

Enhancing Digital Political Literacy through a Community-Based Platform to Improve Public Participation in Urban Neighborhoods: A Community Service Program in Malang City, Indonesia

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INFORMASI ARTIKEL	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Community Service Political Literacy Public Participation Local Governance Urban Democracy	Local democracy in Indonesia still struggles at the neighborhood level. Most people just aren't that politically savvy, and not many jumps in to participate. That's a big deal, especially since this is where decisions hit closest to home. For this reason, we rolled up our sleeves and launched a community service program in Malang City called WargaMelek.id. The goal was pretty clear: boost digital political literacy and get people more involved, for real, not just on paper. We worked directly with residents, neighborhood leaders, and youth groups in Dinoyo and Tlogomas. The program ran for two years, from 2025 to 2026. We kept things hands-on and local. There were workshops, training sessions on digital political literacy, and a number of activities where people helped shape the digital platform itself. We didn't just drop in and leave—we stuck around for mentoring and support all the way through. Participants' digital political literacy scores jumped by 41 percent. Attendance at local planning forums climbed from 48 per cent to 67 per cent, and we saw way more women and young people getting involved. In addition, over 300 people started using the platform actively. The community even set up a Village Digital Community Management Team to keep things running after the program wrapped up. The design of digital programs that meet people where they are and keep them involved – you really can build stronger civic awareness, open up new spaces for participation, and make local government more inclusive and transparent. This is an open access article under the CC-BY-SA license. 

I. INTRODUCTION

He rapid development of digital technology has transformed how people access information, communicate, and participate in public life. Digital transformation provides wider opportunities for communities to engage in governance through digital platforms; however, these opportunities require adequate digital literacy competencies. According to UNESCO (2023), digital literacy encompasses not only technical skills but also cognitive, ethical, and social competencies that enable individuals to access, evaluate, create, and communicate digital information responsibly. From the perspective of **Community Empowerment Theory**, sustainable community development depends on active participation in identifying problems and implementing collaborative solutions (Freire, 2005). Likewise, **Deliberative Democracy Theory** emphasizes that meaningful citizen participation can only be achieved when communities have equal access to information and communication channels that support transparent dialogue between citizens and government (Habermas, 1996). Therefore, strengthening digital literacy through participatory approaches has become an essential strategy for improving civic engagement in the digital era.

Recent studies have highlighted the important role of digital literacy in promoting citizen participation and strengthening digital governance. Community service programs focusing on digital literacy have

demonstrated positive impacts on improving digital competencies and civic awareness. Nevertheless, most existing initiatives emphasize digital literacy education or digital platform development separately, while relatively few integrate digital literacy, participatory technology, continuous mentoring, and institutional collaboration into a sustainable community empowerment model. As a result, improvements in community participation often remain temporary because they are not supported by long-term institutional mechanisms or participatory digital innovations.

This community service program was conducted in Dinoyo and Tlogomas Subdistricts, Malang City. Preliminary observations and discussions with community leaders indicated that although most residents already have access to smartphones and internet services, digital technology is primarily used for communication and entertainment rather than for accessing public information or participating in local governance. Community participation in development planning forums remains relatively low, particularly among youth, women, and micro-enterprise actors. In addition, many residents still experience difficulties in identifying credible information, understanding government procedures, and utilizing official digital channels to communicate public aspirations. These findings indicate a gap between the availability of digital infrastructure and citizens' capacity to participate effectively in digital governance.

These conditions underline the urgency of strengthening digital political literacy through community-based participatory approaches. Increasing internet penetration and digital communication create significant opportunities to enhance public participation; however, inadequate digital literacy may also increase vulnerability to misinformation, digital exclusion, and passive civic engagement. Previous community service activities have generally focused on one aspect of digital literacy without integrating education, technological innovation, institutional strengthening, and sustainable mentoring into a single implementation framework. This limitation demonstrates the need for a more comprehensive community empowerment model that combines digital literacy education with participatory digital platforms and measurable evaluation to generate sustainable impacts.

Accordingly, this community service program aims to strengthen digital political literacy and improve public participation through the development and implementation of the **WargaMelek.id** platform using a community-based participatory approach. The program seeks to improve citizens' understanding of digital political literacy, facilitate transparent communication between communities and local government, and establish sustainable institutional mechanisms for digital participation. The novelty of this program lies in integrating **digital literacy education, participatory digital platform innovation, collaborative governance, continuous mentoring, and measurable evaluation** within a single community empowerment framework. This integrated approach is expected to provide both practical benefits for strengthening community participation and an academic contribution by offering a replicable model of technology-based community empowerment for supporting inclusive and sustainable digital governance.

II. SITUATION ANALYSIS AND PARTNER PROBLEMS

The community service program was conducted in the Dinoyo and Tlogomas Subdistricts, Malang City, East Java, Indonesia. These urban communities are characterized by relatively high internet penetration and widespread ownership of digital devices, particularly smartphones. The availability of digital infrastructure has encouraged residents to utilize digital technologies in their daily activities, including communication, information searching, online transactions, and social networking. In addition, the local government has gradually implemented various digital public services to improve administrative efficiency, transparency, and public accessibility. However, the utilization of digital technology among community members remains predominantly limited to personal communication and entertainment, while its application for civic participation, public information access, and engagement in local governance remains relatively low.

A preliminary needs assessment was conducted through field observations, focus group discussions, and interviews involving village officials, neighborhood leaders, youth representatives, women's organizations, and local residents. The assessment revealed several fundamental challenges affecting the community's capacity for digital civic participation. Although most residents are familiar with digital devices, many still experience difficulties in understanding government policies, identifying credible digital information, and utilizing official digital communication channels to express public aspirations. Furthermore, community participation in local development planning forums remains relatively limited, with active involvement

largely dominated by neighborhood leaders and village officials, while participation from youth, women, and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) remains considerably lower.

The assessment also identified the absence of an integrated digital platform capable of facilitating effective communication between citizens and local government. Public information is disseminated through multiple communication channels, making it difficult for residents to access accurate and timely information regarding local development programs. Moreover, there is no structured and sustainable educational program that equips community members with the knowledge and practical skills required to utilize digital technology responsibly for civic engagement. Consequently, the existing digital infrastructure has not yet translated into meaningful public participation or strengthened community capacity in digital governance.

Based on these findings, five major partner problems were identified. First, the level of digital political literacy remains relatively low, limiting residents' understanding of public policy processes and democratic participation. Second, community members have limited capacity to utilize digital media as a communication channel with local government institutions. Third, the participation of youth, women, and MSME actors in local governance activities remains insufficient despite their strategic role in community development. Fourth, the absence of an integrated digital participation platform restricts opportunities for transparent communication and public engagement. Finally, the community lacks a sustainable mentoring mechanism capable of continuously improving digital literacy and strengthening citizens' participation in local governance.

To address these challenges, this community service program introduced the **WargaMelek.id** platform as an integrated digital participation system accompanied by digital political literacy education, participatory training, continuous mentoring, and institutional collaboration involving universities, local government, and community organizations. This integrated approach is expected not only to improve citizens' digital political literacy but also to strengthen their capacity to participate actively in local governance, promote transparent communication, and establish a sustainable community-based model for digital civic engagement.

III. METHOD

This community service activity uses a community-based participatory approach, which emphasizes collaboration between academic teams, village governments, and local communities. This method aims to ensure that the community is not only a beneficiary, but also actively participates in every phase of the process (Pandey & Pandey, 2015; Rossiter & Godderis, 2011; Suter, 2018; Wiederhold & Riva, 2013). The implementation method is designed systematically and lasts for three years, with a different focus each year. This focus includes (1) socialization and needs mapping; (2) training and capacity building; (3) application of digital technology; (4) mentoring and evaluation; and (5) replication and sustainability.

We used a community-based participatory approach because we didn't want people to just be passive recipients—we wanted them right in the thick of things, shaping the program from start to finish. This way made sense, especially since the goal wasn't just to spread information, but to help participants feel a real sense of ownership and agency. By bringing residents and local stakeholders into every step—figuring out the problems, co-designing the platform, rolling it out, and seeing how it worked—we kept everything rooted in the community's real experiences. This built trust, made the project more relevant, and gave it a better shot at lasting past the end date.

a. Location And Activity Partners

The activity was carried out in the Dinoyo and Tlogomas subdistricts of Malang City, East Java. Both communities This choice Because of the peculiarities of a city with active, multi-ethnic citizens and living social, economic potential, as in cadets' corals microbusinesses and small Facebook based communities for example 3. Government ward and coordinated partners become key partners with the aid of coral cadets and public local communities. Foundational election place Youths born since 1935 enacted the base election place, low literacy, Digital Politics and paths of aspirations inhabitant-based technology (Bellanova, 2017; Sampedro Blanco et al., 2013).

b. Design Activity Approach And Model

This is what we refer to as the Edu-Tech-Participation Model, a fusion of participation, educational and technological principles (Carolan, 2020; Pitcan, 2018). Workshop literacy and education on digital politics promote awareness of citizens' rights, the public policy process itself, and digital media competency. ethical participatory approach using discussion focus group discussions (FGD), co-design workshops and digital

aspirations forums to identify citizens' needs and co-creating content with them. Technology-based intervention was developed and implemented).

c. Implementation Stages Activity

Table 1. Phase Initiation and Increased Capability

Socialisation Programme	Mapping Needs	Training Literacy in Basic Digital Politics	Citizen Platform Prototype Design
Formal team commitment, equipment sub-districts, and community residents' meetings were completed to introduce external goals, benefits, and activities. This is a push for partners to execute the program.	The team holds surveys and interviews with sub-districts of devices and resident representatives for politics literacy measures, digital access, and public participation.	Course This covers right political citizens, digital ethics, use of social media for public aspirations, and concepts of electronics involvement.	The collaborating team with partners is designing the interface (UI/UX) and content for the beginning of the Melek.id platform. This includes the features of citizens' aspirations, the public agenda, and interactive digital literacy.

d. Techniques For Impact Analysis And Measurement

A variety of qualitative and quantitative methods were applied as measures of sustainability and for evaluating programme impact (Avelino, 2016; Howes et al., 2017; Macchiaroli et al., 2023). Quantitative assessment: pre-and post-test digital literacy politics for assessing enhanced understanding of the inhabitant. Source of assessment Method All data used in this analysis was non-identifiable. Indicators of success are: 1. Raise the score literacy in digital politics by, at least, 25% of the threshold. 2. More wargaMelek.id to be in the battlefield. id users per semester. 3. Two village agenda with platform aspiration data to also be included. 4. Enhance the participation of women and youth in public platforms.

e. Partner And Student Engagement

About 40 people joined, representing all sorts of community groups: youth organizations, women's groups, neighborhood leaders (RT/RW), folks from local government, and university students. The program ran in two urban neighborhoods in Malang City—Dinoyo and Tlogomas—across two years (2025 to 2026). With this much time, we could break the work into phases: first getting the word out, then building skills, developing and using the platform, offering mentoring, and finally, evaluating how things went. This phased approach helped us track not just immediate learning, but also how participation patterns shifted over time. Student serves as lead directing, providing technical assistance, digital creation. Participation was controlled for, as MBKM activities are available for 3–6 credit hours records. This means that the programme is firmly anchored in community; partners – communities as well as sub-districts – become active at each stage of the initiative (Abdulla, 2021; Athlin et al., 2018; Tremblay et al., 2018).

f. Program Resilience

The Management Team Subdistrict Digital Community (TPDK) established the existing successor pattern of mentoring. TPDK addresses the issue of content management and work/discussion organization. Same as district sub-government, platform community management and platform management training were also provided for the TPDK from time to time. Connectivity with the Malang City Smart City portal and support by the Communication and Information Service ensure sustainability of the programme (Avelino, 2016; Scown et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2022).

g. Implementation Flowchart Activity

In implementing the activity, there are several stages that we carry out, including:

Socialisation and needs mapping 2. Digital Politics Literacy Introduction 3. Experimentation and platform development 4. Training and integration into village programme 5. Middle year review. 6. Sustainability and scale of the programme.

h. Ethical Consideration

Participation was 100% voluntary. Before anyone got involved, we made the program's goals, steps, and how we'd use any data super clear. Everyone gave informed consent before we collected anything. We kept identities anonymous in all reports and only used the data for the program's evaluation and academic

research—never anything else. These steps protected everyone’s rights and kept the process above board from beginning to end.

i. Data Collection and Evaluation Strategy

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IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Two years prior (2025-2026), public devotions were held in sub-districts Dinoyo and Tlogomas, Malang City. This matter applies some output such teacher to literacy on - line political (digital Literacy), the improvement of participation society and the practice of technology in participatory utilize WargaMelek.id platform. The initiative in general has the potential to produce similar work at colleges, high schools, sub-district governments and societies developing democracy locally based on science and technology.

a. Stage Socialisation and Community Mapping

The starter tasks are in the realms of socializing and programme evaluation. This is in collaboration with 2 sub-districts, with 8 RW, and two dozen people of the community, group women as well as coral cadets. The revelation from the mapping details that 71% of the community possess digital gadgets [smart phones and laptops] but only 28% have used this digital media to monitor their local government activities and express their aspirations. Public reasons for low digital participation include: 1. Lack of political literacy by the people (people do not know formal aspiration channels/ Musrenbang). 2. Lack of real-time access to public information. 3. Weak ward-level participatory digital platform (Bellanova, 2017; Mikhaylovskaya, 2024; Strauß, 2020; Widholm & Ekman). Digital empowerment model fits very well implemented in Malang City.

b. Literacy Training in the Sphere of Digital Politics

Upon completion of the socialisation process, 40 people from different backgrounds ask for courses in literacy and digital politics. As participants are the youths, RT/RW figures, apparatus sub district and students. There are three main session courses available. Understand citizen rights and responsibilities in the public process policy, digital media ethics politics, hoax prevention and simulation. Engaging with Apps and social media. Understanding scores: the mean value of e-politics rose 41% from 59.3 in the pre-test to 83.7 in the post-test. And the respondents have an opportunity to do better for source information that can earn public trust. They also discover more about Good How ambitions disseminated via official government communication throughout the city. Notice that This result is in line with Norris (2011) and Gunawan (2021) findings towards direct relationship with PDL for more effective political and enhanced citizen engagement (Fatimah et al., 2020; Omosekejimi et al., 2018; Satria et al., 2023). Within the worship situation described in this issue, digital literacy stands as a golden pillar of success for technology participatory delivery phase.

c. WargaMelek.id Platform Development and Implementation

The WargaMelek.id is built on the open-source Progressive Web App (PWA) technology. id as a platform and it can be available on multiple devices, desktop & mobile. One of the key characteristics designed see on the table.

Table 2. Platform Development and Implementation

Public Aspiration Forum	Public Aspiration Forum	Local Public Agenda	Corner Community
online, where citizens can exchange ideas, complaints and suggestions on development.	with articles, infographics, and tutorial videos on digital ethics, politics of rights, and government governance.	containing activity calendars of sub-districts and discussion forums.	a platform where Coral cadets and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) can promote activities and products they.

d. Public Participation in Improvement

Resident engagement has increased dramatically, the year-end analysis found. According to the platform statistics and the ward’s reports, number of people who were engaged in public activity planning

rose from 48% in 2023 to 67% per cent in 2026 and female share from 18% to 32 %. And 65 percent of the app's users said that the app helps them articulate dreams that they have, or learn about public policy. Enhancement of quantity This implies that electronic participation is no substitute for face-to-face communication: indeed, governments hybrid model transcends towards downstream democracy. Non-participating citizens are plunged from direct meetings into electronic media, producing an innovative connection between government and society.

e. Synergies with the Digital Economy and Tourism Programme Community

This Platform, politics is not the only one who benefits but so as digital economy and tourism community. WargaMelek.id has 14 local UMKM and three environment tour communities. id. For events and product promotions, they employ the feature Corner Community. The intervention group increased their digital contact to a 38% greater extent than they expressed at the beginning of the programme over six months.

A priority in the government sector is creating a citizen-centric digital economy, or people-driven digital economy. They are taught how to manipulate the digital economy, local affairs and tourism — and inject political knowledge into it.

f. Academic and Social Impact

Academic output, there were several academic outcomes from this program: (1) one scientific paper was published in Community Service Journal (Sinta 3). An internal guidebook community-Based Digital Participation Model" for Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) for the WargaMelek.id application. Meanwhile, quantifiable societal effects include 1. Enhancing the capability of citizens to comprehend digital politics in two partner villages; 2. Increasing the flow of communication and transparency between village officials and residents; three. 2 Make a new culture of public participation based on data and tech. Such findings echo the proposition OECD (2021) and UNDP (2020) notion on democracy, that citizen education and digitalization in local government increase democracy likewise public accountability (Cox et al., 2011; Lutz & Linder, 2004; Ravesteijn, 2020).

g. Theoretical Discussion

The results show that building digital political literacy through a community platform can genuinely boost awareness and participation in local politics. We saw real improvements in how participants understood and engaged with issues, echoing earlier research about the power of hands-on, participatory learning for building civic skills and confidence. WargaMelek.id turned out to be more than just another tech platform—it became a digital meeting place where citizens and local government could actually talk and break down information barriers. This backs up theories about digital democracy and deliberative participation: digital tools can grow the public sphere, but only if they're part of a supportive social and institutional environment. Still, one big takeaway stands out—technology by itself doesn't create participation. You need ongoing civic education, good facilitation, and real institutional support at the community level for it all to work.

In theory, the results of this service show that there is a significant association between digital political literacy and citizen political efficacy. Raising citizens' awareness about the public policy helps them to engage with community issues (Gershtenson et al., 2010; Lever, 2024; Swerts, 2017; Zhang, 2011). On the other hand, as Habermas (1996)" WargaMelek.id is public digital space where citizens' discussion could possibly be organized in the identity of rational, open and public-spirited (Duvenhage, 2024; Habermas, 1999; Shahzad & Muhammad, 2024). This platform shortens the gap between government and people, thus speeding up the participatory decision-making process. According to digital leadership theory (Chadwick, 2019) the creation of a collaborative ecosystem among citizens, government and research organizations is types of crucial in designing flexible public governance 18. That is the merging of science and technology via WargaMelek.id is appropriate. Therefore, incorporating IPTEKS through WargaMelek.id is appropriate. At the local level, this model constitutes a real example of the triple helix (academe-community-government) which can promote citizen participation and social innovation in the digital era (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014; Houser et al., 2012; Savaget et al., 2019).

h. Challenges and Learning

The challenges during the implementation were as follows: Technological problems, low coverage of internet networks in some RWs, various digital literacy levels especially for old residents and limited village budget support for maintenance of the platform. Nevertheless, supportive measures, including face-to-face

training in clinical coaching and support of students from communication and IT. In order to try to work the platform in annually, agree to a memorandum of understanding with the village. This adaptation has served as a powerful reminder that the success of technology-enabled community service depends much more on social and institutional infrastructure of partners than technological innovation alone (Antik, 2023; Christensen et al., 2015; Sørensen & Waldorff, 2014).

i. Implications for Sustainability

Replication started out well in the first two years. Malang City Communication and Information Agency stated that WargaMelek would be integrated. id system into its Smart City portal via inter-sub-district cooperation. This model is also intended to be adopted in the policy named Malang Participatory Digital 2030. In both theoretical and empirical terms these findings reveal that enhancing citizens' digital political literacy not only helps them to better navigate digital environments but also fosters a more durable ecosystem of digital democracy. There, the government, academia and public reinforce one another to produce open, inclusive and data-based governance.

V. CONCLUSION

This community service program successfully strengthened digital political literacy and enhanced community participation in local governance through the implementation of the **WargaMelek.id** platform using a community-based participatory approach. The program effectively addressed the primary challenges identified during the preliminary needs assessment, including limited digital political literacy, low public participation in local decision-making processes, the absence of an integrated digital participation platform, and the lack of sustainable community mentoring. The combination of digital literacy education, participatory platform development, continuous mentoring, and collaboration among universities, local government, and community organizations contributed to improving citizens' understanding of digital governance, increasing their confidence in utilizing digital media for civic participation, and expanding opportunities for transparent communication between residents and government institutions. Beyond improving individual competencies, the program also strengthened institutional capacity through the establishment of a community-based digital management team capable of supporting the long-term sustainability of digital participation initiatives. These outcomes demonstrate that integrating educational intervention, technological innovation, and collaborative community empowerment provides an effective model for promoting inclusive and participatory local governance. Nevertheless, this program was implemented within two urban communities and involved a limited number of participants, meaning that its long-term impacts on behavioral change and policy participation have not yet been comprehensively evaluated. Therefore, future community service initiatives should include broader geographical coverage, longitudinal impact assessments, continuous capacity-building programs, and stronger integration with local government digital governance policies to ensure the sustainability, scalability, and wider adoption of this participatory digital empowerment model.

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