

CIVIC CLICKS

Mastering Digital Citizenship & Media Literacy

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The Digital Generation – Connected but Not Always Conscious

Pakistan's youth – almost two-thirds of our population – live in a world powered by screens. They scroll, stream, and share more than any previous generation. But in this digital flood of information, many struggle to separate facts from fiction, connection from distraction, and expression from exploitation.

The truth is: being online doesn't automatically make someone digitally literate.

To thrive in today's Pakistan, young people need to master digital citizenship, media literacy, and information skills – the real "survival skills" of the 21st century.

What Does It Mean to Be a Digital Citizen?

A digital citizen isn't defined by how much time they spend online – but by how responsibly they behave there. It's about being ethical, informed, and empathetic in every click, comment, and share. Just like good citizens respect traffic laws, good digital citizens respect online ethics:



They verify before sharing



They protect their own and others' privacy



They stand against cyberbullying and misinformation



They use technology for learning, advocacy, and creativity

In Pakistan's hyper-connected society – where social media can shape politics, perceptions, and public opinion – every youth's digital behavior has a ripple effect.

Information Skills: From Scrolling to Thinking

Every second, we're bombarded with data – tweets, videos, articles, ads. But information alone isn't power; understanding it is. Information skills teach young people to:

Search efficiently

Evaluate credibility

Organize and synthesize data

Cite ethically and avoid plagiarism

These are the same skills employers, journalists, and researchers value most – and they can be taught in classrooms through project-based learning and critical inquiry exercises.

Misinformation: The Virus of the Internet Age

In a world of viral posts and sensational headlines, fake news spreads faster than truth. A 2023 report by the Digital Rights Foundation found that 6 out of 10 Pakistani users have shared unverified news at least once. Often, it's not out of malice but out of habit – we forward before we fact-check.

To fight this, we need media literacy:

The ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media content responsibly.

Here's how young people can practice it:

- Check the source: Is it a verified outlet or a random page?
- Read beyond headlines: Context changes meaning.
- Beware of bias: Understand agenda and framing.
- Think before you share: Does it help or harm?

When youth learn to ask critical questions, they become defenders of truth – not amplifiers of confusion.

Digital Dangers: Staying Safe Online

Being a responsible digital citizen also means staying cyber-safe. Phishing scams, fake job offers, identity theft, and online harassment are rising across Pakistan. Although laws like the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) exist, most youth don't know how to report abuse or secure their data. Simple precautions can make a difference:

- Use unique, strong passwords and enable two-factor authentication.
- Avoid sharing personal details on public platforms.
- Report suspicious content and block abusers.
- Stay aware of online frauds and fake investment schemes.

The Role of Schools, Universities, and Parents

True digital transformation begins with education. Our institutions must move beyond teaching students how to use technology — to teaching them how to think with it. Schools & Colleges should:

- Add media literacy and digital ethics modules.
- Encourage fact-checking and research assignments.
- Promote responsible use of AI tools and social media.

Parents should:

- Discuss online safety openly.
- Model balanced digital behavior.
- Guide, not police, their children's internet use.
- Policy makers can support this by integrating digital literacy into the National Curriculum and youth programs like Kamyab Jawan.

Conclusion: The Power of the Informed Click

Every click leaves a footprint. Every share sends a message. Every voice shapes the digital landscape. If Pakistan's youth learn to think critically, act responsibly, and create positively online, they won't just be consumers of technology — they'll be leaders of the digital future.

“Being a digital citizen isn't about being online — it's about being aware, accountable, and active.”

