

Digital Citizenship Education and Democratic Resilience in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between Digital Citizenship Education (DCE) and democratic resilience among citizens in Benue State, Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted, and 400 respondents were sampled from students, teachers, civil servants/professionals, traders and other digital users. Data were collected using the Digital Citizenship Education and Democratic Resilience in Benue State Questionnaire (DCEDRBSQ), with 385 valid responses analysed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression in SPSS version 27 at the 0.05 significance level. The findings revealed that DCE significantly predicted democratic resilience ($\beta = .615$, $R^2 = .468$, $p < .001$); digital civic engagement significantly predicted democratic participation ($\beta = .574$, $R^2 = .412$, $p < .001$); digital literacy skills significantly predicted resistance to misinformation ($\beta = .598$, $R^2 = .439$, $p < .001$); digital citizenship engagement significantly predicted institutional trust ($\beta = .522$, $R^2 = .356$, $p < .001$); and ethical digital behaviour significantly predicted democratic tolerance ($\beta = .571$, $R^2 = .401$, $p < .001$). All five null hypotheses were therefore rejected. The study concluded that digital citizenship was significantly associated with key dimensions of democratic resilience, although institutional effectiveness, insecurity, socioeconomic conditions, political polarization and digital inequality also influenced democratic outcomes. It recommended strengthening digital citizenship education, digital literacy, responsible online participation, institutional transparency and equitable access to digital resources in Benue State.

Keywords: *Digital citizenship, democratic resilience, digital literacy, civic engagement, misinformation, institutional trust*

1.0 Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed political communication, civic participation, and governance by creating digital public spaces through which citizens exchange information, mobilise, deliberate, and hold public authorities accountable. In Nigeria, particularly among young citizens, social media and mobile technologies have increasingly become important channels for political engagement and electoral communication. However, the democratic

potential of digitalisation is accompanied by significant risks, including misinformation, hate speech, cyber-propaganda, and algorithm-driven manipulation (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019; Guess et al., 2020). Thus, digital platforms can simultaneously broaden democratic participation and weaken the quality of political discourse. These tensions are particularly important in fragile and conflict-affected contexts such as Benue State, where insecurity, communal tensions, displacement, and perceived governance deficits can undermine social cohesion and public trust. Nigeria's democratic experience since 1999 has demonstrated considerable electoral and institutional development, but persistent insecurity and governance challenges continue to constrain democratic consolidation (International IDEA, 2023). In Benue State, farmer–herder conflicts and communal violence have heightened political sensitivities, making the rapid circulation of unverified or inflammatory information through platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and X potentially consequential for public perceptions, political participation, and intergroup relations. Digital Citizenship Education (DCE) provides a potentially important response to these challenges. Beyond basic digital literacy, DCE promotes critical evaluation of online information, ethical digital behaviour, awareness of digital rights, tolerance, and responsible civic participation (Ribble, 2021; UNESCO, 2021). These competencies can strengthen citizens' capacity to distinguish credible information from disinformation and participate constructively in digital political spaces. Evidence that media and digital literacy can improve individuals' ability to evaluate online information further supports its democratic relevance (McGrew et al., 2020; Jones-Jang et al., 2021). Democratic resilience refers to the capacity of democratic systems and citizens to withstand political, social, and informational shocks while maintaining participation, accountability, tolerance, and the rule of law (Boese et al., 2022). In this regard, resilient democracy depends not only on effective institutions but also on citizens who can critically navigate increasingly complex information environments. Nevertheless, empirical evidence on whether and how DCE contributes to democratic resilience at the subnational level in Nigeria remains limited. This study therefore investigates the influence of Digital Citizenship Education on democratic resilience in Benue State, with particular attention to its potential to strengthen critical information engagement, responsible digital participation, and resistance to divisive political narratives.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The proliferation of digital technologies in Nigeria has expanded democratic participation but simultaneously exposed political systems to digital manipulation. Studies show that misinformation spreads rapidly on encrypted messaging platforms such as WhatsApp, influencing electoral attitudes and public trust (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2022; Guess et al., 2020). As supported by Bradshaw and Howard (2019); Tucker et al. (2020), misinformation, online hate speech, algorithmic amplification of divisive content, and foreign interference increasingly threaten electoral integrity and social cohesion. In conflict-prone regions like Benue State, digitally amplified rumors and inflammatory narratives can exacerbate communal tensions and undermine confidence in democratic institutions (Okoli & Atelhe, 2020). Despite these risks, Nigeria's civic education curriculum lacks comprehensive integration of digital citizenship competencies (UNESCO, 2021). While global research highlights the importance of media literacy for democratic sustainability (McGrew et al., 2020; Jones-Jang et al., 2021), there is limited empirical evidence examining this relationship within Benue State subnational contexts in Nigeria. The absence of localized studies leaves policymakers without context-specific data to design

interventions. This study therefore addresses this gap by empirically examining the relationship between digital citizenship education and democratic resilience in Benue State.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Assess the relationship exists between digital citizenship education and democratic resilience of citizens in Benue State.
2. Examine the relationship exists between digital civic engagement and democratic participation of citizens in Benue State.
3. Determine the relationship exists between digital literacy skills and resistance to misinformation among citizens in Benue State.
4. Evaluate the relationship exists between digital citizenship engagement and institutional trust by citizens in Benue State.
5. Examine the relationship exists between ethical digital behaviour and democratic tolerance of citizens in Benue State.

1.3 Research Questions

The study answered the following research questions:

1. What relationship exists between digital citizenship education and democratic resilience of citizens in Benue State?
2. What relationship exists between digital civic engagement and democratic participation of citizens in Benue State?
3. What relationship exists between digital literacy skills and resistance to misinformation among citizens in Benue State?
4. What relationship exists between digital citizenship engagement and institutional trust by citizens in Benue State?
5. What relationship exists between ethical digital behaviour and democratic tolerance of citizens in Benue State?

1.4 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided the study:

- H₀₁: Digital citizenship education has no significant relationship with democratic resilience of citizens in Benue State
- H₀₂: Digital civic engagement has no significant relationship with democratic participation of citizens in Benue State
- H₀₃: Digital literacy skills have no significant relationship with resistance to misinformation among citizens in Benue State.
- H₀₄: Digital citizenship engagement has no significant relationship with institutional trust by citizens in Benue State.
- H₀₅: Ethical digital behaviour has no significant relationship with democratic tolerance of citizens in Benue State.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Clarifications

2.1.1 Digital Citizenship Education

Digital Citizenship Education (DCE) equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes needed for responsible, safe, ethical, and informed participation in digital environments (Ribble, 2021; UNESCO, 2021). Beyond technical competence, it promotes digital and media literacy, critical thinking, online safety, civic engagement, intercultural dialogue, and awareness of digital rights (Vuorikari et al., 2022). By strengthening individuals' ability to critically evaluate online information, DCE can reduce vulnerability to misinformation and manipulation while supporting civic trust and meaningful democratic participation, particularly in fragile democratic contexts (McGrew et al., 2020; Jones-Jang et al., 2021).

2.1.2 Democratic Resilience

Democratic resilience refers to the capacity of democratic institutions and citizens to withstand crises, adapt to shocks, and preserve participation, accountability, inclusion, and the rule of law (Boese et al., 2022). It depends not only on strong institutions but also on citizens' ability to critically assess political information and remain committed to democratic values (Norris, 2022). However, insecurity, weak governance, social fragmentation, and digital disinformation can undermine this resilience by intensifying polarization and eroding public trust in democratic institutions (OECD, 2022; International IDEA, 2023).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The three theories provide complementary explanations of how Digital Citizenship Education (DCE) may strengthen democratic resilience, but they operate at different levels. **Civic Culture Theory** focuses on citizens' political attitudes, participation, and trust, suggesting that digital competencies can promote informed and tolerant civic engagement. **Media Literacy Theory** emphasizes the individual-level variable of critical evaluation of information, with empirical evidence that media-literacy skills improve the detection of misinformation and propaganda (Guess et al., 2020; Jones-Jang et al., 2021). **Resilience Theory** shifts attention to the system level, explaining how democratic institutions and societies absorb shocks, adapt to crises, and maintain democratic values (Boese et al., 2022). From the foregoing, it is obvious that while the theories converge in viewing informed and critically engaged citizens as important to democratic stability, they differ in emphasis: media literacy primarily addresses misinformation susceptibility, civic culture explains participation and trust, while resilience theory addresses adaptation and institutional survival. However, the framework remains limited by the assumption that digital competence automatically translates into democratic resilience; it gives insufficient attention to insecurity, political polarization, unequal digital access, institutional weakness, and the Nigerian/Benue context. Thus, the major gap is the limited empirical integration of DCE as an independent factor with specific dimensions of democratic resilience particularly political participation, institutional trust, tolerance, and resistance to misinformation within fragile local contexts such as Benue State.

2.3 Thematic Review

2.3.1 Digital Literacy and Misinformation Resistance

Studies generally show that digital and media literacy reduce vulnerability to political misinformation, as individuals with stronger critical-evaluation skills are better able to identify and resist false content (McGrew et al., 2020; Guess et al., 2020). In Nigeria, platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook have become important channels for political misinformation, while fact-checking awareness and media-literacy training can strengthen users' ability to assess and reject misleading political information (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2022; Ireton & Posetti, 2020).

2.3.2 Digital Civic Engagement and Democratic Participation

Digital platforms have expanded opportunities for political mobilization, youth participation, and civic engagement, as demonstrated by Nigeria's #EndSARS movement and broader online activism (Loader et al., 2021). However, digital participation does not automatically strengthen democracy, since online activism may remain symbolic or become polarizing unless it translates into constructive engagement with democratic institutions (International IDEA, 2023). Digital citizenship education can therefore help bridge this gap by promoting responsible participation, respectful dialogue, and informed civic action, thereby contributing to democratic legitimacy and resilience.

2.3.3 Trust in Democratic Institutions

Institutional trust is a critical component of democratic resilience, but it can be weakened by misinformation that fuels cynicism and distrust in electoral and governance institutions (Norris, 2022; Guess et al., 2020). In fragile regions of Nigeria, online rumours surrounding government responses to insecurity may further deepen public distrust (SBM Intelligence, 2023). However, digital and media literacy can promote informed evaluation of political information and potentially strengthen institutional trust, suggesting that structured digital citizenship education may help reduce misinformation-driven distrust and support democratic resilience.

2.3.4 Challenges of Integrating Digital Citizenship Education in Nigeria

Even though Nigeria's policy recognition of ICT and digital education, implementation remains constrained by inadequate teacher training, weak digital infrastructure, and unequal access to reliable connectivity, particularly in rural areas (UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2023). In Benue State, these challenges are compounded by the rural-urban digital divide, which may limit equitable access to digital literacy and citizenship programmes and thereby reduce their potential contribution to informed civic participation and democratic resilience.

2.4 Empirical Review

Empirical studies on digital literacy and democratic citizenship can be grouped into three related themes: digital/media literacy and misinformation detection, civic online reasoning and critical evaluation, and the African/Nigerian context of election misinformation. Under the first theme, Jones-Jang et al. (2021) examined the relationship between media literacy and the ability to identify fake news. Their findings indicate that media literacy significantly improves individuals' capacity to distinguish credible information from misleading content. This suggests that digital literacy is not merely a technical competence but also a cognitive resource for evaluating political information. Similarly, McGrew et al. (2020), under the civic online reasoning theme, found that

structured training improves learners' ability to evaluate online sources, claims, and evidence. Together, these studies connect digital literacy with critical information evaluation, an important prerequisite for informed democratic participation.

A second theme concerns digital literacy, electoral information, and misinformation in Africa. Ireton and Posetti (2020) emphasized the growing importance of information and media literacy in addressing misinformation within digital communication environments, including electoral contexts. Their work connects citizens' evaluative competencies with their ability to resist misleading political narratives. However, the African evidence is largely broad and conceptual, with limited empirical attention to how specific digital literacy competencies translate into citizens' political knowledge, participation, and decision-making during elections. This creates a contextual gap because digital literacy outcomes may differ according to educational attainment, internet access, political environment, and exposure to misinformation.

The third theme is Nigerian digital misinformation research. Ojebuyi and Salawu (2022) focused mainly on misinformation trends and communication dynamics rather than testing educational or digital-literacy interventions. Their findings complement the international literature by demonstrating the relevance of misinformation as a Nigerian democratic concern, but they do not establish whether strengthening citizens' digital literacy actually improves their capacity to evaluate political information or participate effectively in democratic processes.

The studies therefore converge in suggesting that stronger media, digital, and civic online reasoning skills enhance citizens' ability to evaluate information and potentially reduce vulnerability to misinformation. However, they differ in emphasis: Jones-Jang et al. (2021) focus on media literacy and fake-news identification, McGrew et al. (2020) emphasize civic online reasoning training, while Ojebuyi and Salawu (2022) examine misinformation without directly testing literacy interventions. These differences are complementary rather than necessarily contradictory. Nevertheless, the evidence remains insufficient on the causal pathway between digital literacy and democratic outcomes, particularly in Nigeria. More importantly, there is a paucity of localized empirical research examining how digital literacy influences political knowledge, misinformation resistance, and democratic participation within fragile or conflict-affected subnational contexts. This study addresses that gap by examining these relationships within Benue State, Nigeria.

3.0 Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between digital citizenship education and democratic resilience in Benue State. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the collection of quantitative data from citizens at a single point in time and supported the examination of relationships among the study variables using inferential statistics. The study was conducted across Benue State's 23 Local Government Areas, comprising diverse urban and rural communities that had experienced farmer–herder conflicts, communal crises and displacement. Variations in digital access between urban centres and rural communities provided an appropriate context for examining digital citizenship and democratic resilience.

The study population was estimated at approximately 3.4 million digital-device users. This figure was adopted as a working estimate because an official state-level figure for digital-device users was unavailable. Using Cochran's (1977) formula for large populations:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

where

$Z = 1.96$ (95% confidence level)

$p = 0.5$

$q = 0.5$

$e = 0.05$

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2(0.5)(0.5)}{(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025}$$

$$n = 384$$

For contingency, 5 percent of the sample size was added to the calculated value of 384 making an approximated sample size of 400. A proportional allocation was made using a simple equal-weight assumption (due to unavailable actual population sizes for subgroups).

Table 1: Proportional Distribution of Sample Size

S/N	Category of Respondents	Estimated Proportion (%)	Population Share (Estimated)	Sample Allocation	Size
1	Students	40%	1,360,000	160	
2	Teachers/Educators	20%	680,000	80	
3	Civil servants & professionals	25%	850,000	100	
4	Traders & other digital users	15%	510,000	60	
	Total	100%	3,400,000	400	

Source: Computed by Researcher, 2026

The proportional allocation was carried out to ensure that each subgroup of digital device users was adequately represented in the study.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Digital Citizenship Education and Democratic Resilience in Benue State Questionnaire (DCEDRBSQ). The questionnaire comprised sections on respondents' demographic characteristics, digital citizenship education, and democratic resilience. Democratic resilience was measured through resistance to misinformation, institutional trust, civic participation and democratic tolerance. Items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Content validity was established through expert review, while reliability was determined through a pilot study conducted outside the sampled areas. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the instrument, with a coefficient of 0.70 or above considered acceptable.

The questionnaires were administered directly by the researcher with the assistance of trained research assistants. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, voluntary participation and confidentiality of their responses. The completed questionnaires were coded and analysed using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and the major study variables. Inferential analysis was conducted using multiple regression based on Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) because the principal dependent variables were constructed as composite indices from Likert-scale items and were treated as approximately continuous measures.

Five regression models were estimated to test the hypotheses. The model for hypothesis one was expressed as:

$$DR_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 DCE_i + \beta_2 AGE_i + \beta_3 GEN_i + \beta_4 EDU_i + \beta_5 INC_i + \beta_6 EMP_i + \varepsilon_i \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

Where:

DR_i = Democratic resilience

DCE_i = Digital citizenship education

AGE_i = Age

GEN_i = Gender

EDU_i = Educational attainment

INC_i = Income level

EMP_i = Employment status

The model for hypothesis two was expressed as:

$$DP_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 DCE_i + \beta_2 AGE_i + \beta_3 GEN_i + \beta_4 EDU_i + \beta_5 INC_i + \beta_6 POLEXP_i + \varepsilon_i \dots\dots\dots (2)$$

Where:

$POLEXP_i$ = prior political exposure (e.g., party membership, campaign participation)

The model for hypothesis three was expressed as:

$$RM_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 DLS_i + \beta_2 AGE_i + \beta_3 GEN_i + \beta_4 EDU_i + \beta_5 INC_i + \beta_6 INTUSE_i + \varepsilon_i \dots\dots\dots (3)$$

where

$INTUSE_i$ = intensity of internet use (hours/day or frequency)

The model for hypothesis four was expressed as:

$$IT_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 DCE_i + \beta_2 AGE_i + \beta_3 GEN_i + \beta_4 EDU_i + \beta_5 INC_i + \beta_6 MEDIA_i + \varepsilon_i \dots\dots\dots (4)$$

where:

$MEDIA_i$ = media consumption pattern (social media vs traditional media exposure)

The model for hypothesis five was expressed as:

$$DT_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 EDB_i + \beta_2 AGE_i + \beta_3 GEN_i + \beta_4 EDU_i + \beta_5 INC_i + \beta_6 RELIG_i + \varepsilon_i \dots\dots\dots (5)$$

where:

$RELIG_i$ = religiosity level (often important in tolerance studies)

4.0 Results/Findings

4.1 Questionnaire Administration and Response Rate

A total of 400 copies of the Digital Citizenship Education and Democratic Resilience in Benue State Questionnaire (DCEDRBSQ) were administered to respondents across the selected categories of digital-device users in Benue State. Of these, 392 questionnaires were returned, while 385 were found to be properly completed and suitable for analysis.

Research Question One

What relationship exists between digital citizenship education and democratic resilience of citizens in Benue State?

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Digital Citizenship Education and Democratic Resilience

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Digital Citizenship Education	385	3.74	.61
Democratic Resilience	385	3.56	.63

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2 showed that respondents reported relatively high levels of digital citizenship education ($M = 3.74$, $SD = .61$) and democratic resilience ($M = 3.56$, $SD = .63$), suggesting a positive relationship between digital citizenship education and citizens' democratic resilience. To determine the strength and predictive contribution of digital citizenship education while controlling for demographic factors, a multiple regression analysis was therefore conducted.

Table 3 Multiple Regression of Digital Citizenship Education on Democratic Resilience

Predictor	B	SE	Beta (β)	t	p
Constant	1.214	.183	—	6.63	<.001
Digital Citizenship Education	.487	.041	.615	11.88	<.001
Age	.031	.014	.083	2.21	.028
Gender	.044	.035	.056	1.26	.209
Educational attainment	.072	.018	.151	4.00	<.001
Income level	.049	.017	.108	2.88	.004
Employment status	.036	.019	.064	1.89	.060

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Model Summary: $R = .684$; $R^2 = .468$; Adjusted $R^2 = .459$; $F(6, 378) = 55.35$, $p < .001$

Table 3 showed that digital citizenship education significantly and positively predicted democratic resilience ($\beta = .615$, $t = 11.88$, $p < .001$), explaining 46.8% of its variation. The overall regression model was significant, $F(6, 378) = 55.35$, $p < .001$, indicating that greater exposure to digital citizenship education was associated with higher democratic resilience, even after controlling for demographic factors.

Research Question Two

What relationship exists between digital civic engagement and democratic participation of citizens in Benue State?

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics for Digital Civic Engagement and Democratic Participation

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Digital Civic Engagement	385	3.61	.65
Democratic Participation	385	3.48	.67

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4 indicated generally favourable levels of digital civic engagement ($M = 3.61$, $SD = .65$) and democratic participation ($M = 3.48$, $SD = .67$), suggesting that respondents were relatively active in digital civic activities and democratic processes.

Table 5 Multiple Regression of Digital Civic Engagement on Democratic Participation

Predictor	B	SE	Beta (β)	t	p
Constant	1.327	.196	—	6.77	<.001
Digital Civic Engagement	.452	.043	.574	10.51	<.001
Age	.027	.015	.071	1.80	.073
Gender	.039	.036	.049	1.08	.282
Educational attainment	.081	.019	.159	4.26	<.001
Income level	.044	.018	.093	2.44	.015
Prior political exposure	.119	.028	.161	4.25	<.001

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Model Summary: $R = .642$; $R^2 = .412$; Adjusted $R^2 = .403$; $F(6, 378) = 44.17$, $p < .001$

Table 5 showed that digital civic engagement significantly and positively predicted democratic participation ($\beta = .574$, $t = 10.51$, $p < .001$), with the predictors jointly explaining 41.2% of the variance. The significant model, $F(6, 378) = 44.17$, $p < .001$, indicated that greater engagement in online civic activities was associated with higher levels of democratic participation.

Research Question Three

What relationship exists between digital literacy skills and resistance to misinformation among citizens in Benue State?

Table 6 Descriptive Statistics for Digital Literacy Skills and Resistance to Misinformation

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Digital Literacy Skills	385	3.68	.60
Resistance to Misinformation	385	3.62	.64

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 6 indicated that respondents reported relatively strong digital literacy skills ($M = 3.68$, $SD = .60$) and a considerable capacity to resist misinformation ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .64$), suggesting generally favourable levels of digital competence and misinformation resilience.

Table 7 Multiple Regression of Digital Literacy Skills on Resistance to Misinformation

Predictor	B	SE	Beta (β)	t	p
Constant	1.083	.188	—	5.76	<.001
Digital Literacy Skills	.521	.042	.598	12.40	<.001
Age	.022	.014	.061	1.57	.118
Gender	.032	.034	.041	.94	.348
Educational attainment	.095	.018	.184	5.28	<.001
Income level	.036	.017	.078	2.12	.035
Internet-use intensity	.086	.024	.139	3.58	<.001

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Model Summary: $R = .663$; $R^2 = .439$; Adjusted $R^2 = .430$; $F(6, 378) = 49.25$, $p < .001$

Table 7 revealed that digital literacy skills significantly and positively predicted resistance to misinformation ($\beta = .598$, $t = 12.40$, $p < .001$), explaining 43.9% of the variance. The significant regression model, $F(6, 378) = 49.25$, $p < .001$, indicated that stronger digital literacy, supported by educational attainment and internet-use intensity, enhanced respondents' ability to verify and resist misleading online information.

Research Question Four

What relationship exists between digital citizenship engagement and institutional trust by citizens in Benue State?

Table 8 Descriptive Statistics for Digital Citizenship Engagement and Institutional Trust

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Digital Citizenship Engagement	385	3.55	.66
Institutional Trust	385	3.21	.72

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 8 showed that digital citizenship engagement had a mean of 3.55 ($SD = .66$), while institutional trust recorded a mean of 3.21 ($SD = .72$). Although respondents reported relatively favourable digital citizenship engagement, institutional trust was comparatively lower.

Table 9 Multiple Regression of Digital Citizenship Engagement on Institutional Trust

Predictor	B	SE	Beta (β)	t	P
Constant	1.417	.217	—	6.53	<.001
Digital Citizenship Engagement	.417	.047	.522	8.87	<.001
Age	.036	.015	.091	2.40	.017
Gender	.028	.038	.035	.74	.459
Educational attainment	.062	.020	.119	3.10	.002
Income level	.051	.018	.104	2.83	.005
Media consumption pattern	.106	.029	.142	3.66	<.001

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Model Summary: $R = .597$; $R^2 = .356$; Adjusted $R^2 = .346$; $F(6, 378) = 34.86$, $p < .001$

Table 9 showed that digital citizenship engagement significantly and positively predicted institutional trust ($\beta = .522$, $t = 8.87$, $p < .001$), explaining 35.6% of its variation. The significant model, $F(6, 378) = 34.86$, $p < .001$, indicated that responsible digital citizenship was associated with greater trust in democratic institutions, although broader concerns about institutional performance remained.

Research Question Five

What relationship exists between ethical digital behaviour and democratic tolerance of citizens in Benue State?

Table 10 Descriptive Statistics for Ethical Digital Behaviour and Democratic Tolerance

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Ethical Digital Behaviour	385	3.79	.58
Democratic Tolerance	385	3.58	.62

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 10 certified that ethical digital behaviour recorded a mean of 3.79 (SD = .58), while democratic tolerance recorded a mean of 3.58 (SD = .62). The results indicated relatively high levels of ethical digital behaviour and democratic tolerance among the respondents.

Table 11 Multiple Regression of Ethical Digital Behaviour on Democratic Tolerance

Predictor	B	SE	Beta (β)	t	P
Constant	1.196	.190	—	6.29	<.001
Ethical Digital Behaviour	.476	.043	.571	11.07	<.001
Age	.029	.014	.075	2.07	.039
Gender	.047	.035	.059	1.34	.182
Educational attainment	.073	.019	.142	3.84	<.001
Income level	.041	.017	.086	2.41	.016
Religiosity	.098	.025	.157	3.92	<.001

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Model Summary: $R = .633$; $R^2 = .401$; Adjusted $R^2 = .391$; $F(6, 378) = 42.18$, $p < .001$

Table 11 showed that ethical digital behaviour significantly and positively predicted democratic tolerance ($\beta = .571$, $t = 11.07$, $p < .001$), explaining 40.1% of its variance. The significant model,

$F(6, 378) = 42.18, p < .001$, indicated that responsible and respectful online behaviour was associated with greater tolerance of opposing views in democratic settings.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings demonstrated a consistent positive relationship between dimensions of Digital Citizenship Education (DCE) and democratic resilience among citizens in Benue State. For the first objective, DCE significantly predicted democratic resilience ($\beta = .615, p < .001$), explaining 46.8% of its variation. This suggested that citizens with stronger digital citizenship competencies were more capable of critically evaluating political information, participating responsibly and maintaining democratic values during social and political challenges. The finding supported Ribble (2021), UNESCO (2021), and Boese et al. (2022), and reinforced Civic Culture, Media Literacy and Resilience theories. However, the unexplained variance indicated that insecurity, institutional performance, socioeconomic conditions and political polarization also influenced democratic resilience. For the second objective, digital civic engagement significantly predicted democratic participation ($\beta = .574, p < .001$), accounting for 41.2% of the variation. This supported Loader et al. (2021) by indicating that digital platforms could facilitate political information sharing, civic discussion and mobilization. Nevertheless, digital participation may remain symbolic or polarizing when it is not translated into constructive engagement with democratic institutions. Thus, digital engagement alone does not guarantee meaningful democratic participation. The third objective found a significant relationship between digital literacy skills and resistance to misinformation ($\beta = .598, p < .001$), with the model explaining 43.9% of the variation. This finding was consistent with Jones-Jang et al. (2021), McGrew et al. (2020), and Ireton and Posetti (2020), and provided strong support for Media Literacy Theory. It suggested that citizens with stronger evaluative skills were better positioned to question sources, verify claims and resist misleading political information. However, political identity, prior beliefs, social networks and algorithmic amplification could also shape misinformation responses.

For the fourth objective, digital citizenship engagement significantly predicted institutional trust ($\beta = .522, p < .001$), explaining 35.6% of its variation. Although consistent with Norris (2022), the comparatively lower institutional-trust mean suggested that responsible digital engagement could not substitute for effective, transparent and accountable institutions.

Finally, ethical digital behaviour significantly predicted democratic tolerance ($\beta = .571, p < .001$), explaining 40.1% of the variation. The finding supported UNESCO (2021) and Ribble (2021), suggesting that respectful online conduct can encourage tolerance of political differences. Overall, the findings supported the study's theoretical framework and showed that digital citizenship was positively associated with important dimensions of democratic resilience, while also demonstrating that broader institutional, political and security conditions remained important.

5.1 Conclusion

The study concluded that digital citizenship education was significantly and positively associated with democratic resilience in Benue State. Collectively, the findings demonstrated that citizens' digital knowledge, civic engagement, literacy skills and ethical online behaviour were important in strengthening democratic participation, resistance to misinformation, institutional trust and tolerance. Thus, digital citizenship emerged as an important resource for developing citizens who could participate responsibly, evaluate information critically, engage constructively with institutions and manage political differences in an increasingly digital environment.

However, the findings also showed that digital citizenship was not sufficient on its own to guarantee democratic resilience. The proportion of unexplained variance across the models indicated that institutional effectiveness, insecurity, socioeconomic conditions, political polarization and unequal access to digital resources also influenced democratic outcomes. The study therefore concluded that strengthening democratic resilience in Benue State required a broader strategy in which digital citizenship education was combined with responsive institutions, inclusive civic participation, improved digital access and accountable governance.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommended that:

1. Digital citizenship education should be integrated into civic education programmes in schools and communities, emphasizing critical thinking, digital rights, online safety and responsible participation.
2. Digital civic engagement should be promoted through accessible government and civil-society platforms that facilitate informed public discussion, voter education and participation in governance.
3. Digital literacy programmes should emphasize fact-checking, source verification and identification of misinformation, particularly in rural and underserved communities.
4. Democratic institutions should strengthen transparency, accountability and timely digital communication to improve citizens' institutional trust.
5. Ethical digital behaviour and tolerance should be promoted through civic campaigns addressing respectful communication, hate speech, political differences and responsible information sharing.
6. Government and stakeholders should address digital inequality by improving affordable connectivity and digital-skills training across Benue State.

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