

BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION: DIGITAL COMMUNICATION ETHICS AND CIVIC LITERACY AMONG GENERATION Z STUDENTS

Rany Safitri¹, Dasim Budimansyah²

Civic Education Study Program, Postgraduate School, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia

Email: ranysafitri02@upi.edu

ABSTRACT

This study examines the gap between students' theoretical understanding and their actual behavior regarding digital communication ethics and civic literacy, focusing on Generation Z students at SMA Negeri 1 Cisaat, Sukabumi. Using a qualitative case study design, the research traces how eleventh-grade students interpret and practice civic literacy principles in their daily digital lives on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp. Twenty-four students from twelve classes, two per class selected through purposive sampling, participated alongside three Civic Education teachers. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant classroom observation, and document analysis of materials voluntarily shown by participants; no independent monitoring of participants' personal social media activity was conducted. Findings reveal a marked gap between students' stated ethical knowledge covering hoaxes, hate speech, and civil discourse and their actual online behavior, sustained by peer pressure, algorithmic amplification of provocative content, and insufficient cultivation of digital civic ethics in schools. The study argues that civic literacy must be understood as encompassing dispositions and critical-reflective capacity, not merely factual knowledge, with implications for Pancasila and Civic Education curriculum development and Indonesia's discourse on responsible digital citizenship.

Keywords: *civic literacy; digital communication ethics; Generation Z; social media; civic sensibility*

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z has grown up as digital natives whose daily lives are inseparable from social media. This high intensity of use has positioned the digital space as an arena of civic practice equal in importance to conventional public spaces. Recent national data indicate that Indonesia's social media penetration continues to rise steadily, with young people particularly senior-secondary and university-age cohorts constituting the most active user segment on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp (DataReportal, 2024). For this generation, the boundary between offline civic life and online civic expression has effectively dissolved: sharing information, expressing opinions on public issues, and negotiating social identity now occur as much through a comment column or a broadcast message as through face-to-face interaction.

Civic Education (Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan/PKn) in schools has equipped students with normative knowledge of digital communication ethics, ranging from the provisions of the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (ITE Law) to Pancasila values of respect for diversity. This normative foundation is reinforced by the

government's own digital ethics guidelines, which explicitly frame responsible digital communication as verifying information before sharing it, refraining from hate speech, and respecting differing views as a civic obligation rather than a merely technical matter of online etiquette (Kemkomdigi, 2023). Formal indicators of Pancasila values, including tolerance, mutual respect, and deliberation, have likewise been codified to guide character and citizenship education at the school level (BPIP, 2022). In principle, then, Indonesian students are not short of normative reference points for ethical conduct online. However, strong normative knowledge does not always correspond with students' actual practices on social media. A phenomenon this study terms the civic knowledge-action paradox, following the theoretical account of civic sensibility and the limits of purely rational, knowledge-based models of citizenship (Budimansyah, 2026b).

Banks (2008) argues that citizenship education in increasingly diverse and interconnected societies cannot rest on the transmission of civic knowledge alone; it must also cultivate the dispositions, skills, and sense of belonging that allow citizens to act on that knowledge across group boundaries. An argument that extends naturally to the digital sphere, where interactions routinely cross lines of ethnicity, religion, and region at a scale and speed unmatched by face-to-face civic life. Viewed through this lens, the persistence of unethical digital conduct among students who can correctly recite the relevant rules and values is not simply a failure of instruction, but a symptom of civic education models that have not yet adequately addressed the affective and dispositional dimensions of citizenship.

For clarity, this study uses digital communication ethics to refer to the norms governing how individuals share, verify, and respond to information and opinion in online spaces covering conduct such as fact-checking before forwarding a message, refraining from hate speech, and engaging respectfully with disagreement. And civic literacy to refer to the broader capacity to interpret, evaluate, and act within civic life, of which digital communication ethics forms one increasingly central domain. Civic sensibility, following the chain of meaningful knowledge, feeling, empathy, caring, and acting used throughout this study, is treated as the affective-cognitive process through which civic literacy is translated into observable civic conduct, digital or otherwise. These working definitions are offered not as a claim to theoretical originality, but to make explicit the conceptual vocabulary used consistently in the analysis that follows.

Previous studies on digital civic education tend to exhibit three limitations. First, the dominance of cognitive approaches that assume increased knowledge automatically produces behavioral change, without examining the affective mechanisms that bridge the two. Second, the adoption of digital citizenship frameworks from Western literature without contextualizing them to the local Nusantara values that genuinely shape the daily lives of Indonesian students (Budimansyah, 2026a). Third, a tendency toward quantitative-descriptive research that captures the paradox phenomenon without deeply investigating its underlying mechanisms (Alrahman & Fauzi, 2025; Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015). This last limitation is particularly consequential, since platform-level studies have shown that algorithmic curation and exposure to ideologically or emotionally selective content can itself widen the distance between what users know to be ethical and how they behave once inside a feed optimized for engagement (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015). A dynamic that a purely knowledge-centered civic curriculum has little capacity to counteract.

This study positions itself within these three gaps by employing the civic sensibility framework comprising meaningful knowledge, feeling, empathy, caring, and



acting as a conceptual bridge between knowledge and action, together with the Moral Citizenship Nusantara (MCN) framework (Budimansyah, Suryadi, & Winataputra, 2022) as a contextual normative-interpretive perspective grounded in local values such as *musyawarah* (deliberation), *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), and Pancasila integrity (Budimansyah, 2026a). Rather than treating these local values as ornamental additions to a Western civic-education model, the MCN framework treats them as the primary interpretive resources through which Indonesian students themselves make ethical sense of digital experience. This research specifically seeks to answer four questions: (1) how do forms of the knowledge-action paradox manifest in students' digital communication practices; (2) how do the components of civic sensibility function or become disconnected in the process of transforming knowledge into action; (3) what personal, social, institutional, and digital factors support or hinder this process; and (4) how can Moral Citizenship Nusantara values serve as a foundation for strengthening students' civic sensibility.

Understanding this paradox carries direct significance for the practice of Civic Education in Indonesian secondary schools. If ethical failures in digital communication were purely a matter of insufficient exposure to norms, the appropriate response would be more content delivery—additional lessons on the ITE Law, more recitations of Pancasila values. But if, as this study anticipates, the paradox instead reflects a disconnection between what students know and what they feel motivated to do, then curriculum responses built solely around content delivery are likely to reach a ceiling of diminishing returns. Clarifying where in the knowledge-to-action sequence students' civic sensibility actually breaks down—rather than assuming a uniform knowledge deficit—therefore has direct implications for how limited PKN instructional time is allocated, and for whether interventions should emphasize additional content, structured emotional and empathetic training, or a combination of both.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach within a constructivist paradigm, viewing students' ethical understanding of digital communication as a product of social construction shaped through interaction with teachers, peers, and the digital environment (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Creswell & Poth, 2018). A case study design was chosen because the civic knowledge-action paradox is best understood as a bounded, context-dependent phenomenon rather than a variable that can be isolated from the school and peer environment in which it occurs; the case in this study is bounded by a single school site, a single grade level, and a defined set of ISHEL instrument constructs. Participants consisted of three Civic Education teachers (coded G-01 to G-03) and twenty-four eleventh-grade students from twelve classes (XI-1 to XI-12), two students per class (coded S-01/Respondent 1 to S-24/Respondent 24), at SMA Negeri 1 Cisaat. Students were purposively selected based on their level of social media engagement and willingness to participate, on the assumption that students with higher engagement would have encountered a wider range of ethically relevant digital incidents to reflect upon during interviews.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews guided by ten ISHEL instrument constructs: Prior Knowledge (PK), Knowledge-Action Paradox (KAP), Transformative Action (TA), Meaningful Knowledge (MK), Feeling (FE), Empathy (EM), Caring (CA), Acting (AC), Context (KO), and Moral Citizenship Nusantara (MCN) as well as non-participant observation of PKN learning sessions and

class discussions. It should be emphasized that this study did not conduct independent monitoring or observation of participants' personal social media activity. Documents or digital content were treated as data only when participants voluntarily displayed or described them during interviews, in accordance with the research ethics principles applied. Triangulation was achieved by cross-checking interview accounts from students against those of their teachers, and by comparing both sources against classroom observation notes, so that a claim about a given incidentsuch as a hoax or a hate-speech commentwas only treated as a stable finding when it was corroborated across at least two of these three data sources.

Data were analyzed thematically using a combination of deductive (based on the ten ISHEL constructs) and inductive approaches (allowing new themes to emerge from the data). Coding proceeded in two stages: an initial deductive pass assigned interview and observation excerpts to the ten primary ISHEL codes, followed by an inductive second pass in which sub-codes were developed under the MCN constructspecifically musyawarah-deliberation (MCN-DM), religiosity (MCN-RM), integrity-Pancasila (MCN-IP), and social solidarity/gotong royong (MCN-SK)to capture the specific local values informants invoked when explaining their own conduct. All data were anonymized, participants' real identities were not disclosed, and data were stored in an encrypted folder accessible only to the researcher, in accordance with the ethical clearance coordinated with the research supervisors.

Consistent with the constructivist paradigm underlying this study, the researcher's role was understood not as a neutral instrument of data extraction but as an active participant in the co-construction of meaning during interviews (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Creswell & Poth, 2018). To manage this positionality, interview questions were piloted and reviewed with the research supervisors before fieldwork, field notes were kept separately from interpretive memos so that descriptive observations could be distinguished from the researcher's emerging analytic judgments, and preliminary coding decisions were periodically discussed with the supervising team to reduce the risk that a single reading of the data would dominate the analysis. This procedure does not eliminate the interpretive nature of qualitative analysis, but it provides a documented basis for the analytic claims presented in the following section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overall, the research findings show thematic patterns as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. *Summary of Thematic Patterns Based on the ISHEL Constructs*

Construct	Brief Description	Dominant Pattern in the Data
PK (Prior Knowledge)	Initial normative knowledge of digital ethics	Generally strong at the verbal-cognitive level (teachers and students know the rules/ITE Law by heart)
KAP (Knowledge-Action Paradox)	Gap between knowledge and practice	Appears in the majority of informants, especially under high peer pressure
TA (Transformative Action)	Real incidents that trigger reflection	Hoax cases, body shaming, OSIS black campaigns, SARA-based hate speech
MK (Meaningful Knowledge)	Meaningful awareness after an incident	Emerges strongly after witnessing real impact on victims
FE (Feeling)	Emotional response	Varies: regret/heaviness in some students, flat affect in others



EM (Empathy)	Taking the victim's perspective	Stronger when the informant has personal closeness to the victim
CA (Caring)	Emerging concern	Often appears at the micro level (privately reprimanding a close friend), rarely expands into collective action
AC (Acting)	Concrete action	Ranges from no action at all to active clarification
KO (Context)	Supporting/inhibiting factors	Peer norms, platform algorithms, group social pressure
MCN (Moral Citizenship Nusantara)	Local values as a bridge	Musyawah and Pancasila integrity are the most frequently referenced

Forms of the Knowledge-Action Paradox

Interview data from both teachers and students consistently show that normative knowledge about digital ethics is generally well established at the verbal-cognitive level, but is not always reflected in practice. One Civic Education teacher noted that there was “a student who could explain human-rights articles on privacy and hate speech very well, yet had once circulated a screenshot of a friend's private conversation” (G-01). A similar pattern was reported in the context of national integration, where a student fluent in explaining the importance of unity in the Wawasan Nusantara material nonetheless frequently posted comments belittling other regions whenever a viral issue arose (G-02), and in the context of political participation, where a student who understood the concept of ethical campaigning academically remained actively involved in spreading black campaigns during the student council (OSIS) chair election (G-03).

This pattern is also evident at the student level. Some respondents explicitly acknowledged a gap between what they knew and what they did. For example, in an incident separate from the hoax case discussed in the following section, the same student admitted having known the legal risks of spreading unverified information, yet chose to remain silent when classmates misunderstood an exam-score leak issue, because “I couldn't be bothered getting involved” (Respondent 1). This shows that the knowledge-action paradox can emerge situationally a student may act consistently with their knowledge in one incident but fail to do so in another, depending on the context and their closeness to the parties involved. A more acute paradox was found among several other respondents who openly stated that they continued sharing content potentially harmful to others purely for popularity or engagement, without any meaningful moral hesitation at the time (Respondent 23; Respondent 24).

Classroom observations reinforced these interview findings. During a discussion session on hate speech, when the teacher displayed an example of a comment mocking a regional accent, two students laughed spontaneously before catching themselves, even though the same group had, moments earlier, explicitly stated that such comments constituted unacceptable hate speech (Observation Note OBS-02). This gap between normative statements and first spontaneous responses indicates that the knowledge-action paradox occurs not only at the level of conscious decision-making, but also at the level of automatic affective reactions not yet fully aligned with cognitive knowledge.

Taken together, these three illustrations the teacher-reported cases, the situational inconsistency shown by Respondent 1, and the spontaneous laughter observed in class suggest that the knowledge-action paradox is not a single, uniform failure but a layered phenomenon operating at different speeds. Some instances resemble a deliberate, if regrettable, choice to act against known norms under social pressure; others resemble

an automatic response that occurs before deliberation is even possible. This distinction matters for civic education, because it implies that interventions aimed only at reinforcing what students know (Alrakhman & Fauzi, 2025) are unlikely to address the faster, pre-reflective layer of the paradox, which appears to call instead for repeated affective and dispositional training rather than additional content instruction.

The Mechanism of Civic Sensibility: Intact and Broken Chains

An in-depth analysis of the meaningful knowledge, feeling, empathy, caring, and acting sequence shows that the civic sensibility chain does not operate uniformly across informants, and can even differ within the same informant depending on the incident faced. In some cases, the chain remained fully intact and produced concrete action. In an incident different from the earlier “exam-score leak” case, the same student (Respondent 1) nearly took part in spreading a hoax about a riot at another school, but this time described how meaningful awareness emerged after recognizing the broad impact of a single forwarded message (MK), accompanied by feelings of regret and unease (FE), the ability to imagine their own school in the position of the slandered victim (EM), a growing sense of responsibility (CA), and ultimately concrete action in clarifying the information to friends (AC). Comparing these two incidents involving the same respondent reinforces the finding that personal closeness to the potentially harmed party in the riot-hoax case, it was a close friend attending the school where the incident occurred who prompted verification is one important distinguishing factor between an intact and a broken civic sensibility chain.

Conversely, in a number of other cases the chain broke, particularly between the caring and acting stages. Several respondents admitted they only realized the impact of their actions after the incident had passed, without any meaningful follow-up such as an apology or public correction (Respondent 22; Respondent 23). This pattern is consistent with the finding that emerging concern often stops at the micro level such as privately reprimanding a close friend without developing into broader collective action (Observation Note OBS-02, point 13). This finding reinforces the argument that civic sensibility is not an automatic linear process, but rather a sequence vulnerable to disruption at certain points, particularly when the emotional components (feeling and empathy) are not strong enough to drive commitment from the caring stage through to acting.

This uneven pattern across the five civic sensibility components helps explain why purely cognitive civic education interventions so often fail to close the knowledge-action gap identified in earlier, more descriptive studies of digital citizenship (Alrakhman & Fauzi, 2025). Meaningful knowledge (MK) and feeling (FE) appeared relatively easy to elicit retrospectively most informants, when prompted, could readily describe what they had learned from an incident and how it had made them feel but empathy (EM) and caring (CA) proved far more dependent on a pre-existing relationship with the affected party. Acting (AC), the final and most consequential link, was the point at which the chain most frequently broke down even when the preceding four components were present. This ordering suggests that the caring-to-acting transition, rather than any single component in isolation, is the most strategically important target for classroom intervention, since it is the point where reflective awareness must convert into a costly, socially visible choice such as correcting a friend or reporting a post.

Hochschild's (1979) concept of emotion work—the effortful management of one's own feelings to align them with situational or social expectations—offers a useful lens for



interpreting why this transition is so fragile. Clarifying a friend's misinformation, or objecting to a hate-speech comment within a peer group, typically requires a student to actively suppress an initial impulse toward conflict-avoidance or social conformity and to manufacture, in its place, the discomfort of standing apart from the group. Several respondents described exactly this kind of internal negotiation when explaining why they eventually acted (Respondent 1) or, conversely, why they did not (Respondent 22; Respondent 23): the deciding factor was less whether they recognized a norm had been violated, and more whether they were able, in the moment, to sustain the emotional effort of acting against the immediate social current. Understood this way, strengthening the caring-to-acting transition is less a matter of teaching new facts and more a matter of building students' capacity for this kind of emotion work—a capacity that, like any skill, plausibly improves with deliberate and repeated practice rather than one-off instruction.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Several contextual factors were identified as influencing the strength of the transformation from knowledge into action. At the personal-social level, emotional closeness to the potentially harmed party emerged as the most prominent supporting factor; students with close friendships with victims of religion-based hate speech reported that this closeness was what drove them not to remain silent, while acknowledging that “if I didn't have a close friend from that religion, I probably would have just scrolled past” (Student 6). Conversely, peer group norms could become an inhibiting factor when pressure to join in negative comments outweighed individual ethical considerations, as one teacher affirmed that friendship norms were the most influential factor in determining the boundaries of privacy considered acceptable to breach (G-01).

At the digital-institutional level, the characteristics of social media platform algorithms, which tend to make provocative content go viral faster than its clarification, were also cited as an inhibiting factor by both teachers and students (G-02; Respondent 24). At the school-institutional level, teachers' role as reflective facilitators was already evident, for example through reflective questions posed immediately after inappropriate responses emerged during class discussions, although more specific and personalized follow-up with the students involved had not yet been fully carried out (Observation Note OBS-02, point 16).

These digital-institutional and school-institutional factors do not operate independently of one another. The tendency of platform algorithms to reward provocative content with faster circulation (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015) effectively compresses the window of time in which a student's civic sensibility chain must complete itself before the content has already reached a wide audience—students frequently described feeling that a clarifying response, however sincere, arrived “too late” to matter once a post had already been shared and re-shared. Set against this accelerated digital environment, the school's institutional response, largely dependent on individual teachers' spontaneous reflective questioning rather than a structured, schoolwide protocol, appears structurally under-resourced relative to the speed of the problem it is meant to address. This gap between the pace of platform dynamics and the pace of institutional response offers one explanation for why students with strong prior knowledge (PK) and even strong meaningful knowledge (MK) still frequently arrive at the acting (AC) stage too late for their action to have its intended effect.

Moral Citizenship Nusantara as a Bridge between Knowledge and Action

Moral Citizenship Nusantara values, particularly musyawarah-deliberation and Pancasila integrity, consistently emerged as a shared frame of reference when students and teachers made sense of ethical events in digital spaces. Classroom observations recorded the presence of deliberation-musyawarah and Pancasila-integrity values during the hate speech discussion session (Observation Note OBS-02, point 17), while at the individual level, the student who acted to clarify religion-based hate speech explicitly linked this action to the values of tolerance and unity in the first and third principles of Pancasila learned in Civic Education (Student 6).

This finding is consistent with the idea that local Nusantara values function as a normative-interpretive bridge between universal knowledge of digital ethics and students' concrete actions (Budimansyah, Suryadi, & Winataputra, 2022). Nevertheless, as shown in the previous section, the cognitive-verbal presence of these values is not always sufficient to ensure consistency of action, particularly at the moment of the first spontaneous response. This indicates that strengthening Moral Citizenship Nusantara as a knowledge-action bridge requires repeated, experience-based reflective habituation not merely the transmission of normative definitions in the classroom so that the feeling and empathy components can be trained alongside the strengthening of cognitive knowledge (Hochschild, 1979).

It is worth noting that MCN values were not invoked uniformly across informants. Musyawarah-deliberation and Pancasila integrity were referenced far more often than religiosity or gotong royong/social-solidarity values, even in incidents where a communal or cooperative framing would have been equally plausible. One interpretation, consistent with Budimansyah's (2026a) broader account of Nusantara civic sociology, is that musyawarah and Pancasila integrity are the values most explicitly and repeatedly rehearsed in formal PKN instruction, and are therefore the most cognitively accessible frame for students to reach for when asked to justify their conduct after the fact whereas religiosity and gotong royong, though present in students' everyday moral vocabulary, are transmitted more through family and community life than through the school curriculum, and so surface less readily in a classroom-linked research setting. This asymmetry itself constitutes a finding: it suggests that the MCN framework's five value dimensions are not equally reinforced by current civic education practice, and that a genuinely comprehensive strengthening of Moral Citizenship Nusantara would need to extend deliberate curricular attention beyond the values already well covered by existing PKN materials.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Read together, the findings above provide a direct answer to the four research questions guiding this study. In response to the first question, the knowledge-action paradox manifested in at least three recognizable forms: cross-domain inconsistency, where strong verbal knowledge in one area of civic life (such as human rights or national integration) did not transfer into consistent conduct in a different, digitally mediated situation; situational inconsistency, where the same student acted consistently with their knowledge in one incident but not in another; and automatic-response inconsistency, where the paradox appeared not as a conscious choice but as a spontaneous affective reaction preceding deliberation. In response to the second question, the civic sensibility chain functioned most reliably when meaningful knowledge and feeling were reinforced by empathy grounded in personal closeness to the affected party, and broke down most often at the transition from caring to acting, particularly when that personal closeness was



absent. In response to the third question, personal-social factors (peer closeness and peer pressure), digital-institutional factors (algorithmic amplification of provocative content), and school-institutional factors (the extent and specificity of teachers' facilitative follow-up) each independently shaped whether the chain remained intact. In response to the fourth question, Moral Citizenship Nusantara values especially *musyawarah*-deliberation and *Pancasila* integrity functioned as an accessible normative bridge that students actively drew upon to justify and motivate ethical action, though this bridge was activated unevenly across the five MCN value dimensions and required reflective habituation, not just definitional knowledge, to translate reliably into behavior.

Theoretically, these findings extend the civic knowledge-action paradox literature (Budimansyah, 2026b) by showing that the paradox is not a fixed trait of individual students but a situational and componential phenomenon: the same student can display an intact civic sensibility chain in one incident and a broken one in another, depending on personal closeness to the affected party and the emotional intensity of the moment. This componential view refines cognitively oriented models of digital citizenship (Banks, 2008) by identifying empathy and caring rather than knowledge acquisition alone as the components most in need of deliberate cultivation, and by identifying the caring-to-acting transition specifically as the most fragile link in the chain.

Practically, the findings suggest at least three directions for strengthening the PKn curriculum at the senior-secondary level. First, given that platform algorithms compress the time available for a considered ethical response (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015), civic education activities could incorporate rapid-response simulations brief, realistic digital scenarios requiring students to practice moving from noticing to acting within a limited time frame rather than relying solely on post-hoc classroom discussion of incidents that have already concluded. Second, because empathy and caring were most reliably present when students had a personal connection to the affected party, structured perspective-taking exercises that deliberately introduce distance asking students to reason through incidents involving strangers or out-groups, not only close friends may help generalize the civic sensibility chain beyond cases of pre-existing personal closeness. Third, given the observed imbalance in which MCN values are invoked, teachers might deliberately design discussion prompts that draw out *gotong royong* and religiosity alongside *musyawarah* and *Pancasila* integrity, ensuring that the full range of Moral Citizenship Nusantara values not only the two most curriculum-familiar ones become available as interpretive resources for students facing real digital dilemmas. These directions align with existing national digital-ethics guidance (Kemkomdigi, 2023) and *Pancasila* value indicators (BPIP, 2022), suggesting that the infrastructure for such curricular strengthening is already partly in place and requires pedagogical redesign more than new policy.

These implications also extend to teacher professional development. Several teachers in this study demonstrated strong facilitative instincts posing reflective questions immediately after an ethically ambiguous moment arose in class but reported, and were observed, doing so inconsistently and without a shared, school-wide protocol for follow-up. Embedding a structured facilitation routine into PKn teacher training, one that specifies not only how to raise a reflective question in the moment but also how to conduct a brief, personalized follow-up with the specific students involved in a given incident, could help convert teachers' existing facilitative instincts into a more systematic institutional resource. Such training would be consistent with existing national digital-ethics guidance (Kemkomdigi, 2023), which frames teachers as key intermediaries in

digital citizenship formation, but would need to translate that guidance into concrete classroom routines rather than leaving its application to individual teachers' discretion.

Finally, the componential picture of civic sensibility developed in this study points toward a need to rethink how digital civic competence is assessed in PKn classrooms. Conventional assessment tools written tests of students' knowledge of the ITE Law or of Pancasila values are well suited to measuring prior knowledge (PK) but are structurally unable to detect whether a student's empathy, caring, or capacity to act would actually hold up under real peer pressure. Scenario-based or reflective-journal assessments, in which students respond to realistic digital dilemmas and are evaluated not only on whether they identify the correct norm but on how they describe working through the emotional and social difficulty of acting on it, would align assessment more closely with the componential chain identified here, and could give teachers an earlier, more diagnostic signal of where a given student's civic sensibility is most likely to break down before an actual incident occurs.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the civic knowledge-action paradox is a real and fairly widespread phenomenon in the digital communication practices of Generation Z students at SMA Negeri 1 Cisaat, occurring both at the level of conscious decision-making and spontaneous affective response. The civic sensibility chain—meaningful knowledge, feeling, empathy, caring, and acting—functions as a key mechanism bridging knowledge and action, yet this chain tends to remain intact when supported by emotional closeness to the harmed party, and is vulnerable to disruption at the caring-to-acting stage when such closeness is absent. Peer group norms, platform algorithms, and teachers' facilitative role are significant contextual factors shaping this transformation. Moral Citizenship Nusantara values, particularly *musyawarah* and Pancasila integrity, hold considerable potential as a normative bridge, but their effectiveness requires strengthening through sustained reflective-emotional habituation, rather than the reinforcement of definitional knowledge alone.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, as a single-site case study involving twenty-four students and three teachers at one senior secondary school, its findings describe patterns that are analytically meaningful within this bounded context but are not intended to be statistically generalized to Generation Z students nationally; transferability to other schools should be judged by readers based on contextual similarity rather than assumed automatically. Second, because the study relied on retrospective interview accounts of past digital incidents rather than real-time observation of participants' social media activity, a deliberate ethical choice explained in the Method section, the civic sensibility chain reconstructed here reflects how students narrate and make sense of their own past conduct, which may differ in some respects from the affective process as it unfolded in the moment. Third, purposive sampling based on social media engagement and willingness to participate may have selected for students who were already more reflective about their digital conduct than the wider student population, which could mean that the knowledge-action paradox documented here represents a conservative rather than an extreme estimate of the gap present school-wide. Future studies using diary methods or think-aloud protocols during live digital interactions, together with a more heterogeneous sampling strategy, could help corroborate or refine the componential model of civic sensibility proposed here.

Beyond these substantive findings, the study suggests that civic education research and practice would benefit from treating the knowledge-action paradox as componential and situational rather than as a single global deficit to be corrected through more content instruction. Future research could extend this case study design to other school contexts and to a wider range of platforms, to examine whether the caring-to-acting transition identified here as the most fragile link in the civic sensibility chain holds across different social and institutional settings, and to investigate more systematically why certain Moral Citizenship Nusantara values are invoked more readily than others in students' everyday ethical reasoning.

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