



The Role of Civic Education in Building Media Ethics Among Students at STAI Natuna

Muci Herliyanto^{1*}, Abu Bakar², Vinni Helvionita³

^{1,2,3,4} Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Natuna, Indonesia

Corresponding e-mail : mucihertyanto@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Civic Education; Digital Citizenship; Islamic Moral Values; Media Ethics; Students.	The growing use of digital communication has increased the need for university students to develop responsible media behavior alongside digital competence, making Civic Education increasingly relevant to the formation of ethical digital citizenship. This study aimed to examine STAI Natuna students' understanding of media ethics, identify how Civic Education values are implemented in shaping ethical behavior in digital media, and formulate an integrative model for strengthening media ethics within the institutional context. A qualitative field-study design was employed involving 15 purposively selected informants consisting of students, Civic Education lecturers, and academic leaders. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis and were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña through data condensation, coding, thematic development, data display, and verification. The findings revealed a persistent knowledge-practice gap: students generally understood basic principles of responsible media use but did not always apply them consistently when facing peer pressure, unverified information, and socially sensitive digital interactions. Civic Education contributed to students' ethical awareness, yet its implementation remained predominantly cognitive and was not systematically integrated into the OBE-oriented curriculum. The study consequently developed an integrative model combining civic and Islamic moral values, curriculum integration, contextual and case-based learning, moral courage, and institutional-social reinforcement. The study concludes that strengthening media ethics requires a systematic educational approach that connects ethical knowledge with reflective practice and supportive institutional environments.
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INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of information and communication technologies has reshaped how university students communicate, construct social relationships, access information, and participate in public discourse. Social media platforms increasingly function as digital public spaces in which students are not merely recipients of information but also producers, distributors, and interpreters of content that can influence wider communities (Ngalimun, 2025). This transformation has broadened opportunities for civic participation while simultaneously creating ethical challenges related to misinformation, hate speech, provocative expression, privacy violations, and irresponsible content sharing. Digital competence alone therefore cannot guarantee responsible participation when users lack the ethical judgment required to evaluate the social consequences of their online actions (Siregar, 2023). The growing complexity of online interaction has consequently shifted educational attention from technical media literacy toward the cultivation of responsible digital conduct, critical judgment, and ethical participation (Currie & Kelly, 2022; Huda & Hashim, 2021; Martínez-Bravo et al., 2022). Within higher education, this challenge places greater responsibility on educational institutions to connect students' digital

competencies with the civic and moral principles needed for responsible participation in contemporary digital society.

Civic Education occupies a strategic position in responding to this challenge because its educational mandate extends beyond knowledge of constitutions, citizenship rights, and political institutions. It is also concerned with civic competence, civic responsibility, value formation, critical reasoning, and the capacity to participate responsibly in social life (Aulia & Oktaviani, 2026; Elecalde et al., 2024; Medne et al., 2024; Murdiono & Wuryandani, 2021). In digital environments, these competencies become increasingly relevant because citizenship is now practiced through both physical and mediated forms of interaction. The integration of digital citizenship into Civic Education has therefore been proposed as a means of preparing students to exercise freedom, responsibility, tolerance, and critical judgment in networked environments (Estellés & Doyle, 2025; Megasari et al., 2025; Vetrivel et al., 2026; Weinstein & James, 2021). Fajri et al. (2022) similarly demonstrated that discussions of digital citizenship in Civic Education increasingly emphasize responsible participation, digital literacy, ethics, and citizenship competencies rather than technological proficiency alone. In Islamic higher education, this educational orientation may be further strengthened through the intersection of civic values with moral principles such as honesty, responsibility, respect for others, and accountability, which are central to student character formation (Aderibigbe et al., 2023; Muzaki et al., 2025; Zul et al., 2026). Civic Education can thus provide an important pedagogical space for connecting citizenship knowledge with the ethical demands students encounter in everyday digital communication.

The urgency of this issue becomes more visible when students' awareness of ethical norms does not consistently translate into responsible online behavior. Studies in Indonesia have documented persistent problems involving the circulation of unverified information, hate speech, weak information verification, and limited ethical awareness in social media interactions (Akbar & Armiyanti, 2023; Irwanto et al., 2025; Margono et al., 2024). These problems suggest that knowing what constitutes appropriate digital conduct is different from consistently practicing it under conditions of rapid information circulation and social pressure. Polizzi (2023) argue that digital literacy developed through Civic Education needs to include critical evaluation of information as well as responsibility for the consequences of digital participation. Likewise, Kaitatzi-Whitlock (2021) emphasize the role of Civic Education in strengthening ethical awareness and responsible citizenship amid the pressures of globalization and digital communication. The challenge is therefore not simply to provide students with information about digital ethics, but to create learning experiences through which civic values can be interpreted, tested, and practiced in situations resembling actual online dilemmas (Consoli, 2024; Erol, 2025; Japar et al., 2024a; Prasetyo et al., 2023). This distinction is important because it moves the problem of media ethics beyond individual digital literacy toward the educational processes through which ethical judgment becomes sustained civic behavior.

The pedagogical organization of Civic Education is particularly important in determining whether such ethical learning remains conceptual or becomes embedded in students' everyday practices. Suastika et al. (2022) found that social-media-based Civic Education can contribute to ethical awareness when learning responds directly to contemporary forms of digital interaction rather than remaining confined to conventional classroom instruction. Similar arguments are advanced by Muhkam et al. (2025), who underline the importance of character formation and value internalization as central functions of Civic Education, while Maharani et al. (2025) position Civic Education as an important means of strengthening students' national character in rapidly changing social environments. However, cognitively oriented instruction may be insufficient when ethical dilemmas require students to negotiate peer influence, emotional responses, competing identities, and pressure to participate in viral online communication. This concern is especially relevant to Outcome-Based Education because learning outcomes related to citizenship and character should be reflected not only in knowledge acquisition but also in students' demonstrated capacity to make responsible decisions in authentic contexts (Dujani et al., 2026; Miglani et al., 2026). Consequently, strengthening media ethics requires pedagogical arrangements that connect civic knowledge, moral reflection, contextual problem solving, and

opportunities for students to practice ethical decision-making.

Existing scholarship provides an important foundation for understanding this relationship, but the dominant literature remains fragmented across digital literacy, digital citizenship, character education, and Civic Education. Research on digital citizenship has generally demonstrated the importance of integrating responsible online participation into Civic Education curricula (Agus et al., 2025; Choi & Cristol, 2021; Japar et al., 2024b; Tadmouy-Brahmi et al., 2022), while studies of character and citizenship education emphasize the role of civic values in developing responsibility, tolerance, and moral conduct (Bosio et al., 2023; Chung, 2023; Mazid et al., 2025; Warlim et al., 2026; Ziemes, 2024). Other studies focus more specifically on practical digital risks, showing that misinformation, hate speech, and weak media literacy continue to challenge responsible student participation in online environments (Castellanos et al., 2023; Kansok-Dusche et al., 2023; Luo et al., 2022; Wei et al., 2023). More recent discussions have further positioned Civic Education as a potential mechanism for strengthening digital ethics and moral responsibility in technologically mediated social environments (Dahliana et al., 2026; Fenech & Zammit, 2025; Mellado-Moreno & Burgos, 2025). Across these studies, a broad consensus has emerged that Civic Education can contribute to ethical digital citizenship when digital literacy is connected with value internalization and contextual learning. Nevertheless, much of this scholarship concentrates on the importance of digital ethics, curricular integration, or general character formation rather than examining how students actually negotiate conflicts between ethical knowledge and everyday social-media practices (Jones et al., 2024; Örtgren, 2024; Webster, 2025).

A more critical reading of the literature reveals three unresolved issues that justify further investigation. First, previous studies have established the educational importance of digital citizenship and media literacy, yet comparatively little attention has been given to the mechanisms through which Civic Education knowledge is translated, or fails to translate, into ethical behavior under conditions of peer conformity, social pressure, and rapidly circulating digital content. Second, existing studies commonly treat curriculum integration, digital literacy, and character formation as parallel recommendations, but rarely explain how these elements interact within a coherent educational model capable of linking civic knowledge, moral values, pedagogical practice, and institutional reinforcement. Third, studies situated in Islamic higher education remain limited, particularly those examining how civic principles and Islamic moral values can operate together in shaping students' media ethics within a distinctive institutional and geographical setting. The context of STAI Natuna is relevant in this respect because it represents an Islamic higher education institution in Indonesia's border region, where students encounter digitally mediated information while simultaneously operating within civic, national, and religious value frameworks (Anom & Rassanjani, 2026). The novelty of the present study therefore lies not merely in examining media ethics at a particular institution, but in investigating the knowledge-practice gap in students' digital ethical behavior and using that empirical evidence to construct an integrative model connecting Civic Education, Islamic moral values, contextual pedagogy, and institutional support (Assante et al., 2022; Händel et al., 2025; Iskandar et al., 2025; Rosyid et al., 2025; Vallès-Peris & Domènech, 2024). This analytical position moves the study beyond a descriptive institutional case by addressing an unresolved question concerning how ethical civic knowledge can be transformed into responsible digital practice.

Against this background, the present study aims to analyze STAI Natuna students' perceptions and understanding of media ethics from the perspective of Civic Education, identify how Civic Education values are implemented in shaping ethical behavior in digital media spaces, and formulate an integrative model for strengthening Civic Education-based media ethics within the institutional context of STAI Natuna. The study is designed to explain not only what students understand about media ethics but also how pedagogical, social, and institutional conditions influence the translation of this understanding into everyday digital conduct. Theoretically, the research extends current discussions of digital citizenship by positioning media ethics as an outcome of the interaction between civic competence, moral internalization, contextual learning, and the social environment rather than as a consequence of digital literacy alone. It also contributes to Civic Education scholarship by clarifying the educational processes through which

normative civic knowledge may be transformed into ethical digital participation. Contextually, the study introduces evidence from an Islamic higher education institution in Indonesia's border region, thereby broadening a literature that has largely examined digital citizenship without sufficiently considering the interaction of civic and Islamic moral frameworks. Practically, the findings are expected to inform the development of OBE-oriented Civic Education curricula, case-based pedagogies, and institutional strategies that support the systematic internalization of media ethics. The resulting integrative model is therefore intended to provide both an analytical explanation of the formation of students' media ethics and a practical framework that may later be examined, adapted, and tested in comparable higher education settings.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a field study design to obtain an in-depth and contextual understanding of the role of Civic Education in building media ethics among students at STAI Natuna. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study focused on participants' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of Civic Education values and their application to ethical behavior in digital media rather than on measuring relationships among numerical variables. The study was grounded in a constructivist paradigm, which views social reality and knowledge as being formed through individual experiences and interactions within particular social contexts (Sugiyono, 2021). The research was conducted at Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam (STAI) Natuna, Indonesia, in May 2026. The inquiry focused on three interconnected aspects: students' understanding of media ethics, the implementation of Civic Education values in students' digital behavior, and the educational and institutional factors influencing the development of media ethics. This design therefore enabled the researchers to examine the phenomenon within the actual academic and social environment in which Civic Education was taught and students engaged with digital media.

The study involved 15 informants selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in Civic Education learning and their ability to provide information relevant to the research objectives. The participants consisted of 10 active students who were taking or had previously completed Civic Education courses, identified by the initials RA, RE, AF, AY, NU, AG, ME, RI, IW, and NS; three Civic Education lecturers identified as AB, HE, and KM; and two academic leaders involved in curriculum policy formulation, identified as HZ and DH. Students were included to provide direct accounts of their understanding and practice of media ethics, lecturers contributed pedagogical perspectives regarding the integration of civic values into classroom learning, and academic leaders provided information concerning curriculum and institutional policies. The use of participants from these three groups allowed the study to examine the phenomenon from complementary learner, teaching, and institutional perspectives. Participant selection was based on the relevance of their roles and experiences to the research focus rather than statistical representativeness, consistent with the interpretive orientation of qualitative inquiry. Data collection and analysis proceeded iteratively until the information obtained was sufficient to explain the emerging patterns relevant to the research objectives.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The interview guide focused on participants' perceptions of media ethics, their experiences in applying Civic Education values in digital interactions, ethical challenges encountered in social media use, learning experiences related to civic responsibility, and institutional efforts to strengthen students' digital ethics. Interviews with lecturers and academic leaders also explored the implementation of Civic Education within the curriculum, pedagogical practices, and institutional support for digital character formation. Participant observations were conducted in Civic Education classrooms and student social-interaction settings to examine the ways civic values, ethical considerations, and digital behavior appeared within naturally occurring educational and social activities. Document analysis complemented these data by

examining curricula, syllabi, semester learning plans, and academic policies related to Civic Education and student digital character development. The use of multiple data sources enabled the researchers to compare participants' accounts with observed practices and institutional documents, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). All collected materials were systematically organized, transcribed where applicable, coded, and prepared for qualitative analysis.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña through the interconnected processes of data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing and verification, and thematic coding. Data condensation began by selecting and organizing interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence according to the research objectives. Initial codes were then assigned to statements and observations related to ethical awareness, the application of Civic Education values, digital-media behavior, pedagogical practices, social influences, and institutional support. Related codes were compared and grouped into broader categories, after which recurring patterns were synthesized into analytical themes representing students' understanding of media ethics, the implementation of Civic Education values, and the conditions shaping ethical digital behavior. Data displays were used to compare evidence across students, lecturers, and academic leaders and to identify areas of convergence and divergence among their perspectives. Conclusions were developed progressively and continuously checked against interview, observation, and documentary data, allowing interpretation and verification to occur throughout the analytical process rather than only after data collection had ended (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The overall research procedure is summarized in Figure 1, which illustrates the progression from participant selection and multimethod data collection to coding, thematic synthesis, verification, and formulation of the integrative model.

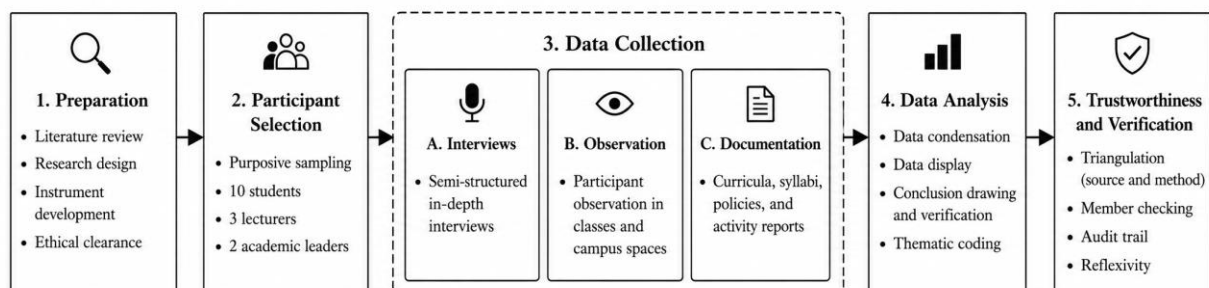


Figure 1. Research Procedure

As illustrated in Figure 1, data collection and analysis were not treated as completely separate stages but as an iterative process in which emerging interpretations were continuously compared with evidence from different sources. The trustworthiness of the findings was addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation across students, lecturers, and academic leaders and through method triangulation involving interviews, observations, and documentation; transferability was supported by providing sufficient contextual description of the institutional setting and participants; dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of the research process; and confirmability was supported through researcher reflexivity and continuous verification of interpretations against the collected evidence (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Participant identities were protected through the use of initials in the presentation of interview data, and research information was treated confidentially throughout the study. Ethical considerations in this study were carried out by ensuring that all participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence, and consent was obtained prior to data collection. These procedures were intended to ensure that the themes and the resulting integrative model were grounded in participants' accounts, observed practices, and institutional documents rather

than solely in researcher interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Analysis of the interviews, participant observations, and institutional documents produced three interconnected areas of findings corresponding to the research objectives. The first concerned students' understanding of media ethics and the extent to which ethical knowledge was reflected in their digital practices. The second concerned the implementation of Civic Education values in shaping students' behavior in digital media, including the pedagogical and social conditions that facilitated or constrained such implementation. The third concerned the formulation of an integrative model for strengthening media ethics through Civic Education within the institutional context of STAI Natuna. Across these areas, the data revealed a recurring pattern in which students generally recognized basic ethical principles but did not consistently apply them when interacting in digital environments. Differences were also observed between students' normative awareness, lecturers' pedagogical initiatives, and the extent to which digital ethics had been formally incorporated into institutional learning arrangements. The principal patterns emerging from the data are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Major Findings on Civic Education and Students' Media Ethics

Analytical area	Main finding	Empirical pattern
Ethical awareness	Students generally recognized basic norms of responsible media use	Students understood that unverified information should not be shared and that online communication involves ethical and legal responsibilities
Knowledge-practice gap	Ethical knowledge was not consistently reflected in actual digital behavior	Some students continued sharing questionable information or participating in viral content despite recognizing the associated ethical risks
Civic Education learning	Civic values influenced some aspects of students' digital conduct	Tolerance, national unity, responsibility, and limits to freedom of expression encouraged greater caution in online interaction
Curriculum integration	Digital ethics had not been systematically embedded in Civic Education learning	Discussion of hoaxes, hate speech, and social-media ethics depended largely on individual lecturer initiatives
Pedagogical constraints	Learning remained predominantly cognitive	Limited class time and the absence of explicit digital-ethics components restricted deeper case-based and reflective learning
Social influence	Peer behavior strongly affected students' media practices	Trust in friends, pressure to follow viral discussions, and fear of social rejection influenced information sharing and correction behavior
Moral courage	Students sometimes hesitated to act according to ethical knowledge	Students reported reluctance to correct misinformation or resist group practices despite recognizing problematic content
Institutional response	Greater curriculum and ecosystem support was considered necessary	Curriculum integration, case-based learning, and campus-family-community reinforcement emerged as interconnected priorities

Students' Understanding of Media Ethics from the Perspective of Civic Education

Most student participants demonstrated an initial understanding of media ethics, particularly regarding the importance of verifying information, communicating responsibly,

respecting others, and recognizing that digital actions may have social and legal consequences. However, the interviews revealed substantial variation in how consistently these principles were applied in everyday social-media use. A recurring pattern was the coexistence of normative awareness and behavior that did not fully correspond to that awareness. RA, for example, acknowledged understanding that unverified information should not be distributed but also admitted occasionally sharing such content because similar behavior was common among peers: *"I know that spreading unverified news is not good, but sometimes I still share it because my friends do the same, as if it has become common practice"* (RA, interview, May 5, 2026). This pattern was also apparent in observations of student digital interactions, where familiarity with ethical norms did not always lead to information verification before content was circulated. The findings therefore revealed a clear distinction between knowing digital ethical principles and consistently applying them in actual media practices.

Students also described Civic Education as providing a general normative foundation for responsible citizenship, although they perceived limited explicit connection between conventional Civic Education content and concrete digital-media situations. RE explained that Pancasila values and citizens' rights were discussed in class, but their application to social-media behavior received relatively little attention. This perception suggests that students were able to recognize the broader ethical relevance of Civic Education while still experiencing difficulty translating course content into specific digital decisions. The interviews further showed that ethical awareness was sometimes strengthened by direct experience rather than formal instruction. AF reported becoming more aware of media ethics after witnessing a fellow student receive institutional sanctions because of a social-media post, which made the participant recognize that online behavior involved legal and institutional consequences as well as interpersonal etiquette. Such experiences demonstrate that some aspects of students' ethical understanding developed reactively through real incidents rather than through systematically planned learning activities.

The data also showed that students' ability to evaluate digital information was shaped by their broader informational and educational environment. Several participants came from island communities in which access to diverse information sources was relatively limited, and the field data suggested that critical evaluation of digital content was not yet uniformly developed. Students could identify obvious forms of inappropriate behavior, yet their responses became less consistent when information was circulated through familiar social groups or presented as widely accepted content. This pattern placed information verification, responsible sharing, and reflective judgment at the center of the ethical challenges encountered by students. Students' understanding of media ethics therefore cannot be characterized simply as either adequate or inadequate. Rather, the findings reveal an uneven level of ethical internalization in which basic awareness was relatively widespread but its application remained dependent on context, social interaction, and prior experience.

Implementation of Civic Education Values in Students' Digital Media Behavior

The implementation of Civic Education values showed both positive influence and important limitations. Interviews with lecturers and students indicated that the teaching of tolerance, national unity, responsibility, democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression had shaped some students' judgments when interacting online. AY reported becoming more cautious when commenting on issues concerning ethnicity, religion, and race after studying tolerance and national unity. Similarly, NU connected classroom discussions about freedom of expression with the principle that online communication also involves limits and responsibilities. These accounts demonstrate that Civic Education values were not completely disconnected from students' digital behavior. However, such influence was uneven across participants and tended to emerge when students themselves were able to connect general civic concepts with specific situations

encountered on social media.

Lecturer accounts revealed that this uneven implementation was related partly to the structure of existing learning practices. AB explained that attempts had been made to connect democracy and human-rights topics with social-media cases, but limited instructional time restricted the depth of those discussions. HE similarly described using viral hoaxes and hate-speech cases as discussion materials and asking students to examine them through Pancasila values. Students reportedly responded positively to these activities, but the lecturer emphasized that such practices remained personal pedagogical initiatives rather than components formally incorporated into the Outcome-Based Education semester learning plan. The documentary findings supported this distinction between individual teaching initiatives and systematic curriculum integration. Consequently, the implementation of media ethics depended substantially on individual lecturer practices rather than on a uniform institutional design across Civic Education learning.

A further pattern emerged around information-sharing behavior in peer networks. AG described how information circulated through cohort WhatsApp groups was sometimes accepted without verification because it had been shared by friends. ME reported a similar experience, acknowledging that information received through group communication was frequently forwarded without checking its accuracy. These accounts reveal that perceived trust in the sender could substitute for verification of the information itself. In such situations, ethical media behavior was influenced not only by what students knew but also by the interpersonal context through which information was encountered. The combination of rapid information circulation and interpersonal trust therefore created situations in which students' existing ethical awareness was not always sufficient to prevent uncritical sharing.

Peer conformity formed another prominent pattern in the data. RI reported feeling that failing to comment on or redistribute viral content could create an impression of being uninformed or indifferent, even when the information was of uncertain value or accuracy. IW similarly described hesitation to correct inaccurate information because of concern about being perceived as arrogant or being socially excluded. These accounts show that the challenges surrounding media ethics were not restricted to knowledge or information-verification skills. Students also had to negotiate the perceived social costs of resisting collective behavior, questioning information circulated by peers, or openly correcting misinformation. The interviews consequently identified a socio-psychological dimension of media ethics in which conformity, social acceptance, and fear of negative peer responses influenced decisions about digital participation.

Lecturer perspectives reinforced this pattern by distinguishing ethical knowledge from the willingness to act on that knowledge. AB summarized the issue by stating, *"In my view, the problem isn't that students don't know right from wrong. They know. But they lack moral courage to act according to their values amid digital social pressure"* (AB, interview, May 19, 2026). This observation was consistent with student accounts describing reluctance to verify, challenge, or correct information when doing so could create interpersonal tension. The combined evidence therefore identified moral courage as an important element connecting ethical understanding with ethical action. The field findings also situated these challenges within Natuna's broader information environment, where students encounter diverse digital content, including cross-border information flows. Within this setting, ethical media behavior involved not only recognizing appropriate conduct but also evaluating information critically and maintaining responsible judgment under social and informational pressure.

Integrative Model for Strengthening Civic Education-Based Media Ethics

The synthesis of student, lecturer, and academic-leader perspectives produced three components for an integrative model of Civic Education-based media ethics at STAI Natuna. The

first component concerned systematic curriculum integration. Participants across institutional roles emphasized that digital ethics should not be treated as an isolated topic but should be embedded within existing Civic Education content. The Study Program Head stated that lecturers were being directed to incorporate digital literacy into Civic Education semester learning plans because of its increasing relevance to student behavior. HE similarly argued that digital ethics would be more meaningful when integrated across topics such as democracy, human rights, and national insight rather than presented as a separate subject. These perspectives positioned curriculum integration as the institutional foundation for moving digital ethics from occasional classroom discussion toward a more systematic learning experience.

The second component concerned the combination of civic principles, Islamic moral values, and contextual learning. Participant KA emphasized that digital ethics would be more readily understood when linked to Islamic values familiar to STAI students. HZ provided a similar institutional perspective, particularly highlighting honesty, trustworthiness, and the prohibition of *ghibah* as ethical principles relevant to communication in digital environments. These views show that participants did not perceive Civic Education and Islamic moral education as competing frameworks. Instead, they regarded civic principles and Islamic values as complementary moral resources that could strengthen students' understanding of responsible digital participation. The field findings also supported the use of case-based learning because students and lecturers repeatedly referred to concrete situations involving hoaxes, hate speech, viral information, online comments, and institutional sanctions as experiences through which digital ethics became more meaningful.

The third component concerned reinforcement beyond classroom instruction. Participants' accounts demonstrated that students' digital behavior was influenced by peer groups, campus culture, family environments, and wider social interactions, suggesting that classroom instruction alone could not fully shape ethical media practices. The resulting model therefore incorporated an ecosystem dimension involving coordination among the campus, family, and community. Within this formulation, curriculum integration provides the formal educational foundation, case-based and value-oriented learning connects ethical principles with actual digital dilemmas, and ecosystem reinforcement supports the continuity of ethical practices beyond classroom settings. These three components emerged from the combined evidence rather than from a single participant group and reflect the principal institutional, pedagogical, and social conditions identified throughout the study. Table 2 presents the empirical structure of the resulting integrative model.

Table 2. Empirical Components of the Integrative Model for Civic Education-Based Media Ethics

Model component	Empirical basis	Implementation focus
Curriculum integration	Digital ethics was not yet systematically incorporated into Civic Education learning, while lecturers had begun introducing digital cases through individual initiatives	Integrating digital ethics across Civic Education topics and incorporating it into semester learning plans
Civic-Islamic value integration and contextual pedagogy	Students connected civic principles with online behavior, while participants emphasized Islamic values and concrete digital cases as meaningful ethical references	Linking Pancasila, civic responsibility, honesty, trustworthiness, and responsible communication with case-based analysis of actual digital dilemmas

Model component	Empirical basis	Implementation focus
Supporting ecosystem reinforcement	Students' behavior was influenced by peers and broader social environments, including pressures surrounding information sharing and online participation	Strengthening coordination among campus, family, and community environments to reinforce responsible digital behavior

Taken together, the model derived from the field data represents a progression from formal curricular reinforcement to contextual ethical learning and broader social support. The findings suggest that the principal issue identified at STAI Natuna was not the complete absence of ethical awareness, but the inconsistent translation of such awareness into everyday digital behavior. Curriculum integration was identified as necessary for providing systematic exposure to media ethics, while contextual and value-oriented learning addressed the need to connect abstract principles with actual digital situations. Ecosystem reinforcement responded to the finding that students' practices were shaped by influences extending beyond the classroom, particularly peer interactions and social expectations. The resulting model therefore reflects the empirical relationship among the educational, moral, and social dimensions that appeared consistently across the data.

Discussion

The most important finding of this study is the persistent gap between students' knowledge of media ethics and their actual behavior in digital environments. Students were generally able to recognize that misinformation, irresponsible sharing, and inappropriate online expression were ethically problematic, yet such recognition did not consistently determine their actions when they encountered real social-media situations. Viewed through a constructivist perspective, this pattern suggests that ethical knowledge becomes behaviorally meaningful only when students actively interpret and negotiate it within authentic social contexts rather than merely receive it as normative information. This interpretation is consistent with Assante et al. (2022), who place personal values and critical dispositions at the center of digital citizenship development, and with Choi and Cristol (2021), who conceptualize digital citizenship as participatory practice rather than simple knowledge of appropriate technology use. Similar concerns are evident in Indonesian Civic Education, where the transition from civic awareness to meaningful action remains a central challenge for digitally connected learners (Agus et al., 2025; Fajri et al., 2022). The present findings therefore support existing digital citizenship scholarship while extending it by showing that the central educational problem is not necessarily a lack of ethical knowledge, but the incomplete translation of that knowledge into situated digital practice. This knowledge-practice gap provides a more precise explanation of why students who understand normative civic and ethical principles may nevertheless participate in practices that contradict those principles.

The findings further indicate that the knowledge-practice gap is reinforced by a Civic Education learning process that remains predominantly cognitive and only intermittently connects civic concepts with students' actual digital experiences. Teaching tolerance, democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression provides an important normative foundation, but abstract knowledge appears insufficient when students must make immediate ethical decisions in complex online situations. Suastika et al. (2022) similarly argue for Civic Education instruction that engages directly with social-media environments, while Currie and Kelly (2022) emphasize reflexive approaches to critical media literacy that enable learners to examine their own positions and responses to mediated information. Evidence that different forms of media education develop different dimensions of digital citizenship also suggests that pedagogical design matters for the type of ethical competence students eventually acquire (Consoli, 2024). Project-based and

participatory approaches have likewise been associated with more appropriate online behavior and stronger civic competencies because students are required to apply values rather than merely reproduce conceptual knowledge (Prasetyo et al., 2023; Dahliyana et al., 2026). In the context of Outcome-Based Education, this finding is especially important because civic learning outcomes should encompass civic dispositions and skills in addition to conceptual understanding, a concern also highlighted by Dujani et al. (2026). The evidence from STAI Natuna thus extends previous work by suggesting that the weakness of cognitively oriented Civic Education lies in the absence of an experiential mechanism through which normative knowledge can be rehearsed, reflected upon, and transformed into ethical judgment.

A second mechanism explaining the discrepancy between knowledge and behavior is the strong influence of peer relationships and perceived social expectations on students' digital decisions. The participants' willingness to forward information received from friends, participate in viral conversations, or avoid correcting misinformation indicates that online ethical decisions are socially negotiated rather than entirely individual. This finding is compatible with research showing that fake-news sharing cannot be explained solely by information literacy because users' choices are also affected by social and behavioral considerations (Wei et al., 2023), while judgments of news trustworthiness depend on the broader competencies through which users evaluate digital information (Luo et al., 2022). Studies of Indonesian social media similarly demonstrate that information flows and opinion formation are embedded within networked social relationships, making social influence an important component of digital participation (Irwanto et al., 2025). The present study adds a more explicitly civic-ethical dimension to this literature by identifying the perceived social cost of ethical resistance: students may know that information is questionable but remain reluctant to challenge it because doing so risks social disapproval or exclusion. This mechanism helps explain why critical digital literacy, although necessary, may not be sufficient unless students also develop the confidence and disposition required to act against group pressure, an issue consistent with broader arguments concerning critical digital literacy and civic agency (Polizzi, 2023). Consequently, responsible digital citizenship should be understood not merely as the capacity to recognize unreliable or harmful content, but also as the capacity to sustain ethical judgment when that judgment conflicts with dominant peer practices.

This socio-relational interpretation also clarifies the significance of moral courage that emerged from the lecturer and student accounts. Students' hesitation to correct false information or resist problematic digital practices suggests that ethical participation requires a dispositional bridge between knowing what is right and being prepared to act accordingly. In this respect, the findings complement research that treats digital citizenship as an interaction between knowledge, values, dispositions, and participation rather than as a set of technical competencies (Bosio et al., 2023; Örtengren, 2024). They also help explain why digital-safety approaches that emphasize rules and protection alone may not fully prepare students for contested online environments; recent reviews increasingly call for movement toward critical forms of digital citizenship that promote judgment, participation, and agency (Estellés & Doyle, 2025). The present evidence extends this position by proposing moral courage as one mechanism through which civic dispositions become observable digital action. This does not imply that every instance of irresponsible media use results from weak moral courage, because habitual sharing, limited verification skills, and situational pressures may provide alternative explanations. Rather, the convergence of students' and lecturers' accounts suggests that moral courage becomes particularly important when students already recognize an ethical problem but face interpersonal pressure not to respond to it. Civic Education that seeks behavioral change must therefore create opportunities for learners to practice not only ethical reasoning but also ethical action in socially difficult situations.

Within STAI Natuna, Islamic moral values provide an additional interpretive framework

through which this ethical disposition can be strengthened. Participants regarded principles such as honesty, trustworthiness, responsibility, and the avoidance of *ghibah* as compatible with civic principles governing responsible digital communication rather than as a separate moral system. This convergence is consistent with Aderibigbe et al. (2023), who demonstrate the relevance of Islamic education to the cultivation of tolerance and respect for diversity, and with recent scholarship emphasizing opportunities for integrating Islamic ethics into contemporary educational curricula (Zul et al., 2026). Related work in Islamic higher education also indicates that ethical institutional environments and prosocial orientations contribute to academic citizenship behavior (Rosyid et al., 2025), while the integration of civic spirituality and civic disposition has been proposed as a basis for ethical citizen character (Mazid et al., 2025). The contribution of the present study is therefore not to replace civic competencies with religious morality, but to show how the two value systems can function complementarily: civic principles provide a public framework for rights, responsibilities, tolerance, and participation, whereas Islamic moral values provide culturally meaningful ethical resources through which these responsibilities may be personally internalized. At the same time, the findings caution against assuming that religious values automatically generate ethical digital behavior, because the same knowledge-practice problem may arise when moral principles remain abstract and disconnected from actual digital dilemmas. Their educational value consequently depends on integration with reflective and contextual pedagogy rather than on the mere addition of religious content to the curriculum.

The institutional context further explains why individual lecturer initiatives produced positive but uneven effects on students' media ethics. Some lecturers introduced discussions of hoaxes, hate speech, and social-media cases, yet these practices had not been systematically embedded in semester learning plans, making students' exposure dependent on individual teaching choices. This finding corresponds with international research showing that digital citizenship development is influenced not only by individual competence but also by curriculum relevance, pedagogical design, and the institutional environments in which digital practices are learned (Fenech & Zammit, 2025; Medne et al., 2024). It also supports the argument that digital citizenship should be treated as an educational and democratic practice embedded in institutional arrangements rather than as an isolated technology-related topic (Vallès-Peris & Domènech, 2024). Natuna's border location adds contextual significance because students operate within overlapping civic, religious, national, and digitally mediated information environments, although the present qualitative evidence does not justify treating geographical location itself as a direct cause of unethical media behavior. Instead, the setting illustrates why digital citizenship education must remain sensitive to the cultural and institutional contexts through which students interpret online information and civic responsibility. This contextual interpretation also limits overly broad generalization: the specific patterns identified at STAI Natuna may not occur identically in other universities, but the mechanisms involving curriculum coherence, social pressure, value internalization, and institutional reinforcement may be transferable to comparable higher-education environments. The case therefore contributes to global digital citizenship scholarship by demonstrating how broadly recognized digital-ethical challenges are locally negotiated within an Islamic higher-education institution in a peripheral border setting.

Taken together, these findings provide the conceptual basis for an integrative model that moves beyond the common recommendation to simply "include digital ethics" in Civic Education. The evidence suggests a sequential and mutually reinforcing process in which civic and Islamic moral values provide the ethical foundation, formal curriculum integration ensures systematic exposure, contextual and case-based pedagogy enables ethical interpretation, critical verification and moral courage facilitate the transition from judgment to action, and institutional-social reinforcement supports the continuity of responsible behavior beyond the classroom. This

formulation is compatible with approaches that connect media literacy with professional and ethical balance (Huda & Hashim, 2021), participatory digital citizenship education (Choi & Cristol, 2021), and competency-oriented civic learning (Dahliyana et al., 2026), but it extends those perspectives by explicitly identifying the mechanisms needed to bridge ethical knowledge and digital practice. It also responds to recent attempts to redefine digital citizenship as a multidimensional educational construct involving responsible, critical, participatory, and context-sensitive engagement rather than technical competence alone (Webster, 2025; Estellés & Doyle, 2025). The theoretical contribution of this study therefore lies in positioning responsible digital behavior as the outcome of interactions among normative knowledge, moral internalization, contextual pedagogical experience, personal agency, and institutional reinforcement. Practically, this means that revising the curriculum alone is unlikely to be sufficient unless lecturers are also supported in using authentic digital dilemmas, students are given opportunities to practice verification and ethical disagreement, and the wider academic environment consistently reinforces responsible communication. By identifying these interconnected mechanisms, the study moves beyond a descriptive institutional case and addresses an unresolved issue in the literature: how Civic Education can translate ethical and civic knowledge into sustained digital conduct.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that Civic Education plays an important but still insufficient role in shaping media ethics among STAI Natuna students. Although students generally understand basic ethical principles in digital communication, a clear knowledge-practice gap remains, particularly when they face peer pressure, unverified information, and socially sensitive online interactions. The findings also show that Civic Education learning is still largely cognitive and has not yet systematically connected civic values with authentic digital dilemmas, while lecturer initiatives related to hoaxes, hate speech, and responsible online behavior remain unevenly institutionalized. The study therefore proposes an integrative model that combines civic values, Islamic moral principles, curriculum integration, case-based learning, moral courage, and institutional-social reinforcement to support more consistent ethical digital behavior. Practically, STAI Natuna should strengthen OBE-oriented learning plans, provide contextual opportunities for ethical decision-making, and develop collaboration among the campus, family, and community. These findings also suggest that future studies should examine the applicability of the proposed model in broader and more diverse higher education settings.

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