

Digital Media Literacy Strategy to Address Character Assassination of the West Java Governor Among University Students in Bandung

Anggita Lestari¹, Nugraha Sugiarta², Arya Muhamad Zaelani³, Faisal Reza⁴

^{1,2}Dosen Program Studi Ilmu Komunikasi, Universitas Informatika dan Bisnis Indonesia Kota Bandung, Indonesia

³Mahasiswa Program Studi Ilmu Komunikasi, Universitas Informatika dan Bisnis Indonesia Kota Bandung, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the role of digital media literacy in addressing the phenomenon of character assassination against the Governor of West Java among students in Bandung. In today's digital era, the spread of inaccurate or harmful information can quickly circulate through social media and other digital platforms, potentially damaging an individual's reputation. Students, as an active and critical age group in using digital media, are at high risk of becoming both targets and spreaders of detrimental information. This study employs a qualitative approach, using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with students from several universities in Bandung to understand their perspectives on digital media literacy and their responses to information related to character assassination. The results indicate that, while students possess a basic understanding of digital media, many still struggle to identify and counter the spread of inaccurate information, particularly regarding political issues. Furthermore, students tend to underutilize skills in information verification and understanding the negative impacts of disseminating harmful information. Therefore, this study underscores the importance of strengthening digital media literacy to enhance students' critical abilities in addressing character assassination, with a focus on skills such as source verification, contextual analysis, and ethical information dissemination. This study recommends that digital media literacy be further incorporated into higher education curricula to better prepare students to become responsible and discerning media users in the digital age.

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Corresponding Author:

Anggita Lestari

Universitas Informatika dan Bisnis Indonesia Kota Bandung, Indonesia

Email Correspondent: anggitapartawijaya@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation over the past two decades has drastically changed how people obtain, convey, and respond to information. University students, as part of the digital-native generation, have become a highly active group on social media, using it as a space for expression and interaction. In line with research by Hadiono and Santi (2020), digital transformation is defined as a process that encompasses implementing virtualization technologies, using mobile computing devices, utilizing cloud computing services, and integrating existing systems within organizations. However, the high intensity of digital media use is not always accompanied by the ability to critically evaluate information, particularly when encountering manipulative, provocative, or potentially damaging content that could damage an individual's reputation. According to Rulli Nasrullah (2015), from a technological perspective, digital media users must understand and adhere to the norms and

ethics that regulate interaction and activities in accordance with established procedures in the digital space. One of the challenges emerging in this era of information openness is the increasing phenomenon of character assassination directed at public figures. Not all information accurately reflects reality; such perspectives tend to overlook this issue by attributing it merely to misinformation or disinformation and oversimplifying it as a consequence of the overwhelming flow of information (Harari, 2025, p. 12). One of the complex problems in digital media is character assassination. Such attacks are not always explicit or fact-based; rather, they are often carried out through carefully constructed narratives designed to undermine an individual's credibility systematically.

In the local context, the Governor of West Java is frequently subjected to negative framing across various digital platforms. The information circulated is not always grounded in factual evidence, yet it can shape public opinion, including among university students. A similar phenomenon was experienced by Soekarno, as highlighted in a study by Samingan (2022), which found that accusations of communism against Soekarno were intended to construct stigma and fear to incite public hostility. If left unchecked, such practices can damage the political climate, obscure rational discourse, and degrade the quality of democracy, as occurred following the G30S and the subsequent transition of power to the New Order regime. When character assassination is allowed to persist, its impact can mirror the stigmatization experienced by Soekarno. This condition raises particular concern, as university students are expected to act as intellectual agents who uphold critical reasoning and ethical communication. Unfortunately, a considerable number of students, often unintentionally, help disseminate content that may contribute to character assassination, whether due to a lack of awareness, limited media analysis skills, or a weak culture of information verification.

In light of this issue, strengthening digital media literacy has become an urgent necessity. Such literacy should not be limited to teaching technical skills in using media. Still, it must also encompass the ability to understand media messages, analyze information structures, and develop ethical awareness in communicating within the digital public sphere. As explained by Herlina (2019:8), media literacy refers to an individual's ability to access, understand, critically evaluate, and create content in both print and digital forms. In the context of digital media, this includes competencies in navigating various online platforms, filtering information, and actively and responsibly participating in the digital space. Appropriate literacy strategies can serve as both preventive measures and mitigation tools against the impacts of character assassination in the digital environment. By focusing on university students who serve on student executive bodies (Badan Eksekutif Mahasiswa) in Bandung, this study seeks to formulate contextual and practical digital media literacy strategies that strengthen individual resilience against information manipulation and help create a healthy and ethical digital communication ecosystem.

This study employs the theory of the social construction of mass media as its analytical framework because, within the digital space, issues are often not merely about factual accuracy but about socially constructed realities shaped by the dissemination of narratives, symbols, and opinions packaged as digital content. These contents are subsequently consumed, shared, and trusted by the public, including university students, who represent an active group on social media platforms. As digital media users, students actively become part of this process of social construction—whether as disseminators (externalization), as recipients who internalize and believe in the narratives (internalization), or as members of the public who collectively shape social reality through shared opinions (objectification). These processes align with the framework introduced by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann in their theory of social construction. Therefore, developing digital media literacy strategies is highly crucial.

Research Problems

1. How are the forms of character assassination practices against the Governor of West Java disseminated through digital media among university students in Bandung?
2. What digital media literacy approaches can be effectively implemented to enhance students' critical awareness and digital ethics in responding to character assassination?
3. Why is it important for students within Student Executive Bodies (BEM) to improve the quality of their digital literacy in addressing character assassination against the Governor of West Java circulating in digital media among students in Bandung?

Research Objectives

1. To identify the forms of character assassination practices targeting the Governor of West Java disseminated through digital media, particularly among students who are members of Student Executive Bodies (BEM) in Bandung.
2. To explore digital media literacy strategies that can be effectively applied to enhance critical awareness, digital ethics, and reflective thinking skills among BEM students in dealing with character assassination content.
3. To examine the importance of improving digital literacy among BEM students so that they possess critical awareness, digital ethics, and reflective thinking abilities in responding to the proliferation of character assassination content against the Governor of West Java in digital media.

Research Significance

1. This study is expected to enrich academic discourse in the field of communication, particularly in relation to digital media literacy, public communication ethics, and the dynamics of information dissemination in the digital era. The findings of this study may serve as an additional reference for the development of theories in political communication and media behavior among younger generations, especially regarding responses to character assassination in the digital space.
2. Practically, the results of this research can be utilized as a foundation for designing educational strategies aimed at improving students' media literacy, whether by higher education institutions, student organizations such as Student Executive Bodies (Badan Eksekutif Mahasiswa/BEM), or other digital communities. These strategies are expected to help students become more careful and critical when managing the massive flow of information, particularly manipulative content or attacks on the character of public figures. Furthermore, the findings of this study may also provide input for regional stakeholders in formulating more ethical and educational communication policies.
3. From a social perspective, this study aims to foster collective awareness among students in building a responsible media culture. With enhanced digital awareness, students are expected not only to filter information effectively but also to actively help create a healthy, ethical digital environment free from manipulative practices that may damage the reputations of certain individuals.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Digital Media Literacy

Digital literacy combines media, computer, and information literacy, as explained by David Bawden (2001) in Herlina (2019:127). Media literacy, long discussed, refers to the ability to access, select, evaluate, and create media content. Meanwhile, computer literacy refers to the skills required to operate hardware and software for communication, publication, and problem-solving (Shapiro and Hughes, 1996, in Herlina, 2019:127). The term media literacy itself has been widely used in both

informal discussions and academic discourse, carrying various meanings. According to the New Media Consortium (2005), as cited in Frank Jefkins (2009), and research by Sari (2019), media literacy is a set of competencies in which audio, visual, and digital literacies intersect. It includes an understanding of the power of images and sounds, the ability to recognize and use them, and the skills to process, distribute, and adapt digital media into various new forms.

In the current digital era, where social media's influence is pervasive, media literacy has become a fundamental competency, particularly for younger generations. This literacy is not intended to reject the existence of social media, but rather to equip individuals to understand how media operates, how digital platforms are used, and how messages are constructed and conveyed. In conclusion, digital literacy reflects an individual's awareness, attitudes, and competencies for using digital devices and technologies wisely and effectively. This includes the ability to identify, access, manage, process, evaluate, and integrate digital resources to generate new knowledge, express ideas through digital media, and build meaningful communication with others. Furthermore, digital literacy plays an important role in fostering positive social engagement across various contexts of life and encourages individuals to reflect critically and responsibly on their use of technology.

2. Social Media

Advances in digital technology, driven by the internet, have reshaped many aspects of life, particularly communication. Innovations in digital communication have created a wide range of media, from complex systems used in military and space contexts to simpler devices like mobile phones, now widely used in everyday life. These technologies serve not only business purposes but also facilitate social interactions, such as checking in on friends. The intensity of such interactions in the social sphere has given rise to the term “social media,” referring to digital platforms that enable human connectivity in the modern era. Within this context, new forms of communication have also emerged. Whereas communication previously relied on speaking with the mouth and listening with the ears, technologies such as smartphones now allow individuals to “speak” by typing with their fingers and to “listen” through their eyes by reading text on screens, thereby creating a shift in how humans interact (Rusmana & Anwar, 2017).

Social media can be understood as a digital communication medium that enables users to interact, exchange information, and build social relationships online. These platforms possess distinctive characteristics that differentiate them from traditional forms of communication. One of their primary features is their digital nature, meaning that all activities occur through electronic devices such as computers, smartphones, and internet networks. In addition, social media is inherently interactive, allowing users not only to receive information but also to respond, share content, and communicate directly through comments or messages. Furthermore, social media relies heavily on multimedia elements—such as text, images, audio, and video—to convey messages and create engaging content. It also facilitates the formation of social networks among users who share similar interests or activities. Through social media, activities such as two-way communication, information dissemination, and relationship expansion within virtual communities can be carried out more easily and quickly. According to Nasrullah (2015), drawing on the perspectives of Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Ferdinand Tönnies, and Karl Marx, social media can be understood as part of the transformation in the relationship between humans and the media they use. The development of social media illustrates how patterns of interaction have evolved, as the relationship between

individuals and technology becomes increasingly close and influential in shaping everyday social life.

3. Character Assassination

Character assassination is a serious violation committed by an individual against another, as every person has equal rights to create, express themselves, and develop their personal identity and character within society. This act is not merely a personal attack but also generates broader psychological and social impacts. Any attempt to damage an individual's reputation—particularly when disseminated through media, including digital platforms—can have consequences for the victim's family and social environment, and, when carried out on a massive scale across transnational digital spaces, may tarnish a nation's image on the international stage (Burhan Bungin, 2016).

In practice, the dissemination of character-assassination content in digital media often escapes adequate oversight, as perpetrators or media institutions may claim adherence to basic journalistic principles. However, in certain cases, this reflects a lack of professional journalistic quality, both in reporters' capacity and in reporting methods that fail to meet ethical standards and ensure accuracy in news production. Media operating under the paradigm of war journalism tend to incorporate character assassination into their narrative construction, often targeting all parties involved. Conversely, media that adopt the paradigm of love journalism demonstrate greater selectivity and careful consideration when presenting news that could damage the reputations, dignity, or careers of individuals or groups. Even when such reporting is deemed necessary for its public-interest value, it is delivered in a respectful and calming manner while striving to minimize harm to those being reported.

4. Social Construction Theory

According to Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, as cited in Sulaiman (2016), the social construction of reality is a social process that unfolds through actions and interactions among individuals, in which they continuously construct a shared reality that is subjectively experienced and interpreted. Berger adapted Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's concept of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis to explain the relationship between the subjective and objective worlds. He then developed a dialectical framework consisting of three stages: externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Externalization is the process by which humans adjust to the social and cultural environment, which is itself a product of human creation ("society is a human product"). Objectivation occurs when social interactions form a shared reality that becomes recognized and institutionalized. "Society is an objective reality." Internalization is the stage at which individuals begin to recognize and adapt to the social institutions or organizations to which they belong. "Humans are products of society." If social theory neglects the interrelated and reciprocal relationship among these three processes, it will lead to a theoretical deadlock. In reality, these processes occur simultaneously: humans create something (externalization), it then becomes an externalized reality (objectivation), and subsequently it is reabsorbed into individual consciousness as part of one's identity (internalization). The following illustrates the three moments in the formation of society within Berger's framework:

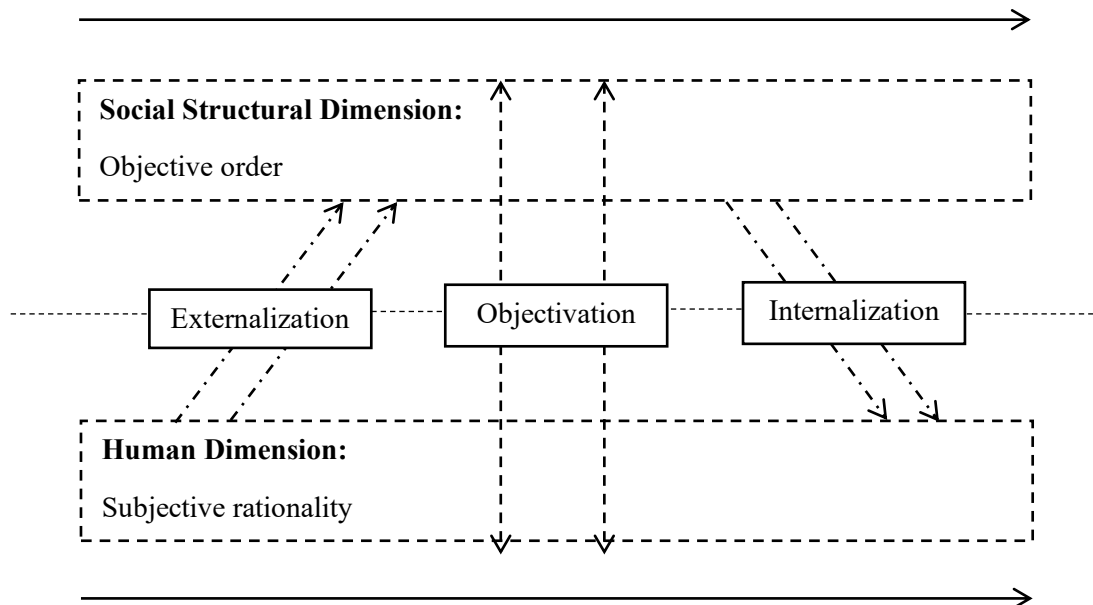


Figure 1. Three Moments in Berger's Thought
Source: Riyanto (2009:112)

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative case study design to describe and gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of character assassination against the Governor of West Java in digital media, and to examine how digital media literacy strategies can be used to address it, particularly among students in Student Executive Bodies (Badan Eksekutif Mahasiswa/BEM) in Bandung. The qualitative method enables the researcher to understand the context, values, and interpretations students hold regarding the information they receive in digital media, especially content containing elements of character assassination. This approach aligns with Nurhadi and Din (2016), who state that qualitative research focuses on understanding meaning in depth within a limited context and aims to explore the perspectives and experiences of individuals or groups directly involved in the issue being studied. The case study approach is used because this research focuses on a specific phenomenon within a particular context, namely the digital media literacy strategies applied (or not yet applied) by BEM students in responding to character assassination targeting the Governor of West Java. Similarly, Yin (2015) argues that case studies are the most appropriate approach when research questions focus on "how" or "why," especially in situations where researchers have limited control over the events being examined and when the object of study relates to contemporary phenomena occurring in real-life contexts. Data collection techniques, as explained by Nurhadi and Suseno (2021:10–119), include direct interviews with students from BEM STHB, BEM UHS, and BEM Universitas Informatika dan Bisnis Indonesia. We observed content on Instagram and TikTok targeting the Governor of West Java that potentially constitutes character assassination. Documentation in the form of posts, comments, and relevant digital interactions was also collected to strengthen findings from interviews and observations. The data analysis technique follows the model proposed by Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman (1994), as adapted by Sugiyono (2017), which consists of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The conclusions are initially tentative and are subsequently verified through additional data collection or source triangulation based on the author's interviews with informants.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Research Results

1. Forms of Character Assassination Practices Against the Governor of West Java Disseminated Through Digital Media, Particularly Among Students of Student Executive Bodies (BEM) in Bandung

Character assassination, as defined by Mohamad (2022), is widely recognized in Indonesian society as an act that damages an individual's reputation by disseminating unverified or factually unsupported information. This form of attack often manifests as exaggerated or manipulative narratives designed to construct a negative public image of a particular individual. One informant noted that character assassination on social media may appear in various forms. The informant identified two main tendencies that frequently occur. First, students often criticize government policies—for instance, policies related to sending children deemed problematic to military-style camps. According to the informant, such criticism remains within the realm of idea-based discourse and cannot yet be categorized as character assassination. However, the informant also observed content that no longer focuses on policy aspects or public roles but instead targets personal dimensions, such as an individual's private relationships or personal life, which are entirely unrelated to their public position or responsibilities. This phenomenon is considered to have crossed the boundary of legitimate criticism and tends to lead toward character assassination through digital media. The following are the forms of character assassination practices against the Governor of West Java disseminated through digital media, particularly on the TikTok platform:



Figure 2. Post from the TikTok Account “Satu Komando”
Source: TikTok (2025)

One example of content that leads to character assassination can be found in a post from the TikTok account @SATU KOMANDO. The content presents a narrative in a threatening tone and contains personal attacks directed at KDM (Dedi Mulyadi). This attack appears as a form of disagreement with one of the programs promoted by KDM, particularly from certain community organizations (*ormas*) that oppose the policy. The TikTok account is reportedly managed by an individual affiliated with a community organization currently in conflict with KDM, resulting in content that reflects a clear bias and could shape negative public perceptions through provocative rhetoric. This explanation is further affirmed by the second informant in this study, who stated that one of the most prevalent forms of character assassination on social media is the

dissemination of false information or hoaxes that directly damage an individual's image. In addition, the spread of degrading memes serves as a symbolic strategy for visually and emotionally mocking or discrediting individuals. It is also common to encounter quotations from public figures that are deliberately distorted, taken out of context, or selectively edited, thereby constructing negative perceptions among audiences. Such practices are not only misleading but also reinforce biased and manipulative narratives within the digital space.

Figure 2. Post from the TikTok Account “Merah Putih”

Source: TikTok (2025)

In one of the reposted clips shared by the TikTok account “Merah Putih,” a statement by the Governor of East Kalimantan is shown, implicitly constituting character assassination against the Governor of West Java, Dedi Mulyadi. In the video, Dedi Mulyadi is referred to as a “content governor,” a phrase that can be interpreted as a form of symbolic disparagement of his leadership image. Nevertheless, Dedi Mulyadi responded to the remark in a relaxed, non-reactive manner; instead, he compared marketing budget allocations to clarify his approach to using media.

The “Merah Putih” account consistently uploads content related to Dedi Mulyadi, both original content and reposts from his official accounts. This pattern indicates a tendency to construct a particular narrative around the public figure, which may influence audience perceptions on social media. In response, the study's informants acknowledged that some students have limited awareness of the issue of character assassination directed at the current Governor of West Java. This is partly due to Dedi Mulyadi's high level of activity on social media; he is widely recognized as one of the regional leaders who actively produces content on platforms such as YouTube, earning him the nickname “content governor.” While seemingly lighthearted, this label is used in certain contexts as satire, potentially undermining his political image. Information regarding alleged character assassination against Dedi Mulyadi has reportedly circulated, with indications that certain media outlets may have contributed to disseminating such narratives, albeit not always explicitly.

This issue is part of the broader dynamics of digital communication that the public must approach critically, particularly among younger groups such as university students. Another informant further added that in the political sphere—an environment inherently characterized by public scrutiny and competing interests—it is not unusual for figures like Dedi Mulyadi to become focal points of attention. Moreover, his active presence as a content creator even prior to assuming office has established a strong digital persona, positioning him not only as a public official but also as a prominent media figure. In this context, the informant suggested that attempts at character assassination against Dedi Mulyadi may be part of a broader political strategy to weaken his influence, particularly in anticipation of future national political contests, such as the 2029 presidential election. Although this perspective remains assumptive, it highlights that opinion formation and personal attacks in digital spaces cannot be separated from long-term political calculations.



Figure 2. Post from the TikTok Account “Ki’ panglaymuda”
Source: TikTok (2025)

One of the posts on the TikTok account “Ki’ panglaymuda” features a young man speaking in Sundanese, delivering sharp criticism of Dedi Mulyadi (KDM). In the video, he questions KDM’s religiosity and accuses him of shirk (associating partners with God) during his tenure as Governor of West Java. He also contrasts KDM’s policy of combating alcohol consumption with allegations of religious violations attributed to him, thereby constructing a negative narrative. One informant expressed the view that among the various social media platforms currently available, TikTok is considered the largest and fastest at disseminating information. This aligns with research by Husna and Mairita (2024), which indicates that TikTok presents user-preferred content through its main interface, known as the For You Page (FYP). This feature curates content based on users’ interests and preferences. Notably, any content can appear on the FYP without requiring a large number of followers, as long as it aligns with the platform’s algorithmic recommendations. Content displayed on the FYP typically receives high engagement, even from audiences who do not follow the content creator.

The informant further argued that TikTok’s algorithm is highly effective at rapidly amplifying content, outperforming those of other platforms. Although all social media platforms can serve as tools for spreading propaganda and facilitating character assassination, TikTok is perceived as the most potent medium for accelerating these processes due to its high level of virality. This makes TikTok a critical digital space that requires careful, media-literacy-based engagement. Another informant added that other platforms, such as Instagram and X, are also highly effective tools for opinion dissemination, including propaganda and image construction. According to this perspective, these platforms exert significant influence in shaping public perception due to their audience characteristics and communication features that enable messages to spread widely and rapidly. This view suggests that the effectiveness of social media as a tool for information dissemination is relative, depending on user preferences and the communicative context in which it operates.

Digital Media Literacy Strategies That Can Be Effectively Implemented to Enhance Critical Awareness, Digital Ethics, and Reflective Thinking Among Students

of Student Executive Bodies (BEM) in Responding to Character Assassination Content. Amid the rapid development of digital media, university students who are members of Student Executive Bodies (Badan Eksekutif Mahasiswa/BEM) have become part of a group that actively accesses, disseminates, and shapes public opinion. However, their engagement in digital spaces also makes them vulnerable to the spread of information containing elements of character assassination targeting public figures. Such content is often delivered through misleading, provocative, or unfounded narratives.

To address this challenge, effective digital media literacy strategies are required to enhance students' critical awareness, ethical communication in digital environments, and reflective thinking abilities. These strategies are essential to ensure that students are not only technically proficient in using media but are also capable of understanding, evaluating, and responding to information wisely and responsibly. The following section presents findings from interviews conducted by the author with informants regarding this issue. This argument is further supported by research conducted by Dhewi and Ningrum (2021), which states that, according to Haguen and Payton (2010), digital literacy refers to an individual's ability to use basic skills to operate digital devices to access, select, and evaluate information. Moreover, this form of literacy encompasses critical thinking, innovation, collaboration, and the ability to communicate efficiently and appropriately.

2. Digital Media Literacy Strategies That Can Be Effectively Implemented to Enhance Critical Awareness, Digital Ethics, and Reflective Thinking Among Students of Student Executive Bodies (BEM) in Responding to Character Assassination Content

Amid the rapid development of digital media, university students who are members of Student Executive Bodies (Badan Eksekutif Mahasiswa/BEM) constitute a group that actively accesses, disseminates, and shapes public opinion. However, their engagement in digital spaces also renders them vulnerable to the spread of information containing character-assassination elements aimed at public figures. Such content is often conveyed through misleading, provocative, or unfounded narratives. To address this challenge, effective digital media literacy strategies are required to enhance students' critical awareness, ethical conduct in digital communication, and reflective thinking abilities. These strategies are essential to ensure that students are not only technically proficient in using media but are also capable of understanding, evaluating, and responding to information wisely and responsibly. The following section presents the results of the author's interviews with informants regarding this issue. This argument is further supported by the findings of Dhewi and Ningrum (2021), who state that, according to Haguen and Payton (2010), digital literacy refers to an individual's ability to use basic skills to operate digital devices to access, select, and evaluate information. Furthermore, it encompasses critical thinking, innovation, collaboration, and effective, appropriate communication.

- 1) One informant explained that efforts to enhance digital media literacy have, in fact, been initiated since the senior high school (SMA) level. According to the informant, media literacy awareness need not begin at the university level; it can be instilled at an earlier educational stage. The informant noted that previously conducted digital media literacy activities involved senior high school students across Bandung as the primary audience. This group was selected based on the assumption that high school students possess emerging critical thinking abilities and are in a developmental stage approaching maturity, making them more receptive to the material and better able to engage in discussions on ethics and the responsible use of digital media. Meanwhile, although junior high school students also demonstrate critical potential, their abilities are still considered to require

gradual development and refinement. The BEM at the informant's university has established collaborations with various governmental institutions to implement digital literacy programs, particularly with the Dinas Perpustakaan dan Kearsipan Provinsi Jawa Barat and the Dinas Komunikasi dan Informatika Provinsi Jawa Barat. In addition, we have formed partnerships with internal university institutions as part of a collaborative effort. This program is an annual initiative that consistently increases interest in literacy and promotes the wise use of social media, particularly among students. Beyond merely developing the ability to filter information, the program is designed to provide a broader understanding of the dynamics of digital media, including potential risks such as cybercrime, fraud, and extortion. Therefore, the primary focus of this initiative is to strengthen digital literacy while fostering critical and responsible attitudes in the use of social media.

Table 1. Implementation of Media Literacy Strategies by BEM Students (1)

Category	Implementation of Media Literacy Strategies in Addressing Character Assassination
Target	Senior high school (SMA) students across Bandung are selected as the primary target group, as they are considered to possess already emerging critical thinking skills and to be at an early stage of maturity. Junior high school (SMP) students are deemed not yet fully prepared.
Objective	To enhance digital media literacy, promote the responsible use of social media, and foster critical and responsible attitudes.
Form of Strategy	Educational initiatives through discussions, seminars, and annual digital literacy programs. The focus is not only on information filtering but also on understanding digital risks such as hoaxes, fraud, cybercrime, and extortion.
Partners	West Java Provincial Library and Archives Office, West Java Provincial Communication and Informatics Office, as well as internal university institutions.
Focus of Digital Literacy	Digital media education, ethical use of media, prevention of digital crimes, and awareness of risks in the digital space.

- 2) Another informant described a different approach, namely the implementation of several programs designed to support the management and enhancement of media literacy within the campus environment. These programs encompass a range of activities, including seminars addressing contemporary issues such as combating hoaxes and promoting responsible social media use. In addition, at the student organization level, there is a specialized unit called Mendiktif, which is authorized to manage and supervise all campus media activities. The role of this unit is not merely administrative but also aims to encourage students' understanding of media, including its use, production, and critical response to information circulating in digital spaces. An informant from the Student Executive Board (BEM) of Universitas Teknologi Bandung also explained that although BEM members do not possess specific academic backgrounds in media or communication studies, they continue to facilitate activities related to responsible and effective social media management. In practice, BEM UTB primarily serves as a platform for discussion and education by inviting experts in digital media to provide students with a deeper understanding. Regarding collaboration in digital media literacy campaigns, the informant stated that BEM UTB has not yet established direct partnerships with government institutions. Nevertheless, we have collaborated with the university and several local media organizations. For instance, BEM UTB has

partnered with media platforms such as BandungBergerak and other outlets, including Tropo Media, particularly for digital media literacy activities involving the university rectorate. These collaborations form part of BEM's initiative to support the dissemination of healthy information practices and to enhance students' awareness of critical and ethical digital media use.

Table 1. Implementation of Media Literacy Strategies by BEM Students (1)

Category	Implementation of Media Literacy Strategies in Addressing Character Assassination
Program Strategy	Media literacy activities are developed through seminars on hoaxes and on ethics in social media use, as well as through educational programs that involve students in open discussions.
Special Division	There is a unit called Mendiktif responsible for managing all campus media activities. This unit is not only administrative in nature, but also supports the enhancement of media literacy.
Role of BEM UTB	Although BEM is not academically trained in communication studies, BEM serves as a facilitator of educational activities by inviting expert speakers to help students better understand digital media.
Partnerships & Collaborations	There has been no direct collaboration with government institutions; however, partnerships have been established with local media such as BandungBergerak and Tropo Media, as well as with the university rectorate.
Focus of Literacy	To foster students' awareness of digital information and encourage the critical, ethical, and responsible use of social media.

Source: Processed Research Data, 2025

- 3) Another informant added that the Student Executive Board (BEM) at their campus is developing a digital media literacy strategy to improve public understanding, particularly through the media and information division, commonly referred to as Kominfo. This division manages programs that deliver educational content through online discussions and informative social media content. The strategy's primary focus is to strengthen students' digital literacy, especially their ability to filter hoax information and understand the dynamics of political farming in digital spaces. Through this approach, students are expected to become more critical and selective in responding to the massive flow of information circulating on social media platforms. An informant from the Student Executive Board (BEM) of Universitas Informatika dan Bisnis Indonesia explained that the digital media literacy campaigns implemented are not limited to seminars and webinars but also include easily accessible visual

content, such as infographics and short educational videos. In addition, we share information directly through discussion forums and collaborations with literacy communities that share similar concerns about digital media issues. BEM UNIBI has partnered with internal university stakeholders, particularly because the academic environment at UNIBI includes study programs that support these initiatives, such as management programs offering courses in digital marketing and digital communication. We are also expanding collaborative efforts by seeking partnerships with government institutions, particularly relevant agencies such as the Department of Communication and Informatics (Kominfo). In the near future, BEM UNIBI is scheduled to conduct a comparative study together with student organizations from several other higher education institutions, including BEM from Sekolah Tinggi Hukum Bandung, LPKIA, and three other universities whose participation is still under confirmation. This activity is expected to broaden collaborative networks and strengthen the implementation of cross-campus digital media literacy initiatives.

Category	Implementation of Media Literacy Strategies in Addressing Character Assassination
Implementing Unit	Digital literacy strategies are implemented by the media and information division (Kominfo), which is responsible for educational activities such as online discussions and the creation of informative digital content.
Strategic Focus	Enhancing students' literacy, particularly in their ability to filter hoaxes and understand political farming issues that frequently appear on social media.
Form of Strategy	Educational activities are conducted through seminars, webinars, infographics, short videos, and direct discussion forums in collaboration with literacy communities.
Collaboration and Partnerships	BEM UNIBI has collaborated with the university and is currently exploring partnerships with Kominfo. Comparative study activities are also planned with BEM organizations from other universities.
Long-Term Objective	Building inter-campus networks and strengthening collaborative digital literacy movements across student organizations.

Source: Processed Research Data, 2025

3. Important Factors for Enhancing Digital Media Literacy Among Student Executive Board (BEM) Students to Develop Critical Awareness, Digital Ethics, and Critical Thinking Skills in Responding to the Proliferation of Character-Assassination Content Targeting the Governor of West Java on Digital Media.

To understand how Student Executive Board (BEM) members perceive the importance of digital literacy, particularly in responding to character-assassination content

disseminated through digital media, it is necessary to examine the factors that shape their awareness. In this context, the informants provided perspectives on the role of digital literacy in shaping critical thinking, ethical media use, and the ability to selectively and reflectively evaluate information. As Ginting (2019) explains, enhancing these competencies among students may help society distinguish high-quality information and understand both the positive and negative impacts of mass media development, thereby enabling media to be used appropriately, correctly, and beneficially for the public. The following explanations were provided by informants who are directly involved in BEM activities and have experience in digital literacy initiatives both within and beyond the campus environment.

- 1) One informant emphasized that in responding to character assassination circulating in digital media, particularly targeting public figures such as the Governor of West Java, students, especially those involved in the Student Executive Board (BEM), must prioritize an objective and critical perspective. The informant stated that students should not become trapped in biased viewpoints but instead continue to uphold their roles as agents of social control, guardians of values, and a moral force amid the evolving dynamics of information dissemination. Therefore, enhancing digital literacy is essential to help students understand information contexts reflectively, respond to issues ethically, and contribute to a healthier, more responsible digital environment.
- 2) In the interview findings, another informant emphasized that students, particularly those involved in the Student Executive Board (BEM), have a moral responsibility to respond intelligently and wisely to the widespread character assassination disseminated through digital media. The informant highlighted the need for greater vigilance in filtering information, given how easily false information (hoaxes) can spread, often in highly convincing forms. According to the informant, when discussing public figures such as the Governor of West Java, students should critically examine the ideas and policies proposed rather than attack the individual's personal aspects or character. The informant argued that character assassination constitutes a form of deviation within the digital democratic sphere, and that students—as agents of change, guardians of moral values, and instruments of social control—are required to be more selective in responding to information. In this context, digital literacy becomes essential for enabling students to develop critical awareness, prioritize ethical communication within digital spaces, and think reflectively before responding to or disseminating an issue. The informant also stressed that remaining silent or refraining from spreading destructive content may itself represent a form of social responsibility when individuals are not yet prepared to respond to issues wisely and ethically.
- 3) Another informant stated that the digital literacy enhancement efforts implemented thus far have been considered relatively effective in fostering students' awareness of the importance of responding wisely to issues circulating in digital media. However, the informant also highlighted that this effectiveness still needs to be strengthened, particularly by expanding outreach and ensuring the consistency of educational message dissemination. According to the informant, not all students have received equal exposure to digital literacy initiatives, underscoring the need for more systematic and sustainable efforts from both educational institutions and government agencies. The informant further emphasized the importance of the government consistently providing educational content that helps the public, particularly students, understand the ethical boundaries of expressing criticism on social media. In the context of character assassination directed at the Governor of

West Java, the informant argued that students need to understand that criticizing public policies is legitimate. However, such criticism must be carried out while upholding ethical values and moral responsibility as digital citizens. Therefore, enhancing digital literacy is essential to equip students with critical awareness, ethical communication practices, and reflective thinking skills to respond to sensitive issues in the digital public sphere.

Table 4. Important Factors in Enhancing Digital Literacy in Addressing Character Assassination Against the Governor of West Java

Informant	Informant Statement	Author's Interpretation
Informant 1	Students, particularly those involved in BEM, need to maintain objectivity when responding to character-assassination issues circulating on digital media. They should not become trapped in biased narratives, but instead continue to perform their roles as agents of social control and moral force within society.	Digital literacy serves as an ethical and critical foundation for maintaining students' role as moral agents within digital democracy.
Informant 2	Students are required to be careful and wise in filtering information. Character assassination is considered a deviation from a healthy democratic sphere. Criticism should be directed toward policies rather than personal matters. Refraining from spreading destructive content can also represent a form of social responsibility.	Information selectivity and ethical responsibility are manifestations of students' critical role in responding to issues concerning public figures.
Informant 3	The enhancement of digital literacy has been considered to produce positive impacts; however, its dissemination remains uneven. More systematic approaches and support for educational content from both campuses and the government are required. Understanding digital ethics should become part of students' political	There is a need for a consistent, inclusive digital literacy education system to foster critical awareness and digital ethics.

	education within digital spaces.	
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Source: Processed Research Data, 2025

4.2. Discussion

The digital media literacy strategies implemented by Student Executive Boards (BEM) at various universities in Bandung can be analyzed through the lens of social construction theory developed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. In this theory, social reality is regarded as a human construction formed through a dialectical process consisting of three stages: externalization, objectification, and internalization. The process of digital media literacy carried out by students, particularly those involved in Student Executive Board (BEM) organizations, can therefore be understood through these three important stages. These stages demonstrate that the values of digital media literacy are not merely developed at the level of ideas but also manifested in concrete social practices.

At the stage of externalization, according to Berger and Luckmann, as cited in Riyanto (2009), when actions are considered appropriate and capable of addressing collective problems at a particular time, such actions tend to be repeated. In this study, externalization refers to the stage in which ideas about the importance of digital media literacy are translated into concrete actions involving various stakeholders. One informant explained that literacy activities are not solely directed toward university students, but also target senior high school students in the city of Bandung. These programs were developed through collaborations between BEM organizations and governmental institutions such as the Department of Communication and Informatics and the West Java Provincial Library and Archives Service. Such efforts indicate that digital literacy is viewed as a fundamental necessity that should be introduced from an early age. Engaging external partners and organizing seminars, discussion forums, and other educational spaces helps promote the importance of critical thinking in responding to the overwhelming flow of information in digital media.

Furthermore, the stage of objectification occurs when socially expressed values are institutionalized in collective structures and practices. Several universities have begun establishing specialized units to address issues related to digital literacy systematically. For example, Universitas Teknologi Bandung has a division known as Mendiktif, which manages campus media and serves as an agent for disseminating digital literacy values. This division also oversees media ethics and fosters a culture of critical awareness on campus. At this stage, digital literacy is no longer personal or individual in nature, but becomes part of a collectively maintained and regulated social norm. Social media is therefore understood not merely as a communication tool, but also as a social space governed by ethics and collective responsibility. This is consistent with Berger and Luckmann's concept of objectification as cited in Riyanto (2009), which explains that when actions are repeatedly performed in a consistent pattern, human reasoning begins to recognize the existence of underlying rules behind such realities. This process is referred to as objectification, namely, the stage at which an institution or social structure is perceived as an objective reality.

The final stage, namely internalization, is characterized by the integration of literacy values into students' personal consciousness. At this stage, students not only understand the importance of filtering information and avoiding hoaxes, but also begin to demonstrate critical attitudes toward negative content, such as character assassination. At Universitas Informatika dan Bisnis Indonesia, for instance, literacy

approaches are not limited to seminars. However, they are further developed through the dissemination of educational content, such as infographics and short videos, and through collaborations with literacy communities. Such strategies not only broaden students' technical understanding of digital media usage but also instill ethical values and responsibility in their actions within digital spaces. This aligns with Berger and Luckmann's explanation in Riyanto (2009), which states that through internalization, individuals are shaped by the values and norms prevailing in society. Internalization plays an essential role in transmitting social institutions as realities perceived as existing independently, particularly to new members of society, to ensure the continuity of these institutions across generations. At the same time, existing members continually undergo processes of internalization, ensuring that their understanding of social institutions remains strong and consistent.

Through these stages, it becomes evident that digital media literacy among students evolves from a mere conceptual idea into part of a broader social structure and eventually becomes embedded within individual consciousness. This transformation positions digital literacy not merely as a technical skill but as a lived value practiced consciously and responsibly.

4. CONCLUSION

From the processes observed within the student-initiated digital media literacy movement, particularly among those involved in Student Executive Board (BEM) organizations, it is evident that literacy is not merely about technical understanding of media but also encompasses values, ethics, and critical awareness in responding to the flow of digital information. When ideas about the importance of critical thinking and ethical conduct are actively expressed in public forums, disseminated through campus institutions, and eventually internalized as individual patterns of thought, digital literacy becomes a component of intellectual culture and social responsibility.

The three stages involved, namely externalization, objectification, and internalization, demonstrate that the formation of digital literacy awareness is a multilayered process requiring collective support. Student initiatives that extend literacy programs to school-level students while simultaneously involving local government institutions reflect an awareness that problems emerging within digital spaces are collective concerns. In the context of character assassination directed at public figures such as the Governor of West Java, students have demonstrated balanced and prudent attitudes by framing criticism as a tool for reflection rather than a personal weapon. This illustrates the active role of students as guardians of moral values within the sphere of digital democracy.

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