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Digital Communication as a Tool to Increase Legal Awareness Among the Community

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Abstract: The rapid development of digital information and communication technology has brought fundamental changes in the pattern of community interaction, including in efforts to increase legal awareness. Through social media, digital platforms, and other information technologies, the dissemination of legal information has become faster and wider, allowing the public to be more aware of their rights, obligations, and applicable legal norms. This study aims to examine the strategic role of digital communication as a means to strengthen legal awareness among the public. Using a qualitative approach through literature studies of various scientific journals, the results of the study show that digital technology can be an effective tool in educating the law, encouraging transparency, and strengthening social control over law enforcement officers. However, challenges such as low digital literacy, the spread of hoaxes, and misinformation are still obstacles that need to be overcome. Therefore, synergy is needed between the government, educational institutions, and digital platforms to improve legal literacy and build a responsible social media culture, in order to create a more aware, fair, and just legal environment in the digital era.

Keywords: Digital communication, legal awareness, social media, information technology, digital literacy.

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INTRODUCTION

In the increasingly advanced digital era, information technology has become an inseparable part of people's lives. This development not only has an impact on the economic, educational, and social sectors, but also influences legal awareness in society. Access to legal information is becoming more open and easily accessible, one of which is through various digital communication platforms. This creates new opportunities to improve public understanding of rights, obligations, and applicable legal norms. Digital communication,

through social media, official government websites, legal portals, and technology-based applications, is now the main means of disseminating legal information. Through these various platforms, the public can quickly obtain information related to regulations, policies, and developing legal issues. This certainly makes a major contribution to shaping legal awareness, which ultimately plays a role in creating order and justice in community life. However, it must be acknowledged that along with this ease of access, there are major challenges in the form of a flood of information that is not always accurate and a lack of digital literacy in some circles of society. Incorrect or unverified information has the potential to cause misunderstanding of the law itself. Therefore, it is important to ensure that digital communication used as a tool to increase legal awareness must be managed properly and accompanied by educational efforts to the public. This change in communication patterns also requires innovation in strategies for delivering legal information. Legal campaigns carried out through social media, online seminars, and the provision of interesting and easy-to-understand educational content are important steps to increase the effectiveness of the dissemination of legal information. In a more interactive and participatory manner, it is hoped that the public will be able to more easily understand and apply the law in their daily lives.

Furthermore, digital communication allows for open legal dialogue, where the public can discuss, ask questions, and share legal views in digital spaces. This not only increases legal knowledge, but also builds a more critical and participatory legal culture. Public participation in legal discussions on digital platforms shows that legal awareness is no longer a monopoly of certain groups, but is part of collective awareness.

The role of the government, legal institutions, and legal experts is very important to ensure that the developing digital communication remains focused and responsible. Providing reliable sources of legal information, digital literacy training, and collaboration with various parties are needed to optimize the potential of digital communication in increasing public legal awareness.

Digital communication in this modern era is not just a tool, but has become a strategic element in building a legally aware society. Proper management of digital media can have a broad positive impact, helping to create a more law-abiding, just, and civilized society.

The purpose of this study is to understand how digital communication plays a role in increasing legal awareness among the public. Through an analysis of the use of social media and other digital platforms, this study seeks to examine the effectiveness of the dissemination of legal information in shaping public understanding, attitudes, and behavior towards the law. In addition, this study aims to identify the benefits, challenges, and strategies that can be applied so that digital communication can be optimally utilized in encouraging a culture of legal awareness in the era of rapidly developing information technology.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method. The data collected comes from various scientific journals, research articles, and reliable literature sources that discuss digital communication, legal awareness, and digital literacy. Researchers analyze these findings to understand how digital media contributes to increasing legal awareness in society. Data analysis techniques are carried out descriptively, by reviewing, interpreting, and concluding various concepts and findings from the sources used, resulting in a comprehensive understanding.

RESULTS

Digital Era

The term "digital" originates from the Greek word *digitus*, meaning finger. This term is commonly used to refer to anything based on numbers, particularly binary digits which form the foundation of modern digital communication. With technological advancements, digital systems have brought significant changes in how humans communicate, process information, and create sophisticated communication tools.

The digital era marks a period during which people worldwide can connect and exchange information swiftly and effortlessly, regardless of geographical distance. Information can be accessed immediately, even in real-time. This era is often described as the era of globalization, characterized by global integration facilitated by technological progress, which accelerates the exchange of ideas, cultures, products, and life values.

Changes occurring in the digital era profoundly affect various aspects of human life. This era represents a historic shift that influences nearly every facet of existence. To navigate these changes effectively, it is critical to understand the characteristics of the digital era and the impacts it generates. Enhancing awareness and managing technology properly are vital to maximizing the benefits of the digital era while minimizing its risks.

Benefits and Importance of Information Technology

Information technology emerges as a solution to assist humans in problem-solving, fostering creativity, and enhancing efficiency and effectiveness in work. According to Sutarman (2009), there are six primary functions of information technology. The first is the capture function, which involves receiving data from hardware devices such as keyboards, scanners, or microphones. This data subsequently serves as material for generating information. The second is the processing function, which transforms raw data into useful information through processes like data conversion, analysis, calculation, and data integration.

The third function is generating, which involves producing information or decisions based on processed data. Fourth is the storage function, which stores data and information for future use. Fifth, the retrieval function enables locating and accessing previously stored data. Lastly, the transmission function entails sending data from one location to another through networks such as the internet.

Schermerhorn further states that computer-based information technology increases efficiency by saving labor, time, and costs. Its effectiveness manifests in the accuracy of results obtained within the stipulated time. The adoption of this technology expedites task completion and boosts productivity.

Public Awareness of Law

Aristotle once stated that the law applies not only to the society but also binds the law enforcers themselves. This assertion underscores that the law universally applies to all citizens without exception.

Legal awareness can be defined as a conscious and compliant attitude toward prevailing legislative regulations, both written and unwritten. The level of legal awareness in a society serves as an indicator of national progress. When legal awareness exists, society tends to be more orderly, peaceful, just, and harmonious.

Legal awareness here refers to an individual's voluntary adherence to the law without external pressure or coercion. When this awareness is well-established, the imposition of legal sanctions need not be repressive, as society voluntarily complies.

According to Soerjono Soekanto, several indicators can be used to measure a person's legal awareness. The first indicator is legal knowledge, which refers to understanding that certain behaviors are regulated by laws, whether prohibited or permitted. The second

indicator is legal understanding, which measures the extent to which an individual grasps the content and meaning of the applicable legal regulations.

The Role of Digital Communication in Enhancing Legal Awareness

As a nation that upholds the rule of law, Indonesian society has a responsibility to understand and recognize the importance of law in daily life. The relationship between law and society is closely interconnected, ranging from the development of legal culture and awareness of regulations to the enforcement of law itself.

Legal awareness is a critical aspect for regulating individual behavior and fostering healthy social interactions. Legal values should be deeply instilled in each individual to create an orderly and just social life.

In today's digital era, technology has become an inseparable part of the community's life. Daily activities heavily depend on technology, which not only facilitates communication and work but also significantly influences the dissemination of legal information.

Unfortunately, many community members still lack adequate legal awareness, as evidenced by the frequent occurrence of legal violations. Therefore, digital communication plays a crucial role in broadly disseminating legal information and education. Through social media, websites, and other digital platforms, people can more easily access information about laws and regulations and learn from widely publicized legal cases. This can encourage society to become more legally aware and cautious in acting according to the applicable laws.

DISCUSSION

The Role of Digital Communication in the Dissemination of Legal Information

According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), social media is an online platform in the form of websites or applications that enable users to create content, share various forms of media, and build virtual social connections. Over time, the function of social media has evolved beyond interaction or friendship-building, becoming a modern public sphere. According to Kamaruddin Hasan, Asmaul Husna, Muchlis, Dwi Fitri, and Zulfadli (2023), "The digital era has fundamentally transformed the mass communication landscape. In this era of digital technology, there has been a significant impact on how messages are disseminated, accessed, and consumed by the public. The transformation of mass communication in the digital era reflects profound changes in communication methods, information access, and interaction with the surrounding world." Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok now serve as mediums for discussion, information dissemination, and open spaces for expressing opinions. Their existence also facilitates discourse on critical issues, including law, public policy, and social justice. Social media fosters the formation of collective opinions and reinforces public participation in understanding and responding to emerging issues (Zhuravskaya et al., 2020). With digital-based communication, the public can access legal information more easily and flexibly, without reliance on print media or face-to-face meetings.

Advantages of Using Digital Communication

Digital communication offers numerous essential benefits, especially in the rapid and broad dissemination of information. One primary advantage is the ability to convey information quickly worldwide without geographical constraints. This is particularly useful in emergencies or when important information must be promptly disseminated to many people. For instance, social media is widely used to spread vaccination-related information through easily shareable campaigns such as challenges, memes, or hashtags, facilitating rapid information spread (AlSobeh et al., 2023). Another advantage is easier and more

equitable access to information. Digital technology allows people from diverse societal segments, including those in remote areas, to access information more conveniently. This expands opportunities for everyone to reach previously hard-to-access information, making communication more democratic. Moreover, digital communication enables more direct interaction between the audience and information providers. Users can comment, like, or share content they encounter, enhancing engagement and creating rapid feedback loops. This is crucial in building closer connections between the audience and information providers (Bening & Kurniawati, 2019). Lastly, digital communication is more cost-efficient. Compared to traditional media, information dissemination through digital platforms is much cheaper and can reach a broader audience without significant expenses. Overall, digital communication greatly facilitates information dissemination, broadens access, enhances interaction, and reduces costs, making it an effective tool for various purposes ranging from education to marketing.

Challenges in Digital Communication

Challenges in digital communication relate not only to the rapid spread of information but also to the public's ability to manage it wisely. One major issue is low digital literacy, making many people vulnerable to hoaxes. Research by Nabila, Manalu, and Santosa (2023) shows that the lower a person's digital comprehension, the higher the likelihood of being influenced by hoaxes, especially among millennials active on social media. Additionally, hoaxes spread on social media pose a significant challenge. Amaly and Armiah (2023) found that low digital literacy plays a critical role in the ease with which people fall victim to hoaxes, influencing public opinion. Another challenge arises from instant messaging apps such as WhatsApp, which are difficult to regulate in terms of hoax dissemination. According to Salsabila, Dermawan, and Fadhil (2024), hoaxes spread via private messages are harder to monitor, requiring more cautious approaches. Overall, the challenges of digital communication do not merely concern the speed of information but also how society addresses it. Enhancing digital literacy is essential to enable people to discern information wisely and reduce hoax impact. Collaboration among government, educational institutions, and organizations is needed to improve digital skills for better preparedness.

Strategies to Enhance the Effectiveness of Digital Communication

False news or hoaxes causing disruptions are regulated under several criminal law provisions. Law No. 1 of 1946 states that anyone intentionally disseminating false news that may cause imprisonment can face a sentence of up to 10 years. Additionally, persons spreading false or potentially provocative information may face up to 3 years imprisonment. The key difference between these rules lies in the perpetrator's intent and knowledge: the first requires deliberate dissemination of known false news, while the second requires awareness or reasonable assumption of the impact. The term "disturbance" here refers to disruptions beyond ordinary unrest, such as the hoax about "rush money" during the November 25, 2016, protests that caused public panic, especially among bank clients.

Article 28 paragraph 2 of the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (UU ITE) also prohibits hoaxes that incite hatred against groups based on ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group relations (SARA). These hoaxes often contain falsehoods and pose serious threats by causing unrest, division, and even conflict in society.

In Indonesia, digital hoax management is regulated under the UU ITE, amended from Law No. 11 of 2008 to Law No. 19 of 2016. Article 28 paragraph 1 prohibits spreading false information that harms consumers in electronic transactions, while Article 45A paragraph 1 threatens offenders with up to 6 years imprisonment and/or fines up to 1 billion rupiahs. The Criminal Code (KUHP) and Law No. 1 of 1946 also include similar provisions.

Despite numerous regulations, law enforcement faces obstacles and remains unclear. Legal certainty is crucial for more effective enforcement. The UU ITE, initially enacted in 2008 and updated in 2016, addresses cybercrime with distinct legal procedures from the KUHP, focusing on prohibiting deliberately fabricated false news causing harm or negative impact.

Offenders spreading hoaxes may face imprisonment up to 6 years and/or fines up to IDR 1 billion under Article 28 paragraph 1 and Article 45A of the UU ITE. The KUHP imposes heavier penalties, with up to 10 years imprisonment for false news causing damage or adverse effects (Articles 14 and 15). The UU ITE also regulates the spread of information inciting hatred based on SARA.

Some articles in the UU ITE are frequently debated for allegedly granting overly broad authority, potentially limiting freedom of expression.

CONCLUSION

In the ever-evolving digital era, communication through digital platforms has become a vital means to enhance legal awareness among the public. Through social media, official websites, legal portals, and various technology-based applications, legal information can be accessed more quickly, broadly, and interactively by diverse groups. This shift in communication patterns opens significant opportunities for developing a society that is more legally conscious, critical, and participatory regarding legal developments around them.

The benefits of digital communication include ease of access, rapid dissemination of information, increased interaction between the public and legal institutions, as well as cost efficiency. However, considerable challenges also arise, particularly related to low digital literacy that makes the public vulnerable to the spread of hoaxes and misinformation, which potentially obscure legal understanding.

Strategies to enhance the effectiveness of digital communication in fostering legal awareness include strengthening digital literacy, providing credible information sources, enforcing laws against the dissemination of false news in accordance with regulations such as the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (UU ITE), and conducting relevant and engaging legal education efforts, especially for Generation Z, the primary users of digital technology. Overall, digital communication, if managed wisely and purposefully, becomes a strategic instrument in creating a society that is more law-abiding, just, and civilized in an ever-advancing information technology era.

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