

# Digital Literacy Education in the Post-Truth Era: A Communication Sociology Perspective on Social Polarization

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The post-truth era has significantly transformed the way information was produced, interpreted, and disseminated in digital environments, particularly through social media platforms. This condition has intensified the spread of disinformation and strengthened social polarization in many societies. The problem was reflected in the limited ability of individuals, especially in educational contexts, to critically evaluate digital information and to engage in responsible communication in the online public sphere.

Digital literacy education was proposed as an essential strategy to improve critical thinking skills and ethical communication in the digital learning environment. Strengthening digital literacy in educational practices was expected to reduce the influence of misinformation and to support healthier public communication.

This research contributed to the conceptual integration between communication sociology and digital literacy education in understanding the challenges of the post-truth era. The study also highlighted the role of education in promoting critical awareness and responsible digital participation.

The research used a qualitative approach through a systematic literature review. Academic articles, books, and scholarly publications related to post-truth, digital literacy, communication sociology, and social polarization were collected and analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The literature was classified into thematic categories to identify relationships between communication dynamics and educational responses.

The results indicated that disinformation in the post-truth era weakened public trust, intensified ideological divisions, and reshaped communication patterns in digital society. The findings also showed that low digital literacy increased vulnerability to misinformation and limited individuals' ability to critically assess online content. In educational contexts, integrating digital literacy into learning processes strengthened students' critical thinking, information evaluation skills, and ethical communication behavior. Educational institutions therefore played a strategic role in developing digital awareness and responsible participation in digital communication spaces.

In conclusion, digital literacy education was essential in addressing the challenges of the post-truth era. Integrating digital literacy within educational development helped reduce the impact of disinformation, improved communication quality, and supported a more inclusive and critical digital society.

## I. Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed the way information is produced, distributed, and consumed in contemporary society. In recent years, scholars have described the emergence of the post-truth era as a condition in which objective facts have less influence on public opinion than emotional appeals, ideological interests, and personal beliefs. In digital communication environments, information spreads rapidly through social media platforms, online networks, and algorithmic systems, often without adequate verification. This situation has facilitated the widespread circulation of misinformation and disinformation that significantly influence social interactions and

public discourse. Several studies have highlighted that the post-truth phenomenon contributes to declining trust in media institutions, political systems, and public authorities while simultaneously intensifying social polarization among different social groups (Bertoli et al., 2025; Cover et al., 2022; Essien, 2025; Michailidou et al., 2021; van Dyk, 2022). Furthermore, digital communication ecosystems have amplified discursive fragmentation and ideological divisions, making it increasingly difficult for societies to maintain constructive dialogue and mutual understanding (Battista, 2026; Brüggemann & Meyer, 2023; Esau et al., 2025; Sevignani, 2022)

Within this context, the education sector faces significant challenges in preparing individuals to navigate complex digital information environments. Students today are constantly exposed to large volumes of online information that vary widely in credibility, reliability, and accuracy (Naeem & Mushibwe, 2025; Sato et al., 2023). Without sufficient digital literacy competencies, learners may have trouble distinguishing trustworthy information from misleading content, which increases their vulnerability to misinformation and ideological manipulation. Previous studies indicate that low levels of digital literacy and critical thinking skills contribute to the rapid spread of false information in digital society (Reddy et al., 2023). In addition, the lack of ethical awareness in digital communication environments may intensify online conflicts, hate speech, and social fragmentation (Arslan Munir et al., 2025; Gelabert et al., 2025). Consequently, educational institutions are increasingly required to develop learning strategies that equip students with the competencies needed to critically evaluate digital information and participate responsibly in digital communication spaces.

One potential solution to these challenges is the integration of digital literacy education within the learning process. Digital literacy education goes beyond technical skills related to the use of digital devices; it also includes the development of critical thinking abilities, information evaluation skills, ethical communication practices, and awareness of the social impacts of digital media (Ru-Zhuc et al., 2025; Vaszkun & Mihalkov Szakács, 2025; Young et al., 2026). Through structured educational practices, learners can develop the capacity to analyze information sources, identify misinformation, and engage constructively in online discussions. Several studies have emphasized that strengthening digital literacy competencies can significantly improve individuals' ability to respond to disinformation and maintain healthier communication environments in digital society (Diepeveen & Pinet, 2022; Georgopoulou et al., 2025; Phippen et al., 2021). Therefore, integrating digital literacy within educational development initiatives is considered an important strategy for improving the quality of learning and supporting responsible digital citizenship.

Several previous studies have examined the dynamics of post-truth communication, disinformation, and social polarization from various disciplinary perspectives. Research conducted by Bondi & Cacchiani (2021; Neuberger et al., 2023) analyzed the structural transformation of truth and knowledge in digital communication environments. Other studies have investigated how disinformation and media ecosystems contribute to social and political polarization across different societies (Adeleke, 2026; Pacheco-Ortiz et al., 2026; Xing et al., 2023). In the Indonesian context, several scholars have explored the influence of social media interactions on opinion formation, political communication, and identity construction in digital society (Lüders et al., 2022; Pérez-Torres, 2024; Yarchi et al., 2024). Meanwhile, research on digital literacy has highlighted the importance of strengthening information evaluation skills and media awareness in educational settings to prevent the spread of misinformation (Dame Adjin-Tetty, 2022; López-Rabadán, 2021; Singh & Banga, 2022). Other studies have also examined ethical communication and organizational communication structures as factors influencing the quality of public discourse (Catană & Stancu, 2025; Enke & Borchers, 2021). These studies collectively demonstrate that post-truth communication and social polarization are complex phenomena shaped by technological, cultural, and social factors.

Despite the growing body of literature on post-truth communication and digital literacy, existing studies often analyze these issues separately. Many studies focus primarily on the sociological dimensions of disinformation and polarization, while others concentrate on educational responses related to digital literacy and media education. Limited research has attempted to integrate communication sociology perspectives with digital literacy education to explain how educational institutions can contribute to addressing the challenges of the post-truth era. This gap indicates the need for a more comprehensive conceptual approach that connects communication sociology with educational strategies aimed at strengthening digital literacy competencies.

The novelty of this research lies in the integration of communication sociology perspectives with digital literacy education to analyze the challenges of the post-truth era within educational contexts.

By synthesizing existing literature on post-truth communication, disinformation, and digital literacy, this study develops a conceptual framework that explains how educational institutions can respond to social polarization and information disorder in digital environments. This interdisciplinary perspective provides a broader understanding of the relationship between communication structures, knowledge production, and educational development in contemporary digital society.

The contribution of this research is the development of a conceptual framework that connects communication sociology with digital literacy education in understanding the dynamics of post-truth communication and social polarization. This study also provides insights into how educational institutions can strengthen digital literacy competencies to improve critical thinking skills, responsible communication behavior, and the overall quality of learning in digital environments.

## II. Method

This research employed a qualitative approach using a systematic literature review to examine the relationship between digital literacy education, post-truth communication, and social polarization. The study aimed to synthesize existing theoretical and empirical research to develop a conceptual understanding of how digital literacy education can address communication challenges in the post-truth era. A qualitative literature-based method was considered appropriate because the research focused on conceptual analysis and theoretical integration across interdisciplinary studies in communication sociology and education.

The data used in this study consisted of secondary data obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, and scholarly publications related to post-truth communication, digital literacy, misinformation, and social polarization. The literature was collected from major academic databases such as Scopus-indexed journals, Google Scholar, and other reputable academic sources published between 2020 and 2025. The selection of literature followed three main criteria: (1) relevance to the research topic, (2) credibility of the publication source, and (3) contribution to discussions on digital communication, literacy education, and social interaction in digital environments.

The data collection process involved several stages. First, relevant literature was identified through keyword searches including “post-truth”, “digital literacy education”, “misinformation”, “disinformation”, “social polarization”, and “communication sociology”. Second, the identified sources were screened based on title, abstract, and relevance to the research objectives. Third, selected studies were categorized into thematic groups such as post-truth communication dynamics, digital literacy competencies, disinformation and misinformation, and the role of education in digital communication environments.

The analysis of the collected data was conducted using qualitative content analysis with a thematic approach. Each selected study was carefully examined to identify key concepts, research findings, and theoretical perspectives related to digital literacy and communication sociology. The analysis process involved coding relevant information, grouping similar concepts, and synthesizing relationships between communication phenomena and educational responses. Through this process, a conceptual framework was developed to explain how digital literacy education can contribute to reducing the impact of misinformation and social polarization in the post-truth era.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study applied source triangulation by comparing arguments and findings from multiple academic sources. Critical evaluation was also conducted to assess the methodological quality and theoretical contributions of the reviewed literature. This approach helped ensure that the synthesized findings reflected consistent patterns across different studies and disciplinary perspectives.

### Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature synthesis, this study proposes a conceptual framework that explains the relationship between post-truth communication dynamics, digital literacy education, and social polarization in digital society.

The framework consists of three main components. The first component is the post-truth communication environment, characterized by the rapid spread of misinformation, algorithm-driven

media ecosystems, and fragmented digital communication spaces. These conditions increase individuals' exposure to unreliable information and contribute to ideological divisions in society.

The second component is digital literacy education, which includes critical thinking skills, information evaluation abilities, ethical communication awareness, and responsible participation in digital environments. Educational institutions play a central role in developing these competencies through structured learning processes.

The third component is the social impact, which includes improved information awareness, reduced vulnerability to misinformation, and the development of constructive digital communication practices that can mitigate social polarization.

The relationship between these components can be illustrated as follows:

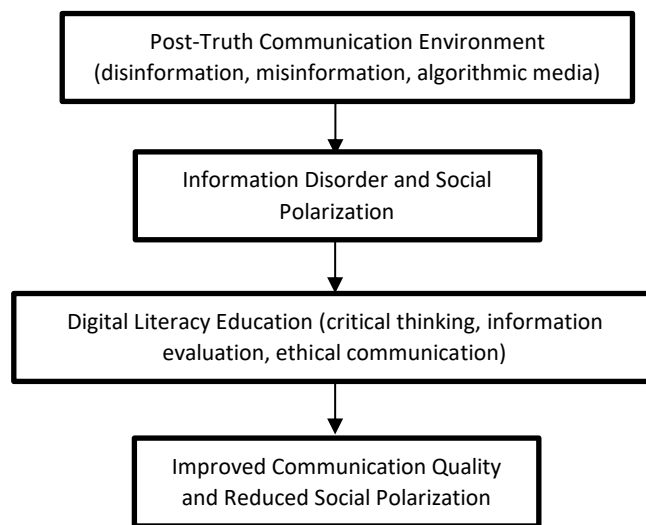


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Digital Literacy Education in Addressing Post-Truth Communication and Social Polarization

This conceptual model highlights the strategic role of educational institutions in strengthening digital literacy competencies as a response to communication challenges in the post-truth era.

### III. Results and Discussion

#### Post-Truth Communication and the Transformation of Digital Information Environments

The findings of this study indicate that the post-truth era has significantly transformed the dynamics of information dissemination and public communication in digital environments. The rapid development of social media platforms and algorithm-driven communication systems has accelerated the circulation of information, allowing both verified information and misinformation to spread quickly across digital networks. In such conditions, factual accuracy is often overshadowed by emotional narratives, ideological preferences, and identity-based affiliations (García de Velazco et al., 2024; Gupta & Bose, 2022). As a result, individuals tend to consume and share information that confirms their pre-existing beliefs rather than engaging in critical evaluation of information sources.

The literature reviewed in this study demonstrates that digital communication ecosystems increasingly contribute to the emergence of fragmented information spaces often described as “echo chambers.” Within these environments, individuals are repeatedly exposed to similar perspectives while opposing viewpoints are marginalized or ignored. This pattern reinforces ideological divisions and strengthens social polarization among different groups in society. The influence of algorithmic recommendation systems further intensifies this fragmentation by prioritizing content that generates engagement rather than accuracy or credibility.

These communication patterns illustrate how the post-truth environment has reshaped the structure of public discourse in contemporary society. The weakening of shared information standards reduces opportunities for rational dialogue and collective understanding. Consequently, the quality of public communication declines, and conflicts between social groups become more visible in digital spaces.

### **Information Disorder and the Spread of Disinformation**

Another important finding of this study is the role of misinformation and disinformation in intensifying information disorder within digital communication environments. Misinformation refers to inaccurate information shared without harmful intent, while disinformation involves intentionally manipulated information designed to influence public opinion. Both forms of information disorder contribute to confusion, misunderstanding, and distrust among digital media users.

The literature analysis shows that disinformation campaigns often exploit emotional narratives, political tensions, and identity-related issues to attract public attention (Revez & Corujo, 2024). In many cases, such content spreads faster than verified information because it appeals to emotions and social identity. As a result, individuals may accept misleading information without conducting adequate verification. This phenomenon contributes to declining trust in institutions, media organizations, and democratic processes.

Furthermore, the widespread circulation of disinformation increases the risk of social fragmentation. When individuals rely on conflicting information sources, collective understanding becomes difficult to achieve. Digital communication environments therefore become spaces where competing narratives shape perceptions of truth and reality. These conditions highlight the urgent need for educational strategies capable of strengthening individuals' ability to critically evaluate information.

### **The Role of Digital Literacy Education in Addressing Post-Truth Challenges**

The results of this study highlight the strategic role of digital literacy education in addressing the challenges posed by the post-truth communication environment. Digital literacy education involves the development of competencies that enable individuals to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate information effectively within digital environments. These competencies include critical thinking, media awareness, information verification skills, and ethical communication practices.

Educational institutions play a crucial role in cultivating these competencies through structured learning processes (Kuleto et al., 2021). Integrating digital literacy into educational curricula allows students to develop the ability to recognize misinformation (Lathrop, 2025; Sulthon et al., 2025), evaluate the credibility of information sources, and understand the social implications of digital communication. In addition, digital literacy education encourages learners to participate responsibly in digital discussions and to engage constructively with diverse perspectives.

The literature also emphasizes that digital literacy education supports the development of critical awareness toward algorithm-driven media environments. By understanding how digital platforms prioritize and distribute information, learners become more capable of recognizing the structural factors that shape online communication. This awareness helps reduce the influence of misleading information and promotes more reflective information consumption behavior.

### **Digital Literacy and the Development of Critical Thinking in Learning Environments**

Another important aspect identified in this study is the relationship between digital literacy education and the development of critical thinking skills. Critical thinking enables learners to analyze arguments, evaluate evidence, and make informed judgments regarding the credibility of information. In the context of digital communication, these abilities are essential for navigating the complex and often ambiguous information landscape.

Educational practices that integrate digital literacy encourage students to question the reliability of online content and to compare information from multiple sources before forming conclusions (McGrew & Breakstone, 2023). Such learning approaches also foster intellectual curiosity and analytical reasoning. As a result, learners develop stronger capacities to resist manipulation, misinformation, and ideological bias.

From an educational development perspective, strengthening digital literacy also contributes to improving the overall quality of learning. Students who possess strong information evaluation skills are better equipped to engage in meaningful discussions, conduct academic research, and participate in collaborative learning activities. Therefore, digital literacy education not only addresses communication challenges but also supports broader educational objectives related to knowledge construction and critical inquiry.

### Implications for Educational Development and Social Cohesion

The conceptual framework developed in this study highlights the interconnected relationship between post-truth communication environments, digital literacy education, and social polarization. In the absence of strong digital literacy competencies, individuals become more vulnerable to misinformation and ideological manipulation. This vulnerability contributes to the escalation of social polarization and the deterioration of communication quality in digital society.

Conversely, educational systems that prioritize digital literacy development can strengthen individuals' capacity to navigate digital communication environments responsibly. Through critical thinking training, ethical communication education, and media awareness programs, learners can develop resilience against information disorder and manipulation.

These findings suggest that educational institutions should integrate digital literacy education across various learning contexts, including curriculum design, teaching strategies, and learning technologies. By doing so, education can function as a preventive mechanism that reduces the negative impacts of post-truth communication dynamics.

More broadly, strengthening digital literacy competencies contributes to the development of a more informed and responsible digital society. Individuals who possess strong digital literacy skills are more capable of engaging in constructive dialogue, respecting diverse perspectives, and participating in democratic communication processes. Therefore, digital literacy education represents a critical pathway for improving both the quality of learning and the health of public communication in the digital age.

Table 1. Literature Synthesis on Post-Truth Communication, Disinformation, and Digital Literacy Education

No	Author(s)	Research Focus	Key Findings	Research Gap
1	Malcolm (2021)	Post-truth society and knowledge transformation	Post-truth reshapes the structure of knowledge and public trust in modern society	Limited discussion on educational responses
2	Purba & Sitorus (2023)	Dynamics of post-truth in Indonesia	Post-truth influences public opinion and information credibility	Lack of connection with digital literacy education
3	Bernstein & Gomila (2025)	Truth and social media communication	Social media contributes to the construction of subjective truths	Educational strategies are not examined
4	Ait Hadi & Bendahan (2025)	Disinformation and decision-making	Disinformation affects public policy and security decision processes	Education-based prevention strategies not discussed
5	De Zeeuw (2024)	Post-truth conspiracism and digital public sphere	Digital public space becomes vulnerable to conspiracy narratives	Limited exploration of educational solutions
6	Brüggemann & Meyer (2023)	Discursive polarization in digital communication	Communication fragmentation intensifies ideological divisions	Does not examine educational literacy responses
7	Vasist et al. (2024)	Political disinformation and polarization	Disinformation contributes to cross-country polarization trends	Focus remains on political communication
8	Pinardi & Darmawanti (2023)	Social polarization in WhatsApp communication	Family communication groups can spread misinformation rapidly	Educational literacy strategies not analyzed
9	Sitorus & Tanoyo (2024)	Political polarization in Instagram interactions	Social media interactions reinforce political identity divisions	Limited link to learning or education
10	Katili et al. (2025)	Political communication credibility in post-truth era	Information credibility is declining in digital media environments	Educational interventions remain underexplored
11	Ma & Revi (2024)	Opinion formation during regional elections	Social media influence's public opinion and political attitudes	Does not address digital literacy learning

12	Suryadi & Anwar (2024)	Religious polarization in virtual environments	Social media contributes to religious discourse fragmentation	Educational mitigation strategies not addressed
13	Mudjiyanto & Dunan (2020)	Media literacy in the post-truth era	Media literacy can reduce the spread of misinformation	Limited conceptual integration with sociology
14	Yuliani (2021)	Digital literacy in combating hoaxes	Digital literacy strengthens information verification skills	Educational framework still limited
15	Saraan et al. (2025)	Digital literacy among the digital generation	Information literacy is essential for resilience against misinformation	Lacks sociological perspective
16	Essien (2025)	Disinformation in social media environments	Information disorder affects public understanding and social welfare	Educational context not emphasized
17	Bustami et al. (2024)	Digital communication ethics	Ethical communication is necessary to maintain healthy interaction	Relationship with digital literacy education not explored
18	Azzahra et al. (2025)	Communication effectiveness in organizations	Communication quality affects organizational performance	Educational implications remain unclear
19	Harianja et al. (2025)	Organizational communication climate	Communication environments influence social interaction patterns	Limited discussion of digital learning
20	Taufik & Suryana (2022)	Media strategies in the post-truth era	Media strategies are necessary to maintain truth in digital communication	Educational approaches are not deeply explored

The reviewed studies indicate that post-truth communication, disinformation, and social polarization have been widely discussed in communication and social science research. However, many studies examine these issues separately from educational perspectives. Only a limited number of studies integrate communication sociology with digital literacy education as a strategic response to the challenges of the post-truth era. Therefore, this research attempts to bridge this gap by proposing a conceptual framework that connects communication sociology and digital literacy education to strengthen critical thinking, responsible communication, and learning quality in digital environments.

#### IV. Conclusion

This study highlights the growing challenges of the post-truth era, where emotional narratives, ideological preferences, and algorithm-driven communication often overshadow factual accuracy in digital environments. The literature analysis indicates that the widespread circulation of misinformation and disinformation contributes significantly to information disorder and intensifies social polarization in online communication spaces. In such conditions, individuals tend to consume information selectively within echo chambers, which reinforces ideological divisions and weakens constructive public discourse.

The findings emphasize that digital literacy education plays a crucial role in addressing these challenges. By developing competencies such as critical thinking, information verification, media awareness, and ethical communication, digital literacy education can strengthen individuals' capacity to navigate complex digital information environments. Educational institutions therefore have a strategic responsibility to integrate digital literacy competencies into learning processes, curriculum development, and technology-based learning practices.

The contribution of this research lies in integrating communication sociology perspectives with digital literacy education as a conceptual framework for addressing social polarization in the post-truth era. This study suggests that strengthening digital literacy competencies can improve the quality of learning while also promoting more responsible digital communication practices. Future research is encouraged to explore empirical approaches to measure the effectiveness of digital literacy education in reducing misinformation exposure and fostering constructive dialogue in digital society.

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