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Developing Communicative Digital Literacy in the Study of Digital Media Fundamentals

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ABSTRACT

The development of information and communication technology has triggered a significant transformation in the way individuals and societies communicate. Digital media has not only become a channel for message delivery but also shapes the way people think, interact, and construct social meaning. In this context, digital literacy should not be understood merely as the technical ability to use digital devices, but also as a communicative competence that involves critical understanding of content, context, and the impact of digital communication. This article aims to fundamentally examine the role of digital media in shaping communicative digital literacy and how this concept becomes an essential part of contemporary communication studies. Through a qualitative-descriptive approach and literature review, this study maps the conceptual framework of digital media from a communication science perspective, including the shift from one-way communication to interactive and participatory communication models. The article also discusses the role of digital media in mediating social relationships, meaning-making processes, and identity formation in digital spaces. Communicative digital literacy is emphasized as the ability not only to access and disseminate information but also to understand the dynamics of digital communication ethically, critically, and reflectively. The findings show that understanding the fundamentals of digital media—including the characteristics of digital mediation, algorithms, and patterns of virtual interaction—is an essential component in developing communicative digital literacy. The main contribution of this article is to provide a theoretical foundation for designing adaptive, critical, and inclusive communication strategies in the digital era. Thus, strengthening digital literacy from a communication science perspective becomes a strategic step in addressing the increasingly complex communication challenges of the digital society.

Keywords: Digital Media; Digital Literacy; Digital Communication

INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation has brought significant changes to the nature of public and interpersonal communication in Indonesia. Digital media now serves not only as a channel for disseminating information but also as a space for social interaction

that shapes new patterns of communication. Through digital platforms, the distribution of information has become faster and more massive, influencing how society understands and interprets the messages received. Consequently, digital media contributes to the formation of collective meaning, which is dynamic and continually evolving based on existing social and cultural contexts (Neubaum et al., 2025). Communication science in Indonesia faces the challenge of re-conceptualizing digital literacy. Digital literacy should not be viewed merely as technical skills in using devices and applications, but must be expanded to encompass communicative competencies that are critical, ethical, and reflective. Digital media users must be equipped with the ability to analyze and critically evaluate information, understand the ethical implications of digital communication, and reflect on their roles within ongoing social interactions. This approach is vital to ensuring that society becomes not just passive consumers, but active, responsible participants in the digital communication ecosystem.

The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a key catalyst in accelerating the adoption of digital technologies and increasing public awareness of the importance of digital literacy across all social strata in Indonesia. Social restrictions and the shift of activities to online platforms forced people to become more engaged with digital technologies in communication, education, work, and daily social interactions. This situation presents both opportunities and challenges particularly in building digital skills that go beyond technical competence to include critical and ethical engagement with digital media.

However, despite the growing body of research on digital literacy, most existing studies in Indonesia tend to emphasize either technical proficiency or access disparities, without deeply exploring the communicative, ethical, and socio-cultural dimensions of digital engagement. There remains a limited understanding of how individuals develop critical digital literacy skills that allow them to navigate, evaluate, and respond to digital content in meaningful and responsible ways within the Indonesian sociocultural context. Moreover, studies that integrate communication theory such as framing, media ecology, and metaliteracy—into digital literacy discussions are still scarce.

This article offers a novel contribution by framing digital literacy as a communicative competence, deeply rooted in ethical awareness, critical thinking, and social responsibility. By combining theoretical insights from contemporary communication theories with empirical findings from the Indonesian context, this study provides a more holistic and contextualized understanding of digital literacy. The conceptual framework developed here aims to bridge the gap between digital literacy as a set of technical skills and its broader role in shaping digital citizenship, identity, and community engagement in the digital age.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communicative digital literacy goes beyond mere technical proficiency; it includes

the ability to understand the characteristics of digital mediation such as algorithms, content filtering mechanisms, and virtual interaction patterns within the digital space. Such understanding is essential before one can produce content or actively participate in the digital world. Digital literacy is not a passive process but a communicative competence requiring critical awareness of how information is presented and influenced by digital technology (Mona & Kawilarang, 2022).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital literacy campaigns played a significant role in fostering a creative and critical mentality among urban communities. These efforts enhanced people's ability to comprehend and utilize digital technologies more effectively. However, these campaigns also revealed persistent digital divides, especially along age and education level lines, which hinder equitable access to and mastery of digital skills (Ahmad, 2022). Young people tend to acquire digital communication skills more quickly, particularly through increasingly popular video conferencing platforms. In contrast, vulnerable groups such as the elderly and individuals with low educational backgrounds have not benefited equally from these technological advances. This underscores the need for inclusive and adaptive approaches to improving digital literacy to ensure equal participation across all segments of society (Neubaum et al., 2025).

Communicative digital literacy extends beyond classical theories like Uses and Gratifications or Media Ecology. It also emphasizes socio-cognitive approaches and digital ethics, which focus on how individuals not only receive but actively process and evaluate messages within broader social and moral contexts. Media framing theory is also relevant in understanding how content generated by artificial intelligence (AI) or algorithms is delivered and interpreted by society, influencing public perception and responses. In Indonesia, a recent survey by Hasanuddin University (2025) revealed that only about 32% of the population possesses sufficient digital literacy to critically understand and evaluate AI-generated content. This indicates a significant gap in the public’s ability to navigate the increasingly complex information landscape dominated by advanced technology.

The increase in internet penetration in Indonesia—reaching approximately 79% by 2024 (Santika, 2024 in Hasanuddin University, 2025)—has widened access to information but also presents serious challenges related to the spread of false information, hoaxes, and disinformation on social media. In this context, the ability to critically evaluate content becomes crucial. Digital literacy involves not only technical skills in using technology but also a deep understanding of the validity of information, the motives behind digital messages, and the consequences of disseminating them in public spaces. Educational strategies need to be adapted to be more contextual and reach communities directly. Community-based approaches involving families, schools, and societal agents such as local organizations and religious or cultural leaders are increasingly important. As Sari (2021) emphasized, digital literacy must be built from the ground up with attention to the local social and cultural context. Such approaches expand the reach of educational efforts and strengthen communities’ resilience to misinformation, fostering a healthier and

more responsible digital ecosystem.

Digital literacy training provided to university students during the pandemic had a positive impact, particularly in enhancing mastery of learning-support applications such as Zoom, Google Classroom, and academic search engines. This directly contributed to improved learning outcomes and the effectiveness of distance learning, which had previously been unfamiliar to higher education in Indonesia (Tuwu et al., 2022). However, different conditions were observed at the secondary education level. A quantitative evaluation of high school students in Ternate showed that their digital literacy scores were only in the medium category, with the weakest dimension being hypertext navigation—skills related to moving between and understanding information across digital pages or sources (Amin et al., 2021). This finding highlights the need for a more comprehensive digital literacy approach that not only focuses on technology use but also on understanding the structure and logic of complex digital information. Such efforts are essential to ensure that digital literacy develops evenly across all educational levels.

The role of the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kominfo) is crucial in facilitating and expanding digital literacy campaigns in Indonesia. Since 2020, Kominfo has launched an ambitious program targeting 50 million citizens by 2024 through the Agent of Change movement. This campaign uses culturally adaptive approaches tailored to local contexts to ensure that digital literacy messages are understood and effectively applied by people across age groups, backgrounds, and regions (Kominfo, 2021). This initiative reflects the state's effort to build an inclusive, participatory, and resilient digital society.

Furthermore, the need for communicative digital literacy is closely tied to the national regulatory framework, especially regarding digital content moderation. One of the latest policies is the implementation of the National Safe Analysis and Moderation System (SAMAN) by the Ministry of Communication and Digital Affairs (Kemkomdigi) in early 2025. SAMAN was developed in response to the growing spread of illegal and harmful content in the digital space. This policy is not merely technical but demands the involvement of a digitally literate public to actively help create a healthy, ethical, and safe digital environment (Menkomdigi, 2025).

Community involvement as information gatekeepers is a key strategy in addressing the dissemination of unverified information. Families, local organizations like Karang Taruna and PKK, and other socially grounded communities are encouraged to take an active role in filtering, evaluating, and distributing valid information within their surroundings (Sari, 2021). This approach positions communities not merely as information consumers but as communication actors with critical competence regarding digital content. Critical thinking becomes a fundamental component in building a digital communication ecosystem that is inclusive and adaptive to Indonesia’s sociocultural context.

From a theoretical perspective, the concept of metaliteracy developed by Mackey and Jacobson (2011) offers a strong conceptual foundation for the development of communicative digital literacy. This theory integrates various forms of literacy—media, digital, informational, and visual—into a single framework that emphasizes individuals' active roles in ethically and reflectively producing, evaluating, and distributing information. The metaliteracy approach supports participatory digital communication strategies that are not top-down and encourage critical engagement from all parties.

This model is highly relevant in Indonesia's diverse and dynamic context, where the success of digital literacy is determined not only by technology but also by the quality of social interaction it fosters. The aim is to build a conceptual framework for communicative digital literacy that integrates theoretical dimensions and empirical findings from various studies in Indonesia and globally. This framework not only summarizes the development of digital literacy in technological contexts but also emphasizes the communicative, social, and cultural aspects that shape how individuals and communities interact in digital spaces.

By combining insights from contemporary theories such as metaliteracy, media framing, and socio-cognitive approaches, this article offers a more holistic and contextual conceptual foundation. This foundation is expected to serve as a basis for developing more relevant digital literacy education strategies and critical-cultural digital communication policies. Such efforts are essential to address contemporary challenges like widespread disinformation, the construction and protection of digital identity, and the increasingly complex dynamics of multimodal interaction in the digital media era. With this approach, digital literacy becomes not just a set of skills but part of an inclusive, reflective, and ethical social transformation in facing the realities of current and future digital communication.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the concept of communicative digital literacy within the context of digital media development and contemporary communication practices. A qualitative approach allows the researcher to explore the phenomenon in a contextual and interpretative manner, focusing on meaning, processes, and the complexity of social interactions in digital spaces (Creswell, 2021). As this is a conceptual study, the "sample" refers to the body of existing literature rather than human participants. The data sources include a wide range of secondary materials relevant to the research focus, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy documents, research reports, and credible online publications. These sources were selected for their relevance to the topics of digital literacy, digital media, and communication theory, both within Indonesian and global contexts.

Instruments and Procedures

The primary method used in this study is library research (studi pustaka), which involves systematic data collection from existing literature to explore, compare, and synthesize both theoretical and empirical insights. This method is particularly suitable for qualitative studies as it helps to strengthen the theoretical foundation and provides a holistic understanding of complex issues (Sugiyono, 2019). The procedure began with the identification of relevant literature by using keywords such as "digital literacy," "digital media," "communicative competence," and "communication theory." The researcher then selected credible and up-to-date academic sources, specifically those published between 2016 and 2025, to ensure the currency and relevance of the findings. After that, the selected literature was reviewed and categorized according to thematic relevance. Finally, key ideas and theoretical perspectives were extracted and synthesized to construct a comprehensive conceptual framework of communicative digital literacy.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process employed thematic content analysis, which was carried out in three main stages. The first stage involved identifying core issues and key concepts across the reviewed literature to uncover recurring themes and patterns. In the second stage, thematic coding was conducted, where the content was categorized based on specific analytical dimensions such as ethical communication, digital engagement, media framing, algorithmic influence, and social participation. The third stage consisted of a critical interpretation of the findings to construct a conceptual framework of communicative digital literacy that integrates both global theoretical perspectives and localized Indonesian contexts. To ensure the validity of the data, the study utilized source triangulation by comparing insights from multiple references and study contexts. This method supports the objective of developing a conceptual understanding that informs the creation of inclusive, critical, and adaptive digital communication strategies, particularly relevant in addressing the increasing complexity of today's digital landscape.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Through literature review and qualitative-descriptive analysis, several key findings emerged, leading to new understandings of how digital literacy develops and functions within the context of Indonesia's digital society.

The Role of Digital Media in Shaping Interactive Communication

The development of digital media in recent years has facilitated a significant shift in how communication takes place in society. Unlike traditional mass media, which tend to be one-way, digital media allow for two-way interactions and active audience participation (Neubaum et al., 2025). In the digital sphere, the audience is not only a receiver of information but also a content producer, enabling dialogue

and collaboration across various platforms. This transformation affects both interpersonal relationships and public-institutional interactions, where feedback and active participation become integral to communication processes. This phenomenon illustrates how digital media drive changes toward more open, democratic, and inclusive social communication patterns (Santika, 2024).

Digital media also create spaces for the dynamic formation of public opinion. On platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, users share opinions, interact, and co-create discourse (Sari, 2021). Moreover, digital media accelerate the information distribution process, facilitate public participation in socio-political issues, and enable broader and faster access to information. Communication patterns once dominated by major institutions have shifted, allowing individuals and communities greater influence over media agendas. This shift has opened new opportunities for strengthening social and cultural identities, as individuals or communities shape and reinforce their identities in the digital world (Kominfo, 2021).

Beyond shaping opinion and identity, digital media also play a role in constructing social meaning within the digital space. This process involves continuous interaction among individuals and groups to create shared meanings. In the digital world, social meanings are often shaped through interaction patterns that include images, texts, and videos—all of which influence public perception and belief. Therefore, critical digital literacy skills are essential for distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate information and for understanding the context behind messages. Communicative digital literacy is crucial in combating the spread of disinformation in digital spaces, especially given the algorithmic influence on how information is disseminated (Neubaum et al., 2025).

Critical and Reflective Dimensions in Digital Literacy

Communicative digital literacy encompasses more than just technical skills in using digital devices or applications. Effective digital literacy also involves critical and reflective thinking skills, particularly in understanding the dynamics behind information dissemination in digital spaces (Neubaum et al., 2025). A key aspect of critical digital literacy is the ability to read the context of information, including how it is constructed, selected, and distributed. This includes awareness of algorithms used by digital platforms to personalize and filter content. Such competencies are vital in addressing challenges like misinformation, hoaxes, and algorithmic bias that can shape public perceptions of issues or events (Mona & Kawilarang, 2022).

In addition, critical and reflective digital literacy demands that individuals assess the credibility of information found in digital media (Sari, 2021). With a vast array of unverified content circulating online, users must be able to evaluate sources, context, and information quality. This includes determining whether the source is reliable, whether there is an underlying agenda, and whether the message has been

framed in a way that alters its original meaning. Social media algorithms often reinforce "filter bubbles" that expose users only to content aligning with their existing views, limiting their understanding of other perspectives. Skills in recognizing these phenomena and engaging in broader, more diverse dialogue are essential to developing truly communicative digital literacy (Santika, 2024).

The critical and reflective dimensions of digital literacy are closely related to framing theory, which highlights how media shape audience perceptions of issues. In the digital realm, framing is not only done by traditional media but also by algorithms and user interactions. Thus, digital literacy must include the ability to deconstruct these framing structures, evaluate their impact on public opinion, and participate actively in shaping more inclusive and responsible meanings. With critical understanding of algorithms and personalized content, society can become more discerning in digital information consumption, avoiding manipulation and disinformation that could undermine social and political cohesion (Hasanuddin, 2025).

Inequality and the Challenge of Inclusive Digital Literacy

Digital literacy inequality in Indonesia poses a major challenge to ensuring inclusive access to information in the digital age. Despite growing internet penetration, recent data shows that only around 32% of Indonesians possess critical digital literacy skills regarding AI-generated content (Hasanuddin, 2025). This reveals a significant gap in the ability to understand and evaluate information produced or distributed by algorithms, including recognizing bias, manipulation, or disinformation. Moreover, vulnerable groups such as the elderly and those with low educational backgrounds often lag in access and understanding of digital technologies. Their lack of access to and understanding of digital information critically and ethically makes them particularly susceptible to the negative effects of digital media, including the spread of hoaxes and disinformation (Amin et al., 2021).

To address this gap, it is vital to develop educational approaches that reach all segments of society, especially digitally marginalized groups. One potential solution is community-based initiatives involving local organizations and families, such as Karang Taruna and PKK. These grassroots programs can bridge the digital divide, especially in remote areas and among older generations who are not fully integrated into digital life. These programs not only teach technical skills but also foster critical awareness of safe, ethical, and responsible digital media use. This is crucial for building an inclusive digital ecosystem where everyone can participate with full understanding and control over the information they access and share (Sari, 2021).

Strengthening both formal and non-formal education is key to achieving digital equity across all social layers. Locally tailored digital literacy programs—through community training or school and university curriculum integration—can help

accelerate the distribution of digital competencies in Indonesia. This aligns with government policies focused on equal access and improved digital literacy quality so that all citizens, regardless of age or educational background, can positively, productively, and critically engage with digital potential (Hasanuddin, 2025).

Integrating Theoretical Perspectives in Communicative Digital Literacy

Integrating theoretical perspectives into communicative digital literacy is essential to understanding digital skills not just as technical abilities, but as critical and reflective competencies for engaging with digital information. One highly relevant theory is metaliteracy, which unifies information, media, visual, and digital literacy within a framework that emphasizes analytical and ethical engagement with information (Mackey & Jacobson, 2011). This approach sees digital literacy as a dynamic, ongoing process where individuals not only access but also create, evaluate, and share information in broader, reflective contexts. In the ever-evolving digital world, the ability to critically and ethically evaluate information is vital, and this theory reinforces the importance of a holistic approach to communicative digital literacy (Mackey & Jacobson, 2011).

Furthermore, metaliteracy introduces the idea of participatory literacy—the ability to engage in the active and responsible creation and distribution of information. In this context, digital literacy includes not just technical competence but also the capacity to participate in shaping social meanings in digital spaces. This transforms communication from a centralized, one-way model into an inclusive and participatory process. Digitally literate individuals do not merely consume information but contribute consciously to content creation, understanding the social, political, and ethical implications of their digital interactions. This approach ensures that digital spaces remain democratic arenas where diverse voices and perspectives are acknowledged (Neubaum et al., 2025).

In practice, applying metaliteracy provides a strong foundation for developing more inclusive digital communication strategies rooted in two-way dialogue rather than one-way information delivery. For example, social media can be used not only to distribute information but also to facilitate discussion, reflection, and active participation. Communicative digital literacy based on metaliteracy requires continuous critical reflection on the role of technology in shaping communication and interaction, both personally and socially. Thus, integrating this theoretical approach helps cultivate a more intelligent, reflective, and responsible digital society prepared to navigate the growing complexity of the digital communication landscape (Hasanuddin, 2025).

Policy Contributions and Government Role

The Indonesian government plays a crucial role in shaping digital literacy policy, particularly through institutions such as the Ministry of Communication and Information (Kominfo) and the Ministry of Digital Communication (Kemkomdigi).

Since 2020, Kominfo has launched the Agent of Change program to improve digital literacy among 50 million Indonesians by 2024. This program not only teaches technical skills but also encourages critical thinking about online information. It aims to cultivate wiser digital behavior and deepen public understanding of the social and political impacts of digital technologies (Kominfo, 2021). Additionally, content moderation policies—such as the SAMAN system implemented by Kemkomdigi in early 2025—aim to reduce the spread of harmful or illegal content that undermines information integrity. These policies highlight the need for synergy between education and regulation to foster a safer and more trustworthy digital communication environment.

However, the effectiveness of such policies depends on two main factors. First is the degree of public participation and readiness to adopt new knowledge and behaviors. Without active public engagement, programs like Agent of Change will struggle to reach all layers of society, especially in digitally marginalized areas or among vulnerable groups such as the elderly or low-educated (Amin et al., 2021). Second is equitable infrastructure. Despite expanding internet access, many Indonesian regions still suffer from limited connectivity in both quality and quantity. Without adequate infrastructure, inclusive and fair distribution of digital literacy remains difficult. The government must therefore collaborate with all sectors to improve infrastructure and provide accessible training for all (Neubaum et al., 2025).

On the other hand, while content moderation is important for safety, it must also uphold freedom of expression and individual rights. One major challenge is ensuring that such regulations are not misused to suppress free speech or manipulate public discourse. A balance must be struck between curbing harmful content and protecting open public dialogue (Menkomdigi, 2025). This further underscores the importance of inclusive cooperation between government, civil society, and the private sector in building a sustainable and healthy digital ecosystem. Effective digital literacy policy cannot rely solely on technical regulations but requires broad, collaborative efforts to address Indonesia's complex digital challenges.

The transformation of communication in the digital era has fundamentally altered how information is disseminated and understood. In the past, traditional communication models placed mass media as the central channel through which messages flowed one-way from source to audience. However, the advent of digital technology and the internet has dismantled this structure, creating a new space where communication has become increasingly interactive and participatory. Digital media platforms—such as social media, video-sharing platforms, and online forums—have empowered audiences not only as recipients of messages but also as creators and distributors of information. This shift reflects interactive media theory, which positions audiences as active participants who engage, collaborate, and co-construct meaning through digital technologies.

This paradigm shift has had profound implications for social relationships and communication dynamics, both on individual and societal levels. Social media, for instance, has become a new public sphere where individuals can express opinions, shape identities, and engage in global conversations on social, political, and cultural issues. This transformation not only changes how we communicate but also how we perceive our roles and responsibilities in communication. In this highly connected environment, each individual holds the potential to influence and shape public opinion—through both the content they create and how they engage with existing information. As a result, communicative digital literacy becomes essential, encompassing the ability to understand and critically engage in digital communication.

Communicative digital literacy extends beyond technical skills such as using devices or apps. It involves critical and reflective capacities to evaluate, interpret, and filter information. Understanding algorithms—which determine how information is distributed in the digital world—is also vital. These algorithms often shape what we see on social media and in search results, subtly influencing perceptions and opinions. Without critical skills, individuals risk becoming trapped in filtered or biased information loops, exacerbating social polarization and the spread of disinformation. Therefore, communicative digital literacy is not just about knowing how to use technology, but about understanding and assessing its social and political impacts.

As digital media continues to evolve, there is an urgent need to strengthen communicative digital literacy across all segments of society. This skillset enables individuals to understand not only how technology functions but also how digital messages affect social values, norms, and behavior. Inclusive and reflective literacy practices are key to ensuring that digital media is used positively—to enhance democratic participation, strengthen social relationships, and foster critical cultural development. Thus, digital literacy education must prioritize the cultivation of mindsets that promote awareness of technology's societal implications.

In line with this, both government and educational institutions play a vital role in building a comprehensive digital literacy framework. Such programs must go beyond technical instruction to include ethical and reflective components, equipping society to become wise and responsible technology users. The Indonesian government, through initiatives like the Agent of Change program launched by Kominfo, has made significant strides in introducing digital literacy to the wider population. However, challenges remain in equalizing access and quality of digital education, especially for vulnerable groups who continue to face difficulties in accessing technology and information. Strengthening communicative digital literacy not only creates technically skilled users but also cultivates socially aware citizens in the digital age.

Digital literacy, therefore, emerges as a critical and ethical communicative competence—one that goes beyond simply accessing or disseminating information.

Amid the rapid spread of information across digital platforms, the ability to critically interpret and assess content is essential. Communicative digital literacy entails recognizing and evaluating various types of information, including manipulative, false, or misleading content that often circulates quickly in digital spaces. These competencies encompass not only source evaluation and fact-checking but also understanding the broader context in which information is produced and shared. With this contextual awareness, individuals can make wiser decisions in how they receive and distribute messages.

Such depth of understanding is crucial for recognizing the social and psychological impact of digital messages. In a landscape increasingly shaped by social media algorithms and automated content curation, individuals must be able to examine sources, identify bias, and detect manipulation. The rise of digital technologies—including artificial intelligence in content distribution—has further complicated the task of identifying disinformation and hoaxes. Hence, critical digital literacy is not only about detecting inaccuracies but also about grasping how media structures influence our perception and interpretation of reality.

Moreover, critical skills in digital literacy must be accompanied by an ethical and socially grounded approach to communication. Digital literacy education must include not only technical and analytical training but also moral education that teaches social responsibility, communication ethics, and critical awareness. In a world where technology continues to evolve, we need more than just the ability to access and share information—we must learn to engage ethically and constructively in digital spaces. This awareness fosters inclusive, just, and dignified communities in both online and offline contexts.

In this regard, social media's powerful communicative role underscores the necessity of critical and ethical digital competence. In a digital world where messages often spread uncontrollably, individuals must understand the consequences of the information they share. It is no longer enough to have the freedom to communicate; individuals must also consider how their actions affect others—whether by shaping public opinion, intensifying polarization, or inciting harm. Therefore, digital literacy education should emphasize ethical values and social responsibility, helping individuals think twice before hitting "share," and encouraging them to understand the real-world consequences of their digital interactions.

Thus, the development of communicative digital literacy that is both critical and ethical becomes integral to building a smarter, more responsible digital society. Digital literacy is not merely about knowing how to operate digital tools, but about equipping individuals with the awareness and skill to communicate wisely, reflectively, and responsibly. Only by achieving this can we harness digital media for positive purposes, preserve communication quality, and promote dignified social participation in the digital public sphere.

However, a significant digital literacy gap remains between younger generations and vulnerable groups such as the elderly and the less educated. Only a small portion of the population possesses adequate digital literacy to critically engage in online spaces. Vulnerable groups often face barriers such as limited access to modern technology, lower levels of education, and unfamiliarity with digital tools. The consequences of this gap are far-reaching—not just in terms of information access, but also in the ability to evaluate and respond to online content, including hoaxes and misinformation. These groups are frequently targeted for manipulation or excluded from increasingly digital social processes.

This disparity reinforces existing social inequalities. Those with greater access and understanding of digital technology are able to capitalize on information, engage in public discourse, and develop their social identities more actively. Meanwhile, those left behind lack not only access but also the ability to interact critically with the digital world. Consequently, they are more susceptible to misinformation and are at risk of being further marginalized in digital discourse. Addressing this requires an understanding of digital literacy that goes beyond technology access—it must include the skills to contextualize, filter, and ethically navigate information.

One effective solution is adopting community-based educational approaches tailored to local needs. Such contextualized digital literacy training can bridge the gap between tech-savvy youth and vulnerable groups unfamiliar with digital environments. Community-based education such as that provided by grassroots organizations like Karang Taruna and PKK can play a crucial role in spreading digital knowledge and skills. These efforts must go beyond formal settings like schools, reaching people through informal and accessible formats that resonate with everyday life, especially for underserved populations.

This strategy ensures that digital literacy content is easier to understand and more relevant to daily experiences. Community involvement also helps individuals internalize knowledge and adapt more smoothly to digital transformations. Moreover, this approach strengthens digital resilience, enabling communities to become more alert to threats like hoaxes or fake news and empowering them to become active participants in the digital space. Achieving true digital inclusivity, therefore, requires collaboration between government and civil society to create and implement digital literacy programs that reflect local realities and address specific vulnerabilities.

Closing the digital literacy gap demands a holistic and inclusive approach in which all layers of society actively engage with digital technology critically and ethically. Enhancing digital literacy among vulnerable groups not only increases their access to information and technology but also strengthens their capacity to participate in the social, political, and economic development of a digital society. Educational programs that emphasize local context and critical understanding of digital information are strategic tools for bridging this divide and reinforcing Indonesia's overall digital resilience.

In this context, the theory of metaliteracy offers a vital framework for advancing a more comprehensive and profound form of digital literacy. Metaliteracy integrates multiple literacies—media, information, digital, and visual—into a cohesive and interconnected model. It emphasizes communicative skills that involve not only accessing and sharing information but also critically evaluating and reflecting on digital content. As a foundation for communicative digital literacy, metaliteracy promotes the development of reflective and participatory abilities, encouraging users to become not only consumers but also ethical and responsible contributors to the digital information ecosystem.

This approach enables a more dynamic form of digital literacy education, one that views media and information within broader, more complex social contexts. It is particularly relevant in light of rapid technological advances that influence how people interact, form opinions, and construct social meaning. As digital platforms become more sophisticated, a deeper understanding of algorithms, content filtering, and the consequences of digital interactions becomes essential. Thus, metaliteracy fosters skills that go beyond technical proficiency, empowering users to participate actively in shaping social and cultural meanings within digital spaces.

Through the lens of metaliteracy, digital users are encouraged to critically assess information and recognize its potential impacts. Rather than being passive audiences, individuals are urged to take active roles in evaluating, creating, and sharing information ethically. This also supports the development of productive digital skills, enabling innovation, collaboration, and the creation of meaningful content. Metaliteracy thus provides a robust theoretical foundation for a form of digital literacy that is not merely consumptive but also socially and politically participatory in an increasingly complex digital society.

Applied to the Indonesian context, metaliteracy can help address persistent challenges such as the digital literacy gap between younger generations and vulnerable groups. By integrating media, information, digital, and visual elements into a unified educational approach, communities become better equipped to navigate digital communication critically. This includes learning to interpret digital messages in relation to cultural, social, and political contexts, an essential component in fostering inclusive, critical, and ethical communication in today's digital era.

The relevance of metaliteracy is thus clear in its potential to shape more reflective, participatory, and inclusive digital communication. By integrating diverse literacy dimensions into a holistic framework, it effectively addresses the complexities of the digital world. Ethical and critical digital literacy becomes the cornerstone for creating a healthier, more responsible, and meaningful digital communication environment.

Finally, the Indonesian government has demonstrated a clear commitment to strengthening digital literacy through strategic policies and initiatives led by institutions such as the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kominfo) and the Ministry of Digitalization and Information (Kemkomdigi). Kominfo's Agent of Change program, launched in 2020, aims to train digital literacy ambassadors across communities to expand digital education inclusively. Similarly, the implementation of the SAMAN digital content moderation system by Kemkomdigi in early 2025 underscores a serious effort to curb the spread of illegal and misleading content online. These policies target not just technical regulation but also behavioral change, promoting responsible and ethical digital media use.

Nonetheless, the success of these initiatives depends heavily on cross-sector collaboration involving local governments, educational institutions, community organizations, and the private sector. Community involvement is key to bridging persistent digital literacy gaps, especially among vulnerable groups. Through communicative and context-sensitive approaches, digital literacy education can be localized to meet specific community needs and challenges. This ensures that digital literacy is not just a formal program but becomes a lived practice embedded in daily life.

Active stakeholder collaboration further enhances implementation by fostering a healthy, inclusive, and secure digital ecosystem. Engagement with local communities, social organizations like Karang Taruna and PKK, and educational institutions expands digital literacy capacity equitably and sustainably. Strengthening digital literacy through government policy thus goes beyond regulation it becomes a foundation for communicative education grounded in critical, ethical, and reflective media engagement. This synergy is a key strategy for building a digitally intelligent, participatory, and responsible society capable of navigating the complexities of digital information in the modern era.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion presented in the previous chapters, it can be concluded that communicative digital literacy is a more complex concept than merely the technical ability to use digital devices. In the context of rapidly evolving digital media, digital literacy must be understood as a communicative competence that includes critical, ethical, and reflective understanding of the content, context, and impact of digital communication. Digital media has transformed the nature of both public and interpersonal communication—from a one-way model to interactive and participatory communication. This shift creates space for individuals not only to receive information but also to actively participate in the production and distribution of messages.

Communicative digital literacy requires skills in reading, understanding, and evaluating the vast amount of information circulating in digital spaces. Although awareness of the importance of digital literacy is increasing, there remains a

significant gap in digital literacy skills across various social groups in Indonesia. Vulnerable populations, such as the elderly and those with low educational backgrounds, still face considerable challenges in accessing and critically understanding digital information. This gap highlights the need for more contextual and community-based educational approaches to strengthen digital literacy equitably.

The use of the metaliteracy theory has proven relevant in developing communicative digital literacy. This theory integrates media, information, digital, and visual literacies, offering a more holistic understanding of increasingly complex digital communication. Digital literacy should not be viewed merely as a technical skill but as a competence that emphasizes ethics, reflection, and participation in the digital society. Government policies, such as the "agent of change" program by Kominfo and the implementation of SAMAN by Kemkomdigi, demonstrate a commitment to strengthening digital literacy and content moderation. However, the success of these programs greatly depends on active public participation as critical gatekeepers of information, ensuring safe and dignified digital communication. Strengthening communicative digital literacy is a strategic step in addressing the challenges of communication in an increasingly complex digital era. It will help foster a society that is not only technologically literate but also capable of participating critically, ethically, and reflectively in digital spaces.

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