

The Role of Civics Teachers in Fostering Responsible Attitudes as Digital Citizens Among Students at SMKN 1 Jerowaru

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Abstract

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The rising internet penetration among students has not yet been fully matched by responsible attitudes regarding digital media usage. This qualitative study, employing a phenomenological approach, aims to describe the role of Pancasila and Civic Education (PPKn) teachers, analyze their strategies, and identify the factors that facilitate or hinder the development of responsible digital citizenship attitudes among students at SMKN 1 Jerowaru. Informants were selected purposively, comprising 24 eleventh-grade students, one PPKn teacher, and the school principal. Data were collected through non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation; they were subsequently analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model and validated through source, technique, and time triangulation. The results indicate that the PPKn teacher acts as a values educator, digital role model, digital literacy facilitator, digital ethics guide, and a figure of oversight and direction. These roles are enacted through five strategies: modeling, habituation, integrating civic values into instruction, strengthening digital literacy, and providing supervision and guidance. This attitude formation is supported by school policies, facilities and infrastructure, inter-teacher coordination, and parental involvement; however, it remains hindered by students' difficulties in distinguishing valid information from hoaxes, the influence of viral content, limited internet connectivity, and a perceptual gap between the principal and the students.

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of digital technology has transformed how people communicate, learn, and participate in social life. This transformation has given rise to a new virtual public sphere where every participant is essentially a "digital citizen"—an individual possessing both the right and the responsibility to use technology appropriately, ethically, and responsibly (Ribble, 2015). In the context of education, digital technology has become an integral part of the lives of learners growing up as "digital natives"; consequently, there is a need for preparedness regarding values, ethics, and responsibility to ensure that technology usage does not negatively impact students' character development (UNESCO, 2023).

This imperative is particularly urgent in Indonesia due to the country's massive internet penetration. An APJII survey (2024) recorded a national internet penetration rate of 79.50%, with the 13–18 age group (students) exhibiting the highest penetration at 99.16%. However, this high level of access has not been matched by corresponding behavioral competence. The Digital Civility Index ranks Indonesian netizens low in terms of digital civility within Southeast Asia (Khairunnisa et al., 2024; Purwantiningsih et al., 2022), and the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (2022) has noted that while digital literacy stands at a moderate level, the pillars of digital ethics and digital security remain the weakest.

Responsible digital citizenship entails more than just the ability to avoid negative content; it represents an individual's conscious approach to interaction, collaboration, and creation in cyberspace—encompassing communication ethics, academic integrity, and responsibility for personal data security. Without such an attitude, the convenience offered by technology risks being misused to spread misinformation, violate others' privacy, or incite social conflict; meanwhile, a digital footprint managed unwisely can impact a student's future reputation, academic prospects, and career. Therefore, instilling this attitude during their school years lays a character foundation that determines the quality of young people's participation in digital life.

Conceptually, the development of this attitude can be understood through three complementary frameworks. Ribble (2015) views digital responsibility as a component of digital citizenship, emphasizing the safe, ethical, and responsible use of technology. Lickona (2013) explains that good character comprises moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action—qualities shaped through role modeling and habituation—while Bandura's social learning theory (2021) asserts that behavior is learned through the observation and imitation of models. In this study, the attitude of digital responsibility is operationalized into six indicators: using digital media wisely for learning, avoiding plagiarism, protecting privacy

and personal data, using polite language, maintaining awareness of one's digital footprint, and possessing the ability to filter information and refrain from spreading hoaxes.

Schools are required to make tangible efforts to instill such attitudes, including those in non-urban areas. SMKN 1 Jerowaru in East Lombok Regency is a multimedia-focused vocational high school—offering specializations such as Multimedia and Culinary Arts—where students interact with digital devices and platforms on a daily basis. Preliminary observations on July 18, 2026, revealed that students use social media to upload their practical work and promote positive school activities, while also utilizing various online resources for learning. The school has also declared itself an "Anti-Bullying School" through educational campaigns and the display of posters regarding digital literacy and ethics; meanwhile, Civics Education (PPKn) classes serve as the primary venue for directly instilling a sense of digital responsibility in students.

Civics teachers hold a strategic position in these efforts. As professional educators tasked with educating, guiding, and directing students (Republic of Indonesia, 2005), Civics teachers are responsible for developing civic competencies that encompass civic knowledge, skills, and character (Winataputra, 2015). In the digital era, this responsibility extends to guiding students to become ethical digital citizens. Civics teachers at this school act as a bridge between formal school rules and the students' actual practices in the digital realm.

Several studies have examined Civics instruction and students' digital character. Pratama (2021) found that integrating moral values into Civics lessons could curb negative student behavior on social media, though the study focused on digital literacy in general. Putri Setyowati (2021) demonstrated that Civics instruction raises student awareness regarding digital rights and obligations, but the study emphasized school policies and regulations. Zahra et al. (2024) identified the influence of digital citizenship on students' global diversity character, yet their research was conducted within an urban school context. Few studies have specifically examined the role of Civics (PPKn) teachers in fostering responsible digital citizenship attitudes through daily classroom practices in vocational schools located in non-urban areas. Therefore, this study aims to describe the role of Civics teachers, analyze the strategies employed, and examine the supporting and inhibiting factors involved in cultivating responsible digital citizenship attitudes among students at SMKN 1 Jerowaru.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a phenomenological research design. A qualitative approach was selected to gain an in-depth understanding of the meanings underlying human actions within natural

settings, with the researcher serving as the key instrument (Sugiyono, 2022). The phenomenological approach was utilized to explore the subjective experiences of Civics Education (PPKn) teachers in performing their roles, as well as the students' experiences in developing a sense of responsibility as digital citizens. The research was conducted at SMKN 1 Jerowaru—located in Jerowaru District, East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara—which was purposively selected due to its implementation of digital-based learning and the presence of Civics Education teachers who are actively engaged in student character education. Data collection took place from July to September 2026.

Informants were selected purposively based on their involvement with and understanding of the research focus, resulting in a total of 26 participants, as presented in Table 1. Informant identities have been masked using initials to ensure confidentiality.

Table 1. Research Informants

Group of Informants	Amount	Information
Grade 11 students	24	Multimedia and Culinary specialization programs; aged 15–17; 20 females and 4 males.
Civics Teacher (AR)	1	Key informant; holds a Bachelor's degree in Law; 19 years of work experience.
School Principal	1	Supporting informants (triangulation)
Amount	26	

Data were collected using three techniques. First, non-participant observation—where the researcher acted solely as an independent observer (Romdana et al., 2025)—was conducted during Civics (PPKn) lessons and students' digital activities. Second, interviews—defined as face-to-face interpersonal interactions to elicit responses regarding the research problem (Rivaldi et al., 2023)—were carried out in a semi-structured format using an interview guide that did not mandate a specific sequence or wording of questions; these interviews took place both in person and via WhatsApp. Third, documentation (Thalib et al., 2022) included teaching modules, digital literacy posters, screenshots from WhatsApp groups and Google Classroom, and photographs of learning activities. The primary instrument was the researcher (acting as the human instrument), supported by an interview guide, observation sheets, and documentation.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification—processes that occurred concurrently until data saturation was reached. Data validity was verified through source triangulation (teachers, the principal, and students), technique triangulation (observation, interviews, and documentation), and time triangulation (Nurfajriani et al., 2024).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research results are presented based on three problem formulations: roles, strategies, and supporting as well as inhibiting factors. In general, most student informants demonstrated a basic understanding that activities in the digital space entail consequences and responsibilities. Understanding the proper use of social media encompasses three key aspects: the utility of content, polite language use, and the verification of information accuracy. One informant, RT, stated, “I use it for positive purposes, use polite language, check the accuracy of information, and protect my own privacy as well as that of others” (Interview with RT, July 27, 2026). The shared views expressed by several informants indicate that these fundamental principles are understood relatively consistently. These findings suggest the influence of repeated guidance provided by Civics (PPKn) teachers. Nevertheless, the extent to which this understanding is applied in daily digital behavior still varies among the informants.

The Role of Civics Teachers in Fostering Responsible Attitudes as Digital Citizens

The role of Civics (PPKn) teachers at SMKN 1 Jerowaru is not limited to delivering normative content during the learning process; it also extends to providing more active, contextual, and continuous guidance within the digital spaces that form part of the students' daily lives. Research findings reveal five interconnected and complementary roles, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The Role of Civics Education Teachers and Its Concrete Forms

Role	Concrete Implementation at SMKN 1 Jerowaru
Values educator	Linking the subject matter of citizens' rights and obligations to internet usage; discussing cases of hoaxes, hate speech, and cyberbullying through the teaching module "Pancasila Values in Digital Life."
Digital role model	Citing sources and respecting copyright, using AI as a learning aid, and communicating politely in the class WhatsApp group.

Role	Concrete Implementation at SMKN 1 Jerowaru
Digital literacy facilitator	Utilizing Google Classroom and Canva, and guiding students to use the computer lab and school Wi-Fi productively.
Digital ethics mentor	Reminding students to comment wisely and be mindful of their digital footprint; providing reflective guidance after a student makes a mistake.
Controller and director	Circulate around the classroom while students are using their devices, offer persuasive corrections, and coordinate quickly with the principal and the class teacher.

Teachers as values educators. Teachers instill Pancasila values and legal awareness by linking them to internet usage. Teacher AR explained that he "connects the material regarding citizens' rights and obligations with rights and responsibilities in internet usage—such as the right to access accurate information and the obligation to use digital media responsibly while respecting the rights of others." (Interview with AR, July 27, 2026). The impact is felt by the students. Informant PM stated that after learning about the values of humanity and unity in Civics (PPKn), he prefers to remain silent rather than making harsh comments, respects differing opinions on social media, and practices the habit of "filtering before sharing" in school WhatsApp groups. Observation notes and teaching modules indicate that lesson plans are effectively implemented in the classroom, with learning objectives that link the analysis of cases involving hoaxes, hate speech, and digital intolerance to the principles of Pancasila.

Teachers as digital role models. Teachers do not merely convey rules verbally but put them into practice. AR stated that he makes a habit of "accessing trusted learning sources, citing references, respecting copyright, and using AI as a learning aid rather than for copying assignments without understanding the material." (Interview with AR, July 27, 2026). Students confirmed this. Informant RO noted that "the teacher sets an example of polite social media use, respects privacy, and does not spread false information." (Interview with RO, July 27, 2026). Observations and screenshots of the class WhatsApp group also show the teacher routinely greeting students politely and presenting data from valid information sources.

Teachers as digital literacy facilitators. Teachers utilize Google Classroom for managing assignments and online discussions, and Canva for creative projects, such as posters for social media ethics campaigns. This role is supported by school policy. The principal stated, "The school allows them to use

the multimedia laboratory and provides free Wi-Fi, provided it is used for creating positive and respectful content.” (Interview with the principal, July 27, 2026). Most student informants mentioned that the school’s Wi-Fi and computer laboratory helped them research materials and complete assignments digitally.

Teachers as guides in digital ethics. This role was the one most frequently highlighted by students. The guidance provided is dialogic in nature, serving not only a preventive function but also curative and reflective ones. Informant NS recounted: “I once accidentally shared a news item that turned out to be a hoax. Upon learning the truth, I felt guilty and immediately deleted the post, then issued a clarification so that others wouldn't be misled.” (Interview with NS, July 27, 2026). Informant FM had a similar experience; thus, the unintentional spreading of hoaxes appears not to be an isolated incident but rather a relatively common pattern among students, underscoring the importance of reflective guidance from teachers.

Teachers act as controllers and guides. They monitor device usage by circulating through the classroom and offering persuasive corrections. The principal described a rapid, non-bureaucratic coordination process: “We have an internal WhatsApp group. If a Civics teacher sees a student posting a disrespectful status or comment online, they immediately notify the group so we can address the issue with the homeroom teacher that very day” (Interview with Principal, July 27, 2026). Informant HA recalled a teacher’s admonition emphasizing that while using a mobile phone was their right, the classroom setting also involved the teacher’s right to speak and their peers’ right to learn without distraction. Data from teachers, the principal, and students mutually reinforce the existence of a multi-layered control mechanism.

These five roles do not operate in isolation; rather, they form a unified whole that encompasses the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. These findings align with Ribble’s (2015) concept of digital citizenship, which calls for integrated education rather than merely technical instruction on device usage. The role of the teacher as a role model is supported by Bandura’s (2021) social learning theory: students do not simply memorize rules but emulate concrete patterns observed in their teachers—such as citing sources and phrasing requests for permission to ask questions politely in class groups. These findings also resonate with Rohili (2025), who asserts that a teacher’s exemplary behavior regarding social media use, information management, and online interaction is a primary factor influencing students' digital behavior.

The roles of values educator and ethics guide align with Lickona’s (2013) ideas: moral knowledge is cultivated through explanations of human rights and the ITE Law; moral feeling is fostered through reflective guidance when students regret their mistakes; and moral action is developed through habitual practices,

such as citing sources and using polite language. The synergy among these three roles explains why the shift in student attitudes appears relatively consistent, representing something more than mere superficial compliance with school rules. Thus, role modeling (Bandura, 2021) serves as the transmission mechanism; the moral knowing–feeling–action components (Lickona, 2013) constitute the character structure being developed; and elements of digital citizenship (Ribble, 2015) provide the substantive content to be internalized. The vocational high school (SMK) context adds a distinctive dimension, as students in Multimedia and Culinary Arts utilize social media to showcase their work, thereby making digital ethics education practical and directly relevant to their vocational needs.

Civic Education Teachers' Strategies for Fostering Responsible Attitudes as Digital Citizens

Based on the synthesis of interview data, these roles are enacted through five mutually reinforcing operational strategies. First, **Leading by Example**. Teachers demonstrate responsible digital behavior in front of students—such as not immediately trusting or sharing information, encouraging students to verify sources and content, and teaching them to recognize hallmarks of hoaxes (e.g., provocative headlines, unclear sources, or images that do not match the news content) (Interview with AR, July 27, 2026). Informant TM observed the teacher filtering for royalty-free images and verifying news via the Press Council website, while also recalling the teacher's message: "As a teacher, I cannot simply tell you to be honest and law-abiding online if I myself carelessly grab people's images without permission or use data from unclear sources" (WhatsApp interview with TM, September 2026). Teachers even include image source links and photographer credits in their presentation slides. Similar responses from informants BF, RO, NV, and UA indicate that leading by example is a consistent and recurring behavior among the teachers.

Second, **Habit Formation**. This is fostered through mandatory rules requiring a bibliography or source link at the end of every digital assignment utilizing internet-based information (Interview with AR, July 27, 2026), the practice of polite communication in learning groups (such as starting messages with a greeting), and routine activities—conducted every semester—that involve group discussions, news validity analysis, and the creation of social media ethics posters. The impact is evident in informant NH, who now records website addresses, author names, and access dates as source references. Informants NS, NA, FM, and others also use the term "plagiarism" when explaining why they cite sources, indicating that the term is repeatedly emphasized by teachers and has become part of the students' vocabulary.

Third, Integration of civic values into instruction. Teachers intentionally integrate material on human rights, legal norms, and citizens' rights and obligations with digital issues—such as the ITE Law and social media ethics—thereby distinguishing this instruction from technical digital literacy training. Informant RO noted that "the Civics material that left the deepest impression concerned the articles of the ITE Law prohibiting the dissemination of fake news (hoaxes) and hate speech based on ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group relations" (WhatsApp interview with RO, August 2026). This integration goes beyond mere knowledge acquisition, manifesting in tangible student projects such as campaign posters created on Canva and in-class presentations of case study findings.

Fourth, the strengthening of digital literacy. Teachers train students to search for, filter, and evaluate the credibility of information using case studies or current news events—enabling them to distinguish valid information from hoaxes, opinions, and provocative content (Interview with AR, July 27, 2026)—while also educating them on safe boundaries for using artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT to avoid plagiarism (Observation notes, July 27, 2026). Informant AH explained their approach: "verifying the authenticity of news by searching for similar topics on trusted official news sites or verified accounts" (Interview with AH, July 27, 2026). A similar pattern was observed among the majority of student informants.

Fifth, supervision and guidance. Teachers circulate while students use devices, provide feedback on group work drafts, and offer reflective guidance following instances of inappropriate posting—using case studies regarding the impact of hoaxes, cyberbullying, and privacy violations. Informant RS recounted a case involving a child-kidnapping hoax that led to a traveling vendor becoming the victim of mob violence; the teacher shared this story to emphasize that a single "share" click on unverified news can ruin a reputation or even cost an innocent person their life (WhatsApp interview with RS, September 2026). This strategy is reinforced by school policy. The principal stated, "I issued an official decree prohibiting bullying, whether in person or on social media. So, when Civics teachers reprimand or take action against students misbehaving in WhatsApp groups, they stand on firm ground because they are fully backed by school regulations" (Interview with the Principal, July 27, 2026).

These five strategies operate simultaneously: modeling provides concrete examples; habituation transforms those examples into routines; value integration establishes a philosophical-juridical foundation; digital literacy reinforcement equips students with critical thinking skills; and supervision-guidance serves as a corrective mechanism when deviations occur. This set of strategies aligns with Nasution's (2024) views on strengthening digital literacy,

habituating digital ethics, providing role models, and utilizing digital media, as well as with the findings of Ginanjar et al. (2025) regarding digital ethics education strategies, discussions on digital issues, and the fostering of responsible behavior among high school Civics teachers.

The students' habit of verifying sources before sharing information indicates that the cognitive and critical elements of digital literacy—as defined by Belshaw (2014)—are beginning to be internalized, albeit not yet uniformly. The habit of citing sources and respecting copyright reinforces constructive elements relevant to the competencies of vocational students who will eventually produce digital works. Furthermore, the link between the ITE Law and the subject matter regarding citizens' rights and obligations demonstrates that Civics Education (PPKn) is adapting to the digital realm as an extension of the public sphere (Winataputra, 2015). Teacher guidance that is reflective rather than repressive also supports Selwyn's (2016) view that the social risks associated with technology require human pedagogical engagement, rather than merely blocking systems or administrative regulations.

Supporting and Hindering Factors Faced by Civics Teachers

In carrying out these roles and strategies, Civics teachers encounter various factors that can either support or hinder the development process. These factors were identified based on data triangulation involving teachers, school principals, and students, and are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Aspect	Supporting Factors	Inhibiting Factors
School policy	Cyber-bullying policy; code of conduct includes sanctions for violations of internet ethics	Rule enforcement does not yet fully extend to student behavior outside the school's direct supervision
Facilities and infrastructure	Wi-Fi with a system to block inappropriate websites; computer/multimedia laboratory; classroom projectors	Internet connection is sometimes slow during simultaneous use

Aspect	Supporting Factors	Inhibiting Factors
Leadership coordination and support	Koordinasi rutin Senin pagi, grup Routine Monday morning coordination, teacher WhatsApp groups, evaluations following report card distribution; budget for positive activities; parental involvement.	-
School programs and culture	Anti-bullying program; digital literacy posters and campaigns on school bulletin boards	Viral content sparks curiosity and the desire to join in
Student capabilities and awareness	Most students are becoming accustomed to verifying information and citing sources	Some students struggle to distinguish between valid information and hoaxes; understanding of digital ethics is inconsistent
Students' social environment	Some peers remind each other to be polite	Some peers use rude language or spread negative content on social media; some students bring mobile phones in violation of the rules

The most prominent supporting factor is the school's official policy framework. The principal emphasized, “We have incorporated these internet ethics rules into the official school code of conduct. Consequently, if a student is caught mocking a peer on social media, the sanctions are clear—ranging from a formal reprimand to summoning the parents.” (Interview with the Principal, July 27, 2026). Support in terms of facilities, coordination among teachers (homeroom teachers, guidance counselors, and subject teachers), and parental involvement through regular meetings demonstrate that fostering this attitude is not solely the responsibility of the Civics teacher, but the result of a multi-layered guidance ecosystem. Informant MP identified the combination of a ban on mobile phone use during class, logical explanations from the Civics teacher, and teacher-facilitated sessions on cyber-ethics conducted with the police as key factors.

The most frequently cited obstacle is the difficulty in distinguishing between valid information and hoaxes. Teachers acknowledged that “not all students share the same understanding of digital ethics; consequently, some still use digital media solely for entertainment, lack diligence in verifying information, or are not accustomed to citing sources when completing assignments.” (Interview with AR, July 27, 2026). Informants RO and NH cited the difficulty of distinguishing facts from hoaxes; informants BF and NV highlighted the influence of viral content that triggers a "copycat" mentality; while informants NW and LR pointed to unstable internet connections. Informant NW also noted the challenge of maintaining focus due to social media notifications and online games, and informant HA acknowledged the influence of peers who lack wisdom in their usage. These findings indicate that the obstacles are not merely a matter of literacy, but also of students' self-regulation in managing digital distractions. The student's candid admission indicates that the internalization of values—specifically moral action within Lickona's (2013) framework—is occurring authentically rather than as a matter of mechanical compliance.

Another notable finding is the perceptual gap between the principal and the students. The principal stated, "To the best of our knowledge, no students have misused social media, either within or outside the school" (Interview with the Principal, July 27, 2026); conversely, a number of students admitted to having been tempted to access social media during lessons, share unverified information, or post inappropriate comments prior to receiving guidance from their teachers. This discrepancy highlights the limitations of managerial oversight compared to the micro-level realities better understood by Civics (PPKn) teachers, while simultaneously underscoring the importance of data derived from the perspective of the students.

The role of policy and facilities aligns with the findings of Ginanjar et al. (2025) and Gustifal et al. (2024), who identified limitations in technological infrastructure and the digital literacy readiness of teachers and students as determining factors; meanwhile, the gap between high technology usage and the daily application of digital citizenship values was also noted by Khairunnisa et al. (2024). The involvement of parents reinforces the findings of Purwantiningsih et al. (2022), who emphasized the complementary relationship between families and schools. In non-urban contexts, limited facilities are offset by routine coordination among teachers, internal WhatsApp groups, and close teacher-student relationships; this demonstrates that such closeness can serve as a distinct strength in shaping digital character, even amidst infrastructure constraints.

Overall, these findings indicate that the Civics Education (PPKn) subject in vocational high schools (SMK) has the potential to evolve into a primary vehicle

for digital citizenship education. Teacher practices that link human rights, legal norms, and citizens' rights and obligations with digital issues—such as the ITE Law, hoaxes, and cyberbullying—can serve as a model for Civics instruction that is contextual to students' vocational specializations, while also complementing previous studies that have rarely examined such practices in vocational schools within non-urban areas.

CONCLUSIONS

The role of Civics (PPKn) teachers in fostering responsible attitudes among students as digital citizens at SMKN 1 Jerowaru encompasses several dimensions: acting as value educators, digital role models, digital literacy facilitators, digital ethics guides, and figures who provide oversight and direction. These roles are enacted through five key strategies: leading by example, habituation, integrating civic values into instruction, strengthening digital literacy, and providing supervision and guidance. Implementation is supported by school policies, the availability of facilities and infrastructure, inter-teacher coordination, and parental involvement. However, challenges persist, such as students' difficulty in distinguishing valid information from hoaxes, the influence of viral content, limited internet connectivity, and differing perceptions between the school principal and the students.

Based on these findings, Civics teachers should develop instruction based on current digital case studies relevant to the lives of vocational students and utilize guidance journals to continuously monitor the development of students' digital attitudes. The school also needs to strengthen participatory reporting mechanisms—for instance, by appointing student digital ambassadors, improving internet network quality, and periodically evaluating anti-bullying programs. Meanwhile, future research could employ quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to measure the effectiveness of the implemented strategies and expand the scope of study to include vocational schools with different areas of specialization.

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