International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
Vol. 14, Issue 11, CONFLUENCE - 2026

Research Paper on Role of Digital Citizenship in Promoting Social Justice Among Youth

Author- Mandara S V Rao
mandara.bcom.10042006@bmsccm.ac.in
V Semester B.Com
BMSCCM

ABSTRACT

In today's digital world, people increasingly depend on the internet for shopping, banking, making payments, and accessing information. As digital platforms become a part of everyday life, being a responsible digital citizen has become important not only for personal safety but also for protecting consumer rights and promoting social justice. This study focuses on the relationship between digital citizenship, consumer rights, and social justice among college students. It explores students' awareness of responsible online behaviour, digital privacy, consumer protection, and their ability to identify and respond to unfair practices in the digital marketplace. The study also highlights how digital literacy and responsible use of technology can help create a more inclusive and fair digital economy. By understanding these aspects, the research aims to show how young consumers can contribute to a safer, more responsible, and socially just digital environment. t the same time, challenges such as misinformation, cyberbullying, online discrimination, privacy concerns, and unequal access to digital technologies can limit the positive impact of digital participation. The study highlights the importance of digital literacy, critical thinking, ethical online behavior, and respect for diversity in enabling youth to become responsible digital citizens

Keywords: Digital Citizenship, Consumer Rights, Social Justice, Digital Literacy, Youth.

(This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.)

International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
Vol. 14, Issue 11, CONFLUENCE - 2026

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital technology has changed how young people learn, communicate, shop, make payments and take part in public conversations. A message, video or post can reach a large audience in a short time. This creates opportunities for education, community support and civic participation, but it also means that inaccurate information, harassment and unfair treatment can spread quickly. For college students, being online is not simply a technical activity; it is also a social and ethical responsibility.

Digital citizenship refers to the knowledge, habits and values that help people participate safely, thoughtfully and responsibly in digital spaces. It includes protecting personal information, checking information before sharing it, respecting other people, understanding digital rights and responsibilities, and using online platforms in ways that do not harm others. A responsible digital citizen is not expected to know every technology. Rather, the person should be willing to question content, consider consequences and seek help when necessary.

The internet is now part of everyday student life. Young people use digital platforms to study, stay in touch, shop, make payments and keep up with current events. These activities make life easier, but they also bring responsibilities. A post can travel widely within minutes, and a careless share can spread false information or hurt someone. For this reason, being a digital citizen is about more than knowing how to use a phone or an app; it is also about making thoughtful choices online.

Digital citizenship means taking part in online spaces safely, respectfully and responsibly. It includes checking whether information is trustworthy, protecting personal details, respecting other people's views and understanding the rights and responsibilities that come with using technology. A responsible digital citizen does not have to know everything about the internet. What matters is being willing to pause, question what appears on screen and think about how an online action might affect others.

Digital spaces can be powerful tools for social justice. Students can share information about important issues, support campaigns, sign petitions and hear from people whose experiences might otherwise be overlooked. Yet the same spaces can also carry discrimination, harassment and misleading claims. Not everyone has the same access to a reliable internet connection, a suitable device or the skills needed to use online services confidently. These differences can leave some people out of conversations that affect them.

Consumer rights matter online too. Shopping websites and digital payments are convenient, but users may come across fake offers, unclear prices, misleading product descriptions or problems with refunds. Students need to know how to protect payment details, keep proof of a transaction and find the right place to raise a complaint. In this way, digital citizenship links everyday online decisions with safety, fairness and accountability.

(This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.)

International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
Vol. 14, Issue 11, CONFLUENCE - 2026

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Young people may spend a great deal of time online without necessarily knowing how to manage privacy settings, spot misleading information or respond to online abuse. This study looks at how the respondents describe their own awareness and habits, and what they see as the main barriers to responsible digital citizenship.

Digital platforms create opportunities to learn, connect and speak up about social issues. However, students may not always feel confident about checking information, protecting their privacy, understanding consumer rights or responding to unfair treatment. This study explores these areas through survey responses and identifies where further guidance may help.

- To assess respondents' familiarity with the concept of digital citizenship.
- To understand self-reported practices relating to information verification and online privacy.
- To examine respondents' experiences of cyberbullying, online harassment, misinformation or discriminatory content.
- To explore perceptions of social media as a tool for raising awareness of social-justice issues.
- To study students' participation in digital activities supporting social causes.
- This study is useful because digital choices can affect both individuals and the wider community. A student who checks a claim before sharing it may help prevent misinformation; a student who understands privacy settings may be better able to protect personal information. The findings can help colleges identify practical topics for student awareness activities, including online safety, respectful communication, consumer protection and equal access.
- To identify the barriers respondents consider most important to responsible digital citizenship among youth.

2.1 Research Questions

- How familiar are students with digital citizenship?
- How often do respondents verify information before sharing it, and how aware are they of privacy settings?
- Do respondents see social media as useful for social-justice awareness, and do they participate in online causes?
- Do students recognise unequal digital access as a source of social inequality?
- How aware are respondents of their consumer rights in online shopping and payments?
- Which barriers do respondents believe most strongly limit responsible digital citizenship?

2.2 Scope of the Study

The study focuses on the 38 people who submitted the attached questionnaire. It covers demographic characteristics, familiarity with digital citizenship, information-checking behaviour, privacy awareness,

(This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.)

International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
Vol. 14, Issue 11, CONFLUENCE - 2026

exposure to harmful or misleading online content, online social participation, digital inequality, consumer rights and perceived barriers. The findings describe this respondent group only and should not be treated as representative of all college students or all young people.

2.3 Significance of the Study

The study is relevant to students, teachers and institutions because digital citizenship involves everyday choices that can affect safety, dignity and fairness. Understanding students' reported strengths and concerns can help colleges design practical sessions on checking sources, managing privacy, responding to harassment, recognising consumer fraud and participating respectfully in online discussions. It can also encourage students to view digital participation as both a personal responsibility and a way to support a more inclusive society.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Digital citizenship is discussed in education as a set of everyday skills and responsibilities, rather than simply the ability to use technology. Ribble's work, for example, describes areas such as digital etiquette, rights and responsibilities, security and literacy. This is a useful way to think about college students' online lives because responsible participation involves judgement and behaviour as well as technical knowledge.

The European Commission's DigComp framework groups digital competence into areas such as finding and evaluating information, communicating with others, creating digital content, staying safe and solving problems. These areas closely match the issues covered in this survey, including information verification, privacy and online communication. The framework also reminds us that digital skills need to develop over time as technology and online platforms change.

Misinformation is a particular concern when people rely on social media for news and public discussion. Before sharing a post, users can check who published it, when it appeared and whether reliable sources report the same thing. This matters for social-justice issues because a false or misleading claim can confuse a discussion or unfairly target a person or group. Checking information is therefore not only a personal habit; it can also help protect the quality of public conversation.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals offer a wider context for this topic. Goal 10 focuses on reducing inequalities, while Goal 16 highlights inclusive societies and access to justice. Digital platforms can help people find information and organise around shared concerns, but these benefits are harder to reach when people lack connectivity, accessible tools or protection from online abuse.

As more shopping and payments take place online, consumers need clear information and ways to resolve problems. The United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection emphasise the importance of protecting consumers and supporting informed choices. In everyday terms, this includes understanding prices and product details, using secure payment methods, keeping transaction records and knowing how to seek help when something goes wrong.

Having internet access does not automatically mean that everyone can benefit from it equally. People may face barriers because of the cost of devices or data, language, accessibility needs, poor connectivity or limited digital skills. A fair approach to digital citizenship should therefore encourage individual responsibility while also recognising that institutions and service providers have a role in making digital spaces more accessible.

(This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.)

International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
Vol. 14, Issue 11, CONFLUENCE - 2026

3.1 Research Gap

Existing work highlights digital literacy, online safety, participation and inclusion as important parts of digital citizenship. This survey adds a small, descriptive picture of how the respondents view these issues together. It cannot show that one factor causes another, but it can point to topics that may be worth discussing in student awareness programmes.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This paper views digital citizenship as a set of connected capabilities and responsibilities. The framework used for interpretation has four linked areas:

- Digital literacy: evaluating online information, recognising misinformation and making considered sharing decisions.
- Safety and rights: managing privacy settings, protecting personal information and understanding consumer protections.
- Ethical participation: communicating respectfully, responding to harassment and avoiding discriminatory conduct.
- Inclusive civic engagement: using digital tools to raise awareness, support social causes and recognise inequalities in access.

These areas overlap in everyday life. For example, checking a source before sharing a post can reduce the spread of misinformation, while knowing how to adjust privacy settings can help someone feel safer online. Still, responsibility should not fall on individual users alone. Colleges, platforms, businesses and public institutions also influence whether online spaces are safe, fair and accessible.

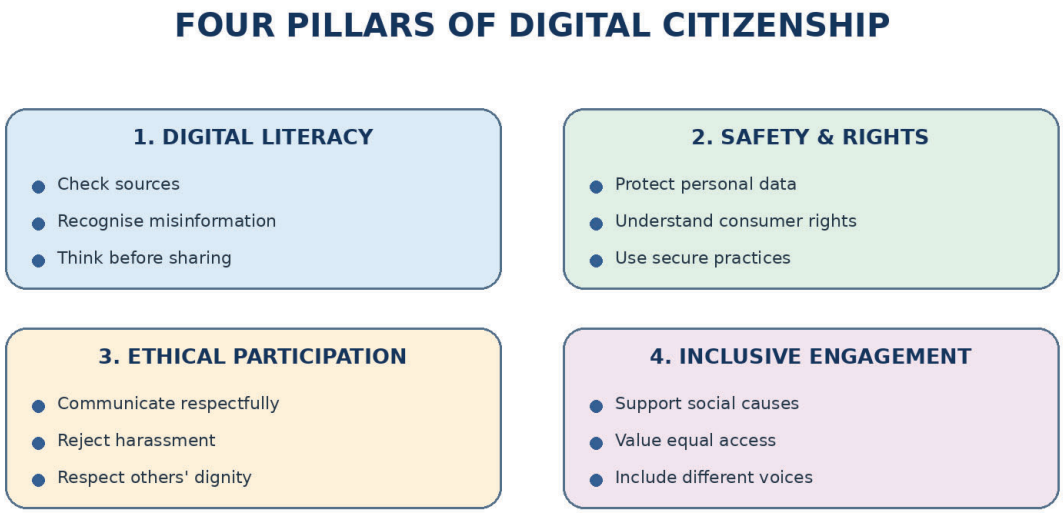


Figure 12. A conceptual view of the four connected areas of digital citizenship.

(This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.)

International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
Vol. 14, Issue 11, CONFLUENCE - 2026

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

A descriptive survey approach was used to summarise the answers to a structured questionnaire. The responses are presented as counts, percentages and charts so that the main patterns are easy to see. This approach is useful for describing opinions and reported habits, but it cannot establish cause and effect.

5.2 Sources of Data

The primary data came from the attached Excel response file, which contains 38 completed questionnaires. The questions cover students' familiarity with digital citizenship, information checking, privacy, experiences with harmful online content, participation in social causes, views on digital inequality and awareness of online consumer rights. Published material was used to provide background for the discussion.

5.3 Sample and Sampling

The file contains 38 respondents. It does not provide enough information to confirm that participants were selected randomly, so the findings are treated as a snapshot of this group rather than as a picture of all college students. The results should be interpreted with that limitation in mind.

5.4 Method of Analysis

Answers were counted by category and converted into percentages using 38 respondents as the base, unless stated otherwise. Charts help show which responses were more common. Since most questions asked respondents to choose from set options, the analysis focuses on the patterns in their answers and avoids assuming reasons that the questionnaire did not ask about.

5.5 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

The results are presented in summary form, without names or timestamps. There are some limits to the study: the sample is small, the answers are self-reported, and some educational or demographic groups have fewer respondents than others. Questions about awareness reflect what people think they know, not necessarily how they would respond in a real situation. The results are best understood as a useful starting point for discussion, rather than a final judgement about young people's digital skills.

6. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The survey includes 38 responses. Most participants are young people who are currently studying, so the results mainly reflect the views of students rather than a broad cross-section of the public. The age, gender, education and study-field charts below provide context for the findings that follow.

(This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.)

International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
Vol. 14, Issue 11, CONFLUENCE - 2026

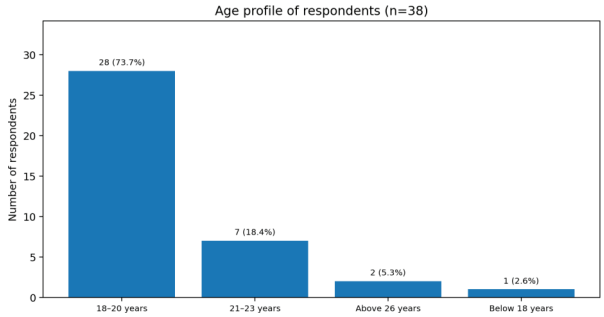


Figure 1. Age distribution of respondents.

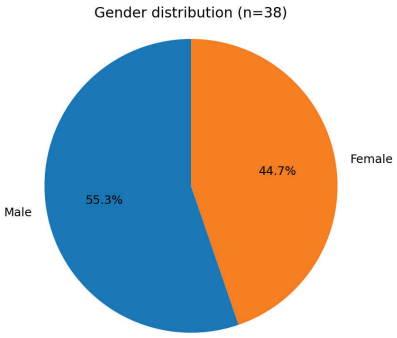


Figure 2. Gender distribution of respondents.

6.1.1 Education and Field of Study

Educational level	Respondents	Percentage
Undergraduate	36	94.7%
Other	1	2.6%
Postgraduate	1	2.6%

Field of study	Respondents	Percentage
Commerce and Management	16	42.1%
Engineering and Technology	16	42.1%
Arts and Humanities	3	7.9%
Science	2	5.3%
Other	1	2.6%

Undergraduates make up 36 of the 38 respondents (94.7%). Commerce and Management and Engineering and Technology each account for 16 respondents (42.1%). The remaining participants come from Arts and Humanities, Science or another field. As a result, the survey offers useful perspectives from two main study areas, while other fields are represented by fewer responses.

(This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.)

International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
Vol. 14, Issue 11, CONFLUENCE - 2026

6.2 Familiarity with Digital Citizenship

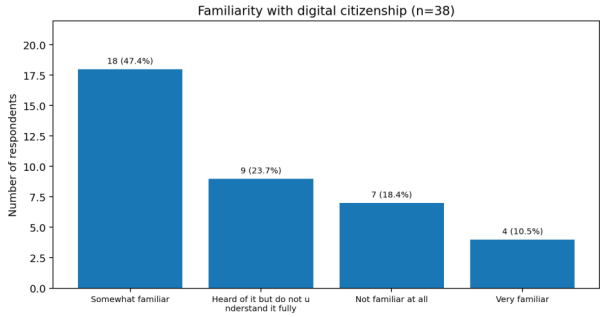


Figure 3. Self-reported familiarity with digital citizenship.

The largest group—18 respondents (47.4%)—say they are somewhat familiar with the term digital citizenship. Nine (23.7%) have heard the term but do not fully understand it, seven (18.4%) are not familiar with it, and four (10.5%) say they are very familiar with it.

In other words, 34 out of 38 respondents (89.5%) do not describe themselves as very familiar with the term. This does not automatically mean that they behave irresponsibly online; they may already follow good habits without using this label. It does suggest that colleges could explain digital citizenship in practical terms, using familiar examples such as checking information, protecting privacy, treating people respectfully and shopping safely online.

6.3 Verifying Information Before Sharing

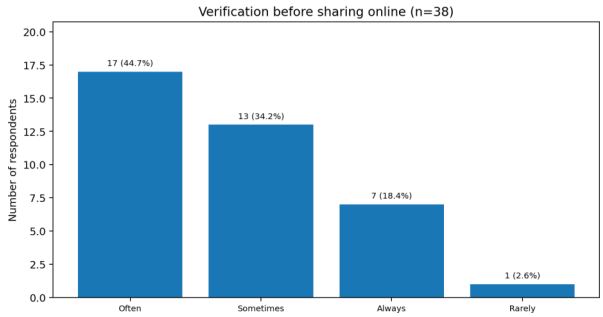


Figure 4. Frequency of checking information before sharing.

Seventeen respondents (44.7%) say they often check information before sharing it, while seven (18.4%) say they always do. Thirteen (34.2%) do this sometimes, and one respondent (2.6%) says rarely. Together, 24 respondents (63.2%) report checking information often or always, but about one in three do so only sometimes.

This is an area where a few simple habits could make a difference. Students can check the original source, look at the publication date, compare a claim with reliable sources and avoid forwarding something simply because it has been shared widely. Since the survey asks people to report their own behaviour, it cannot confirm how well they would identify false information in practice.

(This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.)

International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
Vol. 14, Issue 11, CONFLUENCE - 2026

6.4 Awareness of Online Privacy

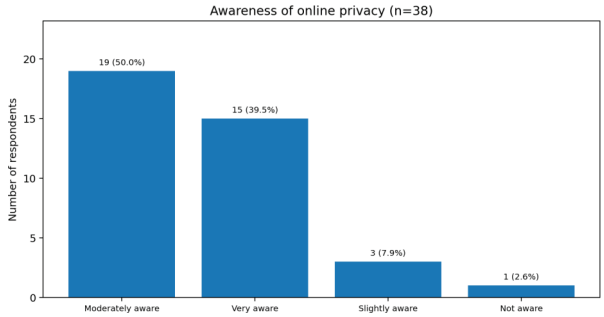


Figure 5. Awareness of privacy settings and personal-data protection.

Nineteen respondents (50.0%) say they are moderately aware of privacy settings and personal-data protection. Fifteen (39.5%) report being very aware, three (7.9%) are slightly aware and one (2.6%) is not aware. Overall, 34 respondents (89.5%) describe their awareness as moderate or very high.

Most respondents feel that they have at least a basic understanding of online privacy. Still, knowing about privacy and consistently protecting personal information are not quite the same thing. Students may benefit from hands-on activities showing how to review app permissions, create strong passwords, use multi-factor authentication where available, recognise suspicious links and decide what information is safe to post.

6.5 Experiences of Harmful or Misleading Online Content

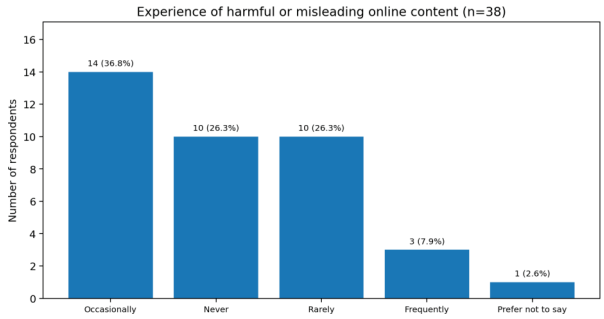


Figure 6. Reported encounters with cyberbullying, harassment, misinformation or discriminatory content.

Fourteen respondents (36.8%) say they occasionally encounter the types of content listed in the question. Ten (26.3%) say rarely, another ten (26.3%) say never, three (7.9%) say frequently and one (2.6%) preferred not to say. Because the question groups cyberbullying, harassment, misinformation and discriminatory content together, these figures cannot show which specific experience occurs most often.

The responses suggest that many participants have come across harmful or misleading content online. Students should know how to report abusive material, block or mute accounts, save evidence when appropriate and seek support from a trusted person or relevant service. It is also important to remember that disagreement is not an excuse for harassment or discrimination.

(This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.)

International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
Vol. 14, Issue 11, CONFLUENCE - 2026

6.6 Social Media and Social-Justice Awareness

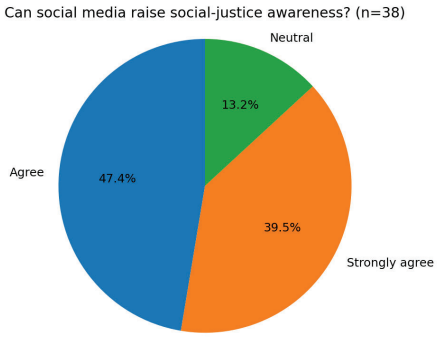


Figure 7. Views on social media as a tool for social-justice awareness.

Eighteen respondents (47.4%) agree that social media can raise awareness of social-justice issues, and 15 (39.5%) strongly agree. Five (13.2%) are neutral, while no one selected a disagree option. Altogether, 33 respondents (86.8%) see social media as a useful way to bring attention to these issues.

This is one of the clearest positive patterns in the survey. Social media can help a campaign reach people quickly, connect individuals with similar concerns and bring attention to experiences that might otherwise be overlooked. But visibility alone does not guarantee change. Sharing accurate information, respecting people's privacy and avoiding unverified claims are important if online campaigns are to be responsible and useful.

6.7 Participation in Digital Activities Supporting Social Causes

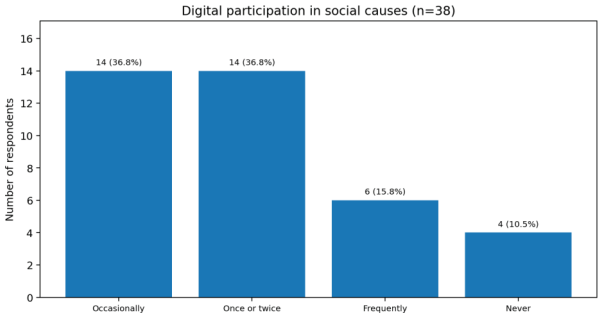


Figure 8. Reported participation in online social causes.

Fourteen respondents (36.8%) say they take part in online social causes occasionally, and another 14 (36.8%) say they have done so once or twice. Six (15.8%) report frequent participation, while four (10.5%) have never taken part in the activities described in the questionnaire.

Most respondents have therefore taken part in some form of online activity for a social cause, but fewer say they do so frequently. The questionnaire does not ask why, so it would be wrong to assume a single explanation. Time, confidence, access to trustworthy campaigns or uncertainty about where to start could be explored in a future survey.

(This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.)

International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
Vol. 14, Issue 11, CONFLUENCE - 2026

6.8 Digital Access and Social Inequality

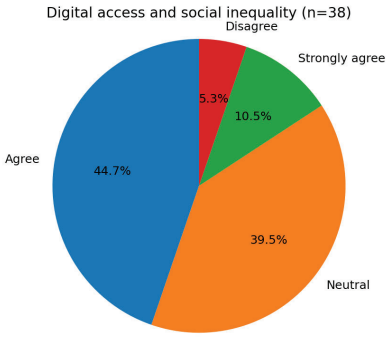


Figure 9. Views on whether unequal digital access creates social inequality.

Seventeen respondents (44.7%) agree that unequal access to the internet and digital technology creates social inequality, while four (10.5%) strongly agree. Fifteen (39.5%) are neutral and two (5.3%) disagree. In total, 21 respondents (55.3%) agree or strongly agree.

A little over half of the respondents recognise a link between digital access and inequality, while many others remain unsure. Access is about more than having an internet connection: the cost of data and devices, accessibility, language and confidence using online services can all affect participation. Efforts to improve digital inclusion need to consider these practical barriers as well as connectivity itself.

6.9 Awareness of Online Consumer Rights

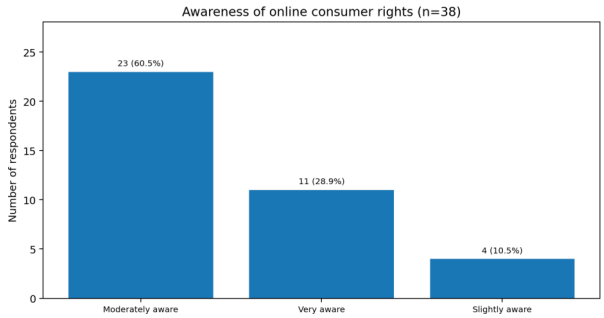


Figure 10. Self-reported awareness of consumer rights in online shopping and payments.

Twenty-three respondents (60.5%) say they are moderately aware of their online consumer rights, 11 (28.9%) say they are very aware and four (10.5%) are slightly aware. No respondent selected “not aware.” This is encouraging, although fewer than one-third describe their awareness as very high.

In practice, consumer awareness means checking product details and the final price, looking into the seller, reading return and refund conditions, keeping transaction records, protecting payment information and knowing how to raise a complaint. Because the survey asks respondents to rate their own awareness, it does not show whether they could apply these steps in a difficult situation. A future study could include short examples or scenarios to test that more directly.

(This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.)

International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
Vol. 14, Issue 11, CONFLUENCE - 2026

6.10 Main Barriers to Responsible Digital Citizenship

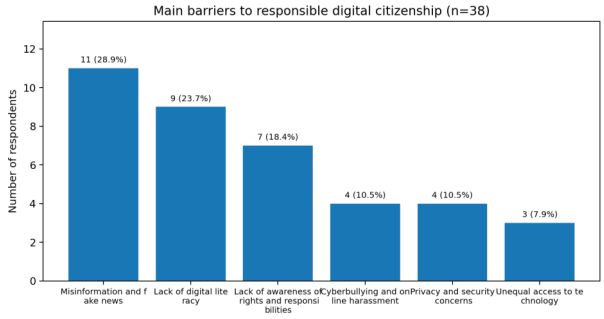


Figure 11. Respondents' selection of the biggest barrier.

Misinformation and fake news is the most frequently selected barrier, chosen by 11 respondents (28.9%). Lack of digital literacy comes next, with nine (23.7%). Seven (18.4%) point to limited awareness of rights and responsibilities. Cyberbullying and online harassment and privacy or security concerns each receive four responses (10.5%), while three respondents (7.9%) select unequal access to technology.

For this group, misleading information and limited digital skills stand out as the biggest concerns. They are closely related: people need practical skills to assess claims, recognise suspicious activity and make informed choices. The other responses also matter, showing that online safety, knowledge of rights and access to technology remain part of the wider picture.

7. MAJOR FINDINGS

- The survey includes 38 respondents, most of whom are undergraduate students.
- Only 10.5% say they are very familiar with the term digital citizenship; most are somewhat familiar or less familiar.
- About 63.2% say they often or always check information before sharing it, while 34.2% do so only sometimes.
- Most respondents rate their awareness of online privacy settings as moderate or very high.
- Many respondents have encountered harmful or misleading content, although the question combines several different types of content.
- A strong majority (86.8%) believe social media can raise awareness of social-justice issues.
- Most respondents have taken part in an online social cause at least once, but 15.8% say they participate frequently.
- Just over half (55.3%) agree that unequal digital access creates social inequality, while 39.5% are neutral.
- Most respondents describe themselves as moderately aware of online consumer rights.
- Misinformation and fake news is the most commonly selected barrier, followed by a lack of digital literacy.

8. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Colleges could hold short, practical sessions on digital rights and responsibilities, respectful communication and the effects of online behaviour.

(This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.)

International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
Vol. 14, Issue 11, CONFLUENCE - 2026

- Use familiar examples to practise checking the original source, date, evidence and confirmation from other reliable sources before sharing a claim.
- Offer a simple privacy check-up covering app permissions, account settings, passwords, multi-factor authentication and suspicious links.
- Make it clear how students can report abuse, block accounts, keep evidence when needed and seek support.
- Encourage students to check campaign claims before sharing them and to respect the privacy, consent and dignity of the people involved.
- Use student-friendly examples to explain safe payments, refund terms, misleading listings, transaction records and complaint options.
- Make learning resources accessible and consider students who may face barriers related to devices, data costs, language or accessibility.
- Use short scenario-based activities before and after awareness sessions to see whether students can apply what they have learned.

9. CONCLUSION

This study looked at how 38 respondents understand digital citizenship in relation to social justice, online safety, digital inclusion and consumer rights. Most respondents believe social media can help raise awareness of social-justice issues, and many report having taken part in online causes at least once. Most also describe their privacy and consumer-rights awareness as moderate or high. At the same time, familiarity with the term digital citizenship varies, not everyone checks information consistently, and misinformation and limited digital literacy are seen as important barriers.

The results suggest that responsible digital participation involves more than spending time online. It means checking information before sharing it, protecting personal details, treating others with respect, recognising unfair practices and understanding that not everyone has equal access to digital opportunities. Colleges can help by using practical examples and activities, rather than relying only on general warnings about online risks.

This study has clear limitations. It is based on 38 self-reported responses and cannot represent all young people. Some questions combine different experiences, while others ask about perceived awareness rather than tested knowledge. Future research could include more respondents from a wider range of backgrounds and use real-life scenarios to explore how students make decisions online. Even with these limits, the survey provides a helpful starting point for conversations about making digital spaces safer, fairer and more inclusive.

REFERENCES

European Commission. (2022). The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp 2.2). Publications Office of the European Union. https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC128415

Ribble, M. (2015). Digital Citizenship in Schools: Nine Elements All Students Should Know (3rd ed.). International Society for Technology in Education.

(This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.)

International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
Vol. 14, Issue 11, CONFLUENCE - 2026

United Nations. (2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. (2016). United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection. https://unctad.org/topic/competition-and-consumer-protection/un-guidelines-for-consumer-protection

UNESCO. (2021). Media and Information Literate Citizens: Think Critically, Click Wisely! UNESCO. https://www.unesco.org/

World Wide Web Foundation. (2018). The Case for a Contract for the Web. https://contractfortheweb.org/

(This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.)