and YouTube as primary sources of information and social interaction. Social media makes it easy for users to produce, disseminate, and consume information in real time (Arisanty et al., 2020). This phenomenon demonstrates that digital communication has shifted the dominance of

mainstream media and created a more participatory, interactive, and open communication culture (Mario & Daria, 2016).

However, the development of digital media also presents various new challenges, particularly related to the spread of hoaxes, misinformation, and disinformation in the digital space. False information can easily spread through social media due to the speed of content distribution, digital platform algorithms, and a low culture of information verification among internet users (Kumar & Shah, 2018). Hoaxes not only impact public misperceptions but can also trigger social conflict, political polarization, public panic, and even threaten social stability and democracy (Tucker et al., 2018).

The phenomenon of the spread of hoaxes is increasing along with the high use of social media among the younger generation (Tambuscio et al., 2015). Students, as a digital-native generation, frequently use the internet for both academic and social activities. They access a variety of information daily through digital media, whether for education, entertainment, or interpersonal communication. However, this high access to digital media is not always accompanied by adequate media literacy skills. Many social media users, including students, still struggle to distinguish between valid and false information (Syam & Nurrahmi, 2020).

Digital media literacy is a crucial issue in addressing communication challenges in the digital age. Digital media literacy encompasses not only the technical ability to use digital devices but also the ability to critically understand, evaluate, analyze, and verify information (Leaning, 2019). From the perspective of Digital Literacy Theory, individuals with good digital literacy are able to understand how media works, recognize information bias, and evaluate the credibility of information sources before sharing it with others (Polizzi, 2020).

The importance of digital media literacy becomes increasingly relevant as social media becomes a primary arena for the spread of hoaxes. Social media algorithms tend to amplify the distribution of emotional, sensational, and viral content over fact-based information (Sunstein, 2018). This creates the Echo Chamber Effect, a situation where individuals only receive information that aligns with their own beliefs and preferences. As a result, social media users become more vulnerable to information manipulation and digital propaganda (Levy & Razin, 2019).

In the context of university students, critical thinking skills are a crucial factor in raising awareness of the dangers of hoaxes (Amalia et al., 2020). As an intellectual group, students are expected to be agents of digital literacy in society. However, various studies show that students are still frequently exposed to and even participate in spreading false information without adequate verification (Dulkiah & Setia, 2020). This indicates a gap between their ability to use digital technology and their ability to evaluate digital information.

Furthermore, the culture of rapid communication on social media encourages the emergence of a "share first, verify later" behavior, where users prioritize the speed of sharing information over the accuracy of its content (Leonardi, 2018). This phenomenon is exacerbated by digital social pressure, the need for online presence, and the fear of missing out (FOMO), which makes students tend to follow viral information without first factchecking (Bernard, 2020). In these conditions, digital media literacy becomes a crucial instrument in building information resilience among the younger generation.

On the other hand, universities play a strategic role in fostering a culture of digital literacy and preventing hoaxes in the academic environment. Campuses serve not only as formal educational institutions but also as spaces for developing students' critical awareness of various digital social phenomena (Arrobi, 2020). However, the implementation of digital literacy education in universities still faces various challenges, such as limited curricula, minimal fact-checking training, and the low integration of digital media education into the learning process (Alexander et al., 2017).

Many studies have been conducted on digital media literacy and hoax prevention in communication and media studies. However, most previous research has focused on the public, social media user behavior, or the impact of the widespread dissemination of hoaxes. Research specifically examining the relationship between digital media literacy and hoax prevention behavior among university students is still relatively limited, especially in the context of the increasingly complex and dynamic digital social communication era.

This research is important because university students are a strategic group in developing a critical and responsible digital society. Their ability to understand, verify, and filter digital information will significantly determine the quality of public communication in the future. Therefore, research is needed that can analyze how students' digital media literacy levels influence their behavior in dealing with and preventing the spread of hoaxes on social media.

Theoretically, this research is expected to strengthen the development of media literacy, digital communication, and information disorder studies in the context of higher education. This research also contributes to understanding the relationship between digital literacy, critical thinking, and student communication behavior in the social media era.

Practically, the research findings are expected to form the basis for developing digital literacy education policies in higher education, including the development of anti-hoax programs, fact-checking training, and strengthening digital communication ethics for students. Thus, this research is not only academically relevant but also socially contributes to building a digital society that is more critical, intelligent, and responsible regarding information circulating in the digital public sphere.

Methods

Research Approach and Type

This research uses a mixed methods approach with an explanatory sequential design. A mixed methods approach combines quantitative and qualitative approaches in one study to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied. This approach was chosen because research on digital media literacy and hoax prevention requires not only statistical data on students' digital literacy levels but also an in-depth understanding of students' behaviors, experiences, and how they interpret digital information in their daily lives.

The explanatory sequential design was implemented through two research stages. The first stage used a quantitative approach through a survey to measure students' digital media literacy levels and their behavior in dealing with hoaxes. The second phase used a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to further explain the quantitative findings. With this design, the research is expected to

provide a more comprehensive picture of the relationship between digital media literacy and hoax prevention behavior in the digital social communication era.

Research Location and Time

This research was conducted in a university environment, with the research subjects being active students who use social media in their daily activities. The research location was selected based on the high intensity of digital media use among students, as a digital-native generation who actively interacts through social media. The research was conducted over several months, encompassing the stages of developing research instruments, collecting quantitative data, conducting qualitative interviews, analyzing data, and preparing the research report.

Research Population and Sample

The population in this study was all active students at the university where the research took place. Students were selected as the research population because they are a group of digital media users who frequently access and share information through social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, X, and YouTube.

The sample selection in the quantitative phase was conducted using a purposive sampling technique. This technique was chosen because the study required respondents with active experience in digital media use and online information interactions. Respondent criteria included active students, having social media accounts, and using digital media daily. The sample size was determined based on the needs of statistical analysis to represent the general digital literacy status of students.

Meanwhile, in the qualitative phase, research informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on the results of a quantitative survey. Informants were selected from groups of students with high, medium, and low levels of digital literacy to obtain a variety of experiences and perspectives regarding hoax prevention behavior in the digital environment.

Data Collection Techniques

The data collection technique in this study was conducted in two stages: quantitative data collection and qualitative data collection. In the quantitative stage, data were obtained through a questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was used to measure students' digital media literacy levels, information verification skills, critical thinking skills, social media usage intensity, and hoax prevention behavior.

The research instrument was developed based on the concepts of Digital Literacy Theory and the study of Information Disorder, which emphasizes the importance of digital information evaluation skills in addressing misinformation and disinformation. Before being used in the study, the instrument was tested for validity and reliability to ensure that each question item accurately and consistently measured the research variables.

In the qualitative stage, data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The interviews were semi-structured to explore students' experiences regarding digital information consumption patterns, exposure to hoaxes, information-sharing behavior, and online information verification strategies. Meanwhile, the Focus Group Discussions were used to understand the dynamics of students' digital social communication and the influence of their social environment on their behavior in addressing hoaxes.

Research Variables and Indicators

This study consists of independent and dependent variables. The independent variable in this study is digital media literacy, while the dependent variable is hoax prevention behavior.

The digital media literacy variable is measured through several indicators: the ability to access digital information, the ability to understand information content, the ability to evaluate the credibility of information sources, the ability to verify facts, and the ability to think critically about digital information. Meanwhile, the hoax prevention behavior variable is measured through the ability to identify hoaxes, the behavior of verifying information before sharing, the ability to reject the spread of false information, and awareness of digital communication ethics.

Furthermore, this study also examines the intensity of social media use as a supporting variable that may influence students' behavior in dealing with hoaxes in the era of digital social communication.

Data Analysis Techniques

The quantitative data in this study were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to describe students' digital media literacy levels, the intensity of social media use, and hoax prevention behavior. The results of the analysis are presented in tables, percentages, means, and frequency distributions.

Meanwhile, inferential analysis was used to examine the relationship between digital media literacy and hoax prevention behavior. The analysis techniques used included linear regression and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to more deeply understand the influence of each research variable.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis was conducted through data reduction, coding, identifying key themes, interpreting meanings, and drawing conclusions. This technique was used to understand the patterns of students' experiences in dealing with hoaxes and to explain the digital social factors that influence their behavior in verifying information.

Data Validity Testing

To ensure the validity and credibility of the research data, this study employed method triangulation and source triangulation techniques. Method triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of the quantitative survey with the results of qualitative interviews. Meanwhile, source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from various research informants with varying levels of digital literacy.

In addition, the researcher conducted member checking with several informants to ensure that the data interpretations aligned with their experiences and perspectives on digital media literacy and hoax prevention behavior.

Research Ethics

This research adheres to the ethical principles of social research. All respondents and informants were provided with an explanation of the research objectives, research procedures, and their rights as research participants prior to data collection. Respondent participation was voluntary, and the identities of all participants were kept confidential.

Data obtained during the study were used solely for academic purposes and were not disseminated beyond the research's intended purpose. By adhering to research ethics, this study is expected to be conducted objectively, transparently, and respect the rights of all research participants.

Results

Student Digital Media Literacy Level

The results of the study indicate that students' digital media literacy levels are moderate to high in terms of digital technology usage, but their evaluative skills regarding information obtained through social media vary. Most students are accustomed to using various digital platforms as their primary source of information, communication, entertainment, and academic activities. Students can quickly access information through various social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, X, and YouTube. The high intensity of digital media use indicates that students possess sufficient technical skills in operating digital communication technology.

However, students' digital media literacy skills are not fully matched by their critical ability to evaluate the validity of information (Sulianta, 2020). The results indicate that some students still have difficulty distinguishing between credible information and hoaxes or misinformation. Many students tend to believe information that has gone viral and been widely shared on social media without first verifying it. This phenomenon suggests that the culture of rapid communication on social media influences students' information consumption patterns, focusing more on the speed of obtaining information than on factchecking.

Furthermore, students' fact-checking skills are still suboptimal. Some students admitted to only reading headlines or summaries of information before sharing it with others. This lack of thorough reading habits makes students vulnerable to exposure to hoaxes, especially on emotional, sensational, and viral issues. On the other hand, students with better critical thinking skills tend to be more cautious in receiving and sharing digital information. They typically compare information from several official sources before believing a news story.

The research also shows that students' digital media literacy levels are influenced by several factors, such as social media experience, critical thinking skills, the digital social environment, and the intensity of online information access. Students who actively participate in academic discussions, current news, and educational content tend to have better information evaluation skills than those who primarily use social media for entertainment.

In the context of digital social communication, students' digital media literacy is not only related to the ability to use technology but also includes the ability to understand how media works, recognize information bias, and be aware of the social impacts of the spread of false information. This suggests that digital media literacy is a combination of technical skills, analytical skills, and ethical awareness in using digital media responsibly.

Based on interviews, some students recognize the importance of verifying information before sharing news on social media. However, some students still admit to often believing viral information due to the influence of the digital environment and the high intensity of online information flow.

"Sometimes, if the information is widely available on TikTok or Instagram, I immediately believe it without double-checking because I feel it must be true." Student Informant

"I usually check the news source first. If it's not from official media, I'm a bit hesitant to share it." Student Informant

"Virgin news often turns out to be a hoax, so now I'm more careful before sharing information." Student Informant

"Many friends immediately share news in groups without reading the full content, so sometimes misinformation spreads quickly." Student Informant

This finding indicates that students do have an initial awareness of the importance of digital media literacy, but its implementation in daily behavior is still inconsistent. Therefore, strengthening digital literacy education in higher education environments is necessary so that students are not only able to use digital media technically, but also able to think critically, verify information, and assume ethical responsibility in digital communication.

Forms of Exposure to Hoaxes Among Students

Research results indicate that students are highly susceptible to exposure to hoaxes through various social media platforms used in their daily activities. The high intensity of digital media use results in students receiving a massive daily influx of information, whether in the form of news, short videos, images, or chain messages. Exposure to hoaxes is commonly found on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, X, YouTube, and digital chat groups like WhatsApp and Telegram. Social media has become a primary platform for information dissemination due to its high distribution speed and the ability for viral information to spread quickly without adequate verification (Yoo et al., 2016).

The forms of hoaxes most frequently encountered by students relate to political, health, social, entertainment, and sensational viral information. On political issues, students often encounter provocative information containing data manipulation, hate narratives, or video clips distorted to shape public opinion. Meanwhile, on health issues, hoaxes often appear in the form of information about instant cures, fake news about certain diseases, and even medical information lacking scientific basis. In the digital social context, information containing emotional elements tends to attract students' attention more quickly than information based on facts and data.

Research also shows that most students are indirectly exposed to hoaxes through reposts from friends, social media groups, or content that appears on social media algorithms' recommendation pages. Digital platform algorithms tend to display content that is frequently accessed or has a high level of interaction, making it easier for viral information to reappear on users' homepages. This leads students to repeatedly see the same information and gradually accept it as true, even if it has not been verified. This phenomenon demonstrates the influence of the Echo Chamber Effect in shaping students' information consumption patterns in the digital space.

Furthermore, exposure to hoaxes among students comes not only from text news but also from visual content such as short videos, memes, still images, and engaging audio narratives. Visual content is considered more easily able to influence users' emotions because it is concise, easy to understand, and easy to share. Many students admit to being

more interested in information in the form of short videos than reading complete news from official sources. As a result, students often receive information in fragments without understanding the true context. The research also found that the fast-paced communication culture on social media often leads students to accept and share information without first factchecking it. The desire to stay up to date with the latest trends and information leads some students to prioritize speed over accuracy. In some cases, students may not even realize that the information they share is a hoax or misinformation.

Based on interviews, students admitted to frequently encountering information that turns out to be incorrect after it goes viral on social media. Most informants stated that they had received fake news through chat groups or social media without knowing the original source.

"I often get news from WhatsApp groups with family or friends on campus, but sometimes after checking, the information turns out to be a hoax." Student Informant

"On TikTok, there are many videos that seem convincing, but after seeing the official news, the information turns out to be false." Student Informant

"Usually, the news that goes viral the fastest is the one with a provocative or panic-inducing title, so people immediately share it without reading the full story." Student Informant

"Sometimes I see the same information appearing repeatedly on social media, so over time people believe it, even though it's not necessarily true." Student Informant

These findings indicate that students live in a highly dynamic digital communication environment filled with a constant flow of information that is not always valid. The high level of exposure to hoaxes on social media demonstrates the need for students to develop stronger digital media literacy skills to recognize, verify, and reject the spread of false information. Therefore, strengthening a culture of information verification and anti-hoax education are crucial in developing critical student awareness in the era of digital social communication.

Students' Hoax Prevention Behavior

Research results show that hoax prevention behavior among students is developing along with increasing awareness of the dangers of misinformation on digital media. Most students recognize that the spread of hoaxes can have negative impacts, such as public misunderstanding, social conflict, public panic, and even damage to the reputations of individuals and groups. This awareness encourages students to be more cautious when receiving and sharing information obtained through social media. However, the level of caution students demonstrate in verifying information varies depending on their level of digital media literacy, experience using social media, and critical thinking skills (Ku et al., 2019).

The most common form of hoax prevention behavior among students is double-checking information sources before sharing it with others. Students with digital literacy awareness tend to compare information from several official media outlets, search for comparative news online, and verify the authenticity of news sources before believing the content. Furthermore, some students have begun using fact-checking websites and

trusted media outlets to ensure the validity of information they receive through social media.

Research also shows that college students are more cautious about provocative, sensational, and emotional information. Information containing political, health, and social issues often prompts students to conduct further verification, as it is perceived as carrying significant risks if spread without factchecking. Students with better critical thinking skills tend to be able to recognize the characteristics of hoax information, such as exaggerated headlines, unclear sources, the use of provocative narratives, and a lack of credible supporting data.

Students' hoax-prevention behavior is not entirely consistent. In some situations, students are still compelled to share information quickly due to the influence of a digital communication culture that emphasizes speed and the virality of information. Some students admitted to frequently sharing information without thoroughly reading the content, especially if the information comes from close friends, family, or social media accounts considered trustworthy. This situation indicates that hoax-prevention behavior is influenced not only by digital literacy skills but also by social and emotional factors within the digital communication environment.

In addition to verifying information, some students are also beginning to demonstrate educational behavior in preventing the spread of hoaxes. Students with higher digital awareness tend to alert friends or social media group members when they encounter information that is uncertain. They also try to provide clarification or share official sources of information as a form of social responsibility in digital communication. This indicates that some students are beginning to understand the importance of communication ethics and moral responsibility in using social media.

In the context of digital social communication, students' hoax-prevention behavior reflects a process of adaptation to the challenges of increasingly complex digital information flows. Students no longer act solely as consumers of information, but also as filterers and disseminators of information that has an influence on their digital social environment. Therefore, the ability to verify information is a crucial part of digital media literacy in the modern communication era.

Based on interviews, students revealed that they have become more selective in accepting and sharing digital information after frequently encountering fake news on social media.

"Now I'm more careful when I see viral news. I usually check it on Google or official media before sharing it." Student Informant

"If the information is too provocative or causes panic, I usually immediately become suspicious and look for other sources." Student Informant

"I once shared news that turned out to be a hoax, so after that, I often read the full content before sharing." Student Informant

"Sometimes I tell friends if the news they shared turns out to be false, so it doesn't spread further." Student Informant

This finding indicates that students are beginning to become aware of the importance of anti-hoax behavior in their daily digital lives. However, hoax prevention behavior still needs strengthening through digital media literacy education, fact-checking training, and

the development of a more critical and responsible digital communication culture within the university environment.

Factors Influencing Digital Literacy and Hoax Prevention

Research results show that digital literacy and hoax prevention behavior among university students are influenced by various interrelated internal and external factors. These factors shape how students' access, understand, evaluate, and disseminate information in the digital space. In the highly dynamic context of digital social communication, students' ability to deal with hoaxes is not only determined by technical skills in using digital media, but is also influenced by critical thinking skills, the social environment, online communication culture, and the intensity of daily social media use.

One of the main factors influencing students' digital literacy is critical thinking skills. Students who possess critical thinking skills tend to be better able to evaluate the validity of information, recognize media bias, and verify information sources before believing or sharing it with others. This ability helps students resist being easily influenced by emotional, provocative, or viral information on social media. Conversely, students who lack analytical skills tend to accept information directly without thorough evaluation.

In addition to critical thinking skills, educational level and experience using digital media also influence students' digital literacy skills. Students who regularly participate in academic discussions, read news from trusted media, and engage in educational activities online tend to have better digital awareness than those who use social media solely for entertainment. Previous experience with hoaxes also makes some students more cautious when receiving digital information.

External factors that influence hoax-prevention behavior include the digital social environment and peer influence. In students' digital lives, information is often obtained through chat groups, online communities, and social media platforms that involve intensive social interaction. Students tend to trust information shared by people they consider close or have strong social connections. As a result, false information can easily spread due to the trust in informal sources within their social environment. A digital communication culture that prioritizes the speed of information sharing also increases the risk of spreading hoaxes without prior verification.

This study also found that social media algorithms are a significant factor in influencing students' information consumption patterns. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, X, and YouTube tend to display content that is frequently accessed or has high levels of interaction. As a result, students are more likely to receive viral and emotional information than information that is fact-based and verified. This situation reinforces the Echo Chamber Effect, where users are only exposed to information that aligns with their own preferences and beliefs.

On the other hand, the lack of formal digital literacy education on campus also hinders efforts to prevent hoaxes. Some students admitted to never receiving specific training on factchecking, digital information verification, or social media communication ethics. Yet, digital literacy education is crucial in building students' critical awareness of the dangers of misinformation and disinformation in the digital space.

Furthermore, psychological factors such as the fear of missing out (FOMO), the need for online presence, and the urge to stay up to date with viral information also influence students' behavior in disseminating information. Many students feel the need to

immediately share the latest information to remain active and relevant in their digital social circles. This often leads to the process of verifying information being neglected in favor of speedy content sharing.

Based on interviews, students acknowledged that critical thinking skills and the habit of reading information from trusted sources significantly help them avoid hoaxes.

"If you're used to reading news from official media, it's usually easier to distinguish between true information and hoaxes." Student Informant

"Sometimes people immediately believe news because it was sent by a close friend or family member, even though it's not necessarily true." Student Informant

"Social media is too fast paced these days, so people often share first and then check the truth later." Student Informant

"I feel like universities don't provide enough education on how to fact-check or recognize fake news." Student Informant

"If news goes viral and keeps appearing on timelines, people eventually start to believe it even if the source isn't clear." Student Informant

These findings indicate that students' digital literacy and hoax prevention behavior are influenced by a combination of individual, social, technological, and educational factors. Therefore, strengthening digital media literacy requires an approach that focuses not only on technical media skills but also on developing critical thinking skills, ethical awareness, and a more responsible digital communication culture in the university environment.

Relationship between Digital Media Literacy and Hoax Prevention

The results of this study indicate a significant relationship between digital media literacy and hoax prevention behavior among students. The higher the level of digital media literacy of students, the better their ability to recognize, evaluate, and prevent the spread of false information on social media. Digital media literacy not only helps students understand how digital media works but also develops critical thinking skills in filtering the rapid flow of information in the era of digital social communication.

Students with high levels of digital literacy tend to be more cautious in accepting information circulating on social media. They have a habit of verifying information through trusted sources before sharing it with others. Furthermore, students with good digital literacy skills are also able to recognize the characteristics of hoaxes, such as the use of provocative titles, unclear sources of information, image or video manipulation, and emotional and sensational narratives. This ability makes them more selective about viral information circulating on digital platforms like TikTok, Instagram, X, and YouTube.

Conversely, students with low levels of digital media literacy tend to more easily believe information widely circulated on social media without first factchecking it. They are more susceptible to being influenced by the popularity of information, the number of likes, comments, or the number of users sharing it. This condition indicates that low evaluative skills regarding digital information can increase the risk of spreading hoaxes among students.

This study also found that critical thinking skills are an important part of the relationship between digital media literacy and hoax prevention behavior. Students who can think

critically not only passively receive information but also question the credibility of sources, the purpose of information dissemination, and the possibility of digital content manipulation. Thus, digital media literacy serves as a protective mechanism against misinformation and disinformation in the digital communication space.

In the context of digital social communication, the relationship between digital media literacy and hoax prevention demonstrates that technical skills in using digital media alone are not sufficient. Students also need analytical skills, ethical awareness, and social responsibility in using digital media. Students with good digital literacy tend to be more aware of the social impacts of the spread of hoaxes, making them more cautious when sharing information with others.

Furthermore, research shows that students with high levels of digital media literacy are more active in educating their social circles about the dangers of hoaxes. They not only avoid spreading false information but also seek clarification from friends or social media groups when they encounter inaccurate information. This suggests that digital literacy can shape more responsible and participatory digital communication behavior.

The strong relationship between digital media literacy and hoax prevention also demonstrates the importance of digital literacy education in higher education. Strengthening information verification, fact-checking, and critical thinking skills is crucial for building student resilience to the increasingly complex flow of digital information. In this regard, digital literacy is understood not only as technological skills but also as social and intellectual abilities to face the challenges of modern communication.

Based on interviews, most students stated that understanding digital media helps them be more careful when receiving and sharing information on social media.

"The more I learn about digital literacy, the more I realize that not all information on social media is true." Student Informant

"Now I always check the source of the news before believing it or sharing it with others." Student Informant

"If I know the characteristics of hoaxes, it's usually easier to distinguish between real and fake news." Student Informant

"I think digital literacy is important because there's too much information on the internet now, and not all of it is trustworthy." Student Informant

"I used to immediately share viral news, but now I'm more careful because I'm afraid of spreading misinformation." Student Informant

These findings indicate that digital media literacy plays a crucial role in shaping hoax-prevention behavior among college students. The better students' ability to understand and evaluate digital information, the stronger their ability to face the challenges of misinformation in the digital social communication era. Therefore, strengthening digital media literacy education is a strategic step in building a digital communication culture that is critical, responsible, and free from the spread of hoaxes.

Discussion

This study aims to analyze the role of digital media literacy in hoax prevention among college students in the digital social communication era. In general, the results indicate that digital media literacy has a significant relationship with students' ability to

recognize, evaluate, and prevent the spread of hoaxes in the digital space. These findings confirm that the primary challenge in modern digital communication is no longer simply access to information, but rather an individual's ability to interpret, verify, and manage the rapid and complex flow of information (Aceto et al., 2019). In this context, digital media literacy has become a new form of social competence that determines the quality of student participation in the digital public sphere.

The results of this study indicate that students generally possess sufficient technical skills in using digital media. As a digital-native generation, students are accustomed to accessing various communication platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, X, and YouTube in their daily activities. However, this study reveals a gap between their operational technological skills and their evaluative skills regarding digital information. Students are able to actively use digital media, but not all of them possess the critical skills to evaluate the credibility of information (Izni, 2019). This finding reinforces the argument of Digital Literacy Theory, which states that digital literacy cannot be reduced solely to technical media use but also encompasses analytical, reflective, and ethical skills in understanding digital information (Falloon, 2020).

From a contemporary digital communication perspective, this phenomenon demonstrates that advances in communication technology do not automatically result in a more critical public regarding information (Uzuegbunam, 2020). Instead, the ease of producing and distributing information through social media creates a state of information overload that increases individual vulnerability to misinformation and disinformation. College students live in a communication environment characterized by speed, virality, and fragmentation. As a result, the process of evaluating information is often overridden by the need to stay socially connected and keep up with the fast-paced flow of digital communication (Aliudin, 2019).

This study found that exposure to hoaxes among college students largely originates from social media and informal digital communication groups. The information that spreads most rapidly is generally highly emotional, provocative, and sensational. This finding is relevant to the Information Disorder theory, which explains that the spread of hoaxes in the digital era is heavily influenced by the algorithmic logic of social media, which prioritizes engagement over information validity (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). In digital algorithmic systems, information that generates greater emotional reactions tends to receive higher visibility than fact-based information (Bastian et al., 2019). As a result, students are not only consumers of information but also part of an information distribution ecosystem that is vulnerable to digital manipulation.

Furthermore, this study shows that students' behavior in disseminating information is strongly influenced by digital social relationships. Many students trust information because it comes from friends, family, or communities with whom they feel socially close. This phenomenon suggests that the spread of hoaxes is not solely due to limited access to information but is also influenced by the structure of social trust within digital communication networks. In this context, social media functions not only as a space for information exchange but also as an arena for the formation of social identity and group solidarity (Ptatama, 2019). Therefore, students' decisions to believe or share information are often more influenced by affective and social factors than rational considerations of the information's validity.

The research findings also indicate that critical thinking skills play a central role in shaping hoax-prevention behavior. Students with critical thinking skills are better able to question information sources, recognize media bias, and verify digital information (Barreiro, 2018). This suggests that digital media literacy must be understood as an epistemological process, namely the individual's ability to construct knowledge reflectively and critically amidst the flood of digital information. Thus, digital literacy is not simply technological skills, but a form of intellectual awareness in navigating the complexities of modern communication.

In the context of higher education, the results of this study indicate that universities have a strategic responsibility in developing a culture of critical digital communication. To date, digital literacy education on many campuses has tended to be technical and administrative, for example, focusing only on the use of digital learning platforms or basic technological skills. However, the primary challenge in the digital communication era lies in students' ability to evaluate the validity of information, understand the logic of social media algorithms, and develop digital communication ethics (Head et al., 2020). Therefore, higher education needs to transform its approach to digital literacy from merely technological literacy to critical digital literacy.

The theoretical implications of this study suggest that digital literacy studies need to move beyond instrumental approaches that solely emphasize the ability to use technology. This research demonstrates that digital media literacy is a multidimensional construct involving technical skills, cognitive abilities, ethical awareness, and social skills in navigating the flow of digital information. Therefore, this research strengthens the development of media literacy and digital communication studies by positioning digital literacy as part of the process of developing critical awareness in a networked society.

Furthermore, this research also has important practical and policy implications. First, universities need to integrate digital literacy education into their cross-disciplinary curricula, not just within communication or information technology study programs. Digital literacy must be a fundamental competency for students facing digital social transformation. Second, universities need to develop training programs in factchecking, digital information verification, and social media analysis as part of strengthening a critical academic culture. Third, collaboration between universities, the government, and social media platforms is needed to build a healthier and more responsible digital communication ecosystem.

This research also shows that efforts to prevent hoaxes cannot be achieved solely through regulatory or technological approaches. Hoax prevention requires a social and educational approach that can build critical awareness in digital communities. In the context of university students, strengthening digital media literacy is a fundamental strategy for building social resilience against misinformation and disinformation. Students with good digital literacy are not only able to protect themselves from hoaxes but also have the potential to become agents of digital education in their social environment.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that digital media literacy plays a crucial role in shaping students' ability to prevent the spread of hoaxes in the era of digital social communication. Although students, as digital natives, possess strong technical skills in

using digital and social media, these skills have not yet been fully matched by critical skills in evaluating the validity of information. The high intensity of use of digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, X, and YouTube makes students highly vulnerable to exposure to hoaxes, especially information that is viral, emotional, and provocative. This study found that critical thinking skills, information verification habits, digital media experience, and the digital social environment are important factors influencing students' hoax-prevention behavior. The higher the level of digital media literacy of students, the better their ability to recognize, verify, and reject the spread of false information. Therefore, strengthening digital media literacy education in higher education is a strategic step in building a culture of critical, ethical, and responsible digital communication to address the challenges of misinformation and disinformation in the modern communication era.

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