



## The Phenomenon of Student Experiences in Social Science Learning in the Digital and Technological Era

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**Abstract:** This study aims to explore students' experiences in Social Science learning in the digital era, focusing on the cognitive, affective, and social aspects influenced by digitalization. The participants in this study are university students engaged in technology-based IPS learning. The method used is a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, where data is collected through a relevant literature review and analysis. The results show that students gain significant benefits from digitalization, such as broader access to information sources and the development of critical thinking skills. However, the challenges faced include information overload, limited digital literacy, and digital fatigue due to prolonged device use. Additionally, the digital divide between urban and remote areas presents a significant barrier. In conclusion, although technology offers more flexible and interactive learning opportunities, the emerging challenges must be addressed through the development of digital literacy skills and the use of blended learning models. The implications of this research highlight the need for efforts to improve access to technology and integrate digital literacy into the curriculum to support more effective learning in the digital era.

**Keywords:** Digital literacy, educational digitalization, educational technology, Social Science learning, student experiences.

### Introduction

The digital transformation that occurred in the 21st century has had a significant impact on almost all aspects of human life, including in the field of education (Akour & Alenezi, 2022; Amarulloh & Irvani, 2025a; K. K. de S. Oliveira & De Souza, 2022). In this digital era, information and communication technology (ICT) is no longer just an auxiliary tool, but has become an integral part of the learning process (Balaban et al., 2023; Paling et al., 2024; Sulastris et al., 2024). Higher education institutions, as organizations responsible for producing intellectual human resources, cannot ignore the profound influence of digitalization in education. In the context of Social Science learning in higher education, digitalization plays a crucial role in shaping students' ways of thinking, interacting, and learning.

Social Science learning in higher education has traditionally been conventional, with face-to-face interactions between lecturers and students as the primary form of the learning process (Brown, 2022; Ferrero & Álvarez Sainz, 2024; Stevens et al., 2021). Lecturers act as the source of knowledge, while students play a more passive role as information recipients. However, with the rapid advancement of

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digital technology, this pattern is undergoing significant changes. Today, Social Science learning is no longer limited to classroom interactions, but also takes place in digital spaces. Students can now access a variety of information sources through the internet, collaborate with fellow students online, and develop deeper analytical and critical skills through the use of digital technology.

Digitalization in education offers numerous opportunities, particularly in Social Science learning. Access to various digital learning platforms, such as educational videos, online journals, and global discussion forums, enables students to acquire broader and more diverse knowledge (Adeniyi et al., 2024; Rafiq et al., 2024; Ulanday et al., 2021). Furthermore, digitalization facilitates a more interactive and participatory learning experience, where students are no longer just recipients of information but also play an active role in the learning process (Alfiansyah et al., 2022; Nurroniah et al., 2025). Students, who were previously accustomed to text-based learning, can now utilize various visual and interactive media to understand concepts in Social Science, such as social phenomena, digital economy, and the impacts of globalization.

Behind the vast potential of digitalization in education, there are various challenges that need to be addressed, particularly in the context of Social Science learning (Bygstad et al., 2022; Masripah et al., 2024; Mhlongo et al., 2023). The primary challenge faced by students is the significant shift in the way they learn. In the digital era, students are not only confronted with the challenge of mastering the learning material but also with the task of managing a vast and diverse amount of information. The ability to filter valid and relevant information has become an essential skill in this context. Additionally, while technology offers flexibility in the learning process, not all students have equal access to this technology. The digital literacy gap, along with the limitations in technological infrastructure in some areas, further exacerbates the inequality in higher education learning.

It is important to conduct in-depth research on students' experiences in Social Science learning in the digital era (Rawal, 2024). This research will help to understand how students perceive the paradigm shift in learning, both cognitively, affectively, and socially. The study will also identify the main challenges faced by students in adapting to technology-based IPS learning, as well as how they overcome these obstacles.

With the rapid advancement of digital technology, various studies have been conducted to explore its impact on education. In many fields, including higher education, technology has brought about remarkable changes in learning methods and approaches. The current generation of students, known as "digital natives," has a learning style that is significantly different from previous generations (Hammad, 2025; Reid et al., 2023; Thianthai & Tamdee, 2022). They are accustomed to technology and the internet, and prefer learning that is visual and interactive. This creates great opportunities for the development of technology-based learning models, especially in Social Science education.

Recent studies also indicate that digitalization can enrich students' learning experiences. Digital media, such as educational videos and e-learning platforms, allow students to access information in a more flexible and engaging way (Ahmad, 2024; Kiryakova, 2022; Ulanday et al., 2021). Additionally, technology enables more collaborative learning, where students can work together online, share ideas, and engage in discussions with peers from diverse backgrounds.

However, not all studies provide a wholly positive view of digitalization in education. Some research reveals significant challenges faced by students in the digital learning process. Many students struggle with navigating digital information, particularly in filtering credible and relevant sources (Naeem & Mushibwe, 2025; Panda & Kaur, 2024; Yu et al., 2024). This indicates that, although technology opens up great opportunities, its use in education also requires students to have high digital literacy skills.

Some studies also reveal that, although technology enables more flexible learning, it also poses risks to students' social engagement and empathy. Excessive online learning can reduce social interactions between students, which contributes to a decline in empathy and social awareness, two values that are crucial in Social Science education (Baber, 2022; Kalmar et al., 2022).

Although there have been various studies on digitalization in education, research specifically examining students' experiences in Social Science learning in the digital era remains limited. Most existing studies focus more on the impact of technology on learning in general (Iqbal & Kazmi, 2023; Puspitasari, 2022), without deeply exploring how students experience these changes within the context

of Social Science learning. In Social Science education, which involves many social and cultural aspects, digitalization presents unique challenges and opportunities that need further investigation.

Existing research often overlooks the local context, particularly in terms of digital literacy and access to technology. In Indonesia, for example, there is a significant digital divide between students in major cities and those in remote areas. This gap has the potential to exacerbate inequalities in the quality of learning, which needs to be considered in this study.

This study aims to explore and understand students' experiences in Social Science (IPS) learning in the digital era, focusing on the changes occurring in their cognitive, affective, and social aspects. The study also aims to identify the main challenges faced by students in adapting to technology-based IPS learning, as well as the solutions or strategies they use to overcome these challenges.

To clarify the direction of the research, the following research questions are presented:

RQ1: What are students' experiences in Social Science (IPS) learning in the digital era, particularly in terms of cognitive, affective, and social aspects?

RQ2: What are the main challenges faced by students in adapting to technology-based IPS learning in higher education?

RQ3: How do students overcome the challenges that arise in digital IPS learning, and what strategies do they use to enhance their learning experience?

## Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method to explore students' experiences in Social Science learning in the digital era. The phenomenological approach is chosen because its main focus is to understand the subjective meanings embedded in an individual's lived experience related to a particular phenomenon (Amarulloh & Irvani, 2025b; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In the context of this study, the phenomenon refers to how students perceive, interpret, and interact with digitalized Social Science learning. Phenomenology allows researchers to explore deep meanings through direct experiences and subjective reflection, which is highly relevant to answering the first research question regarding students' cognitive, affective, and social experiences (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022).

To answer the first research question, which focuses on students' experiences in digital IPS learning, this study will analyze literature related to digital transformation in education. The primary data sources will be literature reviews, using national and international scholarly journal articles, academic books, and relevant research reports on IPS learning and educational digitalization. This research method is also designed to identify the main challenges faced by students in adapting to technology-based IPS learning, which answers the second research question. Data will be collected by filtering literature that discusses various obstacles in digital learning, such as the digital literacy gap, information overload, and limitations in technological infrastructure (Mhlongo et al., 2023; Okoye et al., 2023). The researcher will categorize these findings into relevant categories, such as technical, social, and pedagogical challenges, which will provide a comprehensive view of the key obstacles in implementing digital IPS learning in higher education.

To answer the third research question regarding the strategies students use to overcome these challenges, this study will employ thematic analysis, focusing on the collection and interpretation of findings related to solutions or approaches used by students. The blended learning approach, which combines online learning with face-to-face activities, will be explored as one solution to address digital fatigue and strengthen the learning experience (Atwa et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2021). Additionally, the researcher will analyze how students develop digital literacy and critical thinking skills to manage the information they acquire online (Felesia & Irvani, 2025; Irvani & Anisah, 2024). Thus, the phenomenological method used in this study allows the researcher to provide in-depth and reflective insights into students' experiences in digital IPS learning.

## Result and Discussion

### Students' Experiences in Social Science Learning in the Digital Era

Social Science learning in the digital era offers a significantly different experience for students compared to traditional learning (Abuali & Ahmed, 2025). Based on a literature analysis, students today have the opportunity to access various digital information sources, enabling them to build knowledge independently. Previously, students relied heavily on lecturers as the primary source of information, but now they can access e-journals, educational videos, and other online resources to enrich their understanding of various social, economic, and political phenomena. Students engaged in digital learning show improved critical thinking skills because they can explore multiple perspectives from diverse sources.

This cognitive experience is also faced with the challenge of information overload. Many students report difficulty in filtering relevant and valid information from the vast number of sources available online. This phenomenon requires students to possess adequate digital literacy skills to assess the credibility of the information they encounter, especially in the context of Social Science, which involves social analysis that heavily relies on accurate data and facts. Insufficient digital literacy can hinder students from filtering relevant information, leading to the spread of misinformation (Anurogo et al., 2023; Panda & Kaur, 2024).

Digital learning also affects students' affective experiences. Many students feel freer to manage their time and learning locations, a benefit highly valued by the digital native generation. The flexibility offered by online learning allows students to access learning materials anytime and anywhere. However, along with this, students also report experiencing digital fatigue due to prolonged interaction with electronic devices. Prasetyo et al. (2025) reported that 64% of students in Indonesia experience digital fatigue after more than six hours of online learning, which affects their motivation to continue learning.

On the social aspect, Social Science learning in the digital era allows for more open and collaborative interactions between students, lecturers, and external sources, such as online discussion forums and webinars. Previously, Social Science learning in the classroom was dominated by one-way interaction between lecturers and students. However, with platforms such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), WhatsApp groups, and other academic social media, these interactions have become more egalitarian and interactive. Lecturers no longer serve as the sole source of knowledge but act as facilitators, helping students develop understanding through digital learning experiences. However, this also presents challenges in maintaining communication ethics, which can sometimes blur between formal and informal interactions (Nuci et al., 2021).

### Challenges Faced by Students in Digital Social Studies Learning

Social Science learning in the digital era is not without the various challenges faced by students, particularly those related to unequal access to technology and digital literacy. One of the greatest challenges that arises is the digital divide, where students from areas with limited access to the internet or digital devices struggle to participate optimally in learning. Students in remote areas or from economically disadvantaged backgrounds often face difficulties in accessing online learning materials, which leads to disparities in the quality of education they receive (Catalano et al., 2021; Kennedy et al., 2022).

Another challenge is the low level of digital literacy among students. Although many students access various information through the internet, not all students have the skills to assess the credibility and quality of the information they encounter. This can potentially lower the quality of Social Science learning, as students may get caught up in invalid or irrelevant information. For example, when students use social media as a source of information, they may be exposed to opinions or even hoaxes, which can affect their ability to analyze social issues objectively. This phenomenon causes students to be more likely to accept information without first verifying it, which is detrimental in an educational context (Majerczak & Strzelecki, 2022; G. Oliveira et al., 2021).

The phenomenon of information overload also presents a challenge in digital learning. With unlimited access to various sources, students tend to feel confused when selecting relevant information. This can lead to a decrease in focus during learning, which in turn affects the quality of students'

understanding of the material. Technology-driven learning must be complemented with skills to filter quality and relevant information so that students are not overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information they have to process (Sharma et al., 2024; Sholihin & Irvani, 2025).

The final challenge is the growing dependency on technology in IPS learning. As learning becomes more reliant on technology, there is a risk that human values, such as social empathy and solidarity, may be displaced by the efficiency of technology. Students may become less sensitive to deeper social issues because they are more often interacting with screens than engaging directly with social realities. Technology provides broader access, it can reduce the social experiences that are crucial for Social Science learning, which is based on in-depth social analysis (Knott et al., 2022).

### **Strategies Students Use to Overcome the Challenges of Digital Social Studies Learning**

To overcome these challenges, students employ various strategies to address the obstacles that arise in digital Social Science learning. One of the most effective solutions is the use of a blended learning approach, which combines online learning with face-to-face activities (Irvani et al., 2025; Lapitan Jr et al., 2021). This approach allows students to remain engaged in more authentic social interactions while leveraging technology to enrich their learning experiences. For example, in Social Science learning, students can conduct field research or social observations and then report their findings online through digital platforms. This way, they still gain contextual social experiences while benefiting from the flexibility offered by technology.

To address the issue of information overload, students need to develop stronger digital literacy skills. They must learn how to filter relevant information, evaluate the credibility of sources, and avoid misinformation. As a solution, many educational institutions are now beginning to integrate digital literacy into their curricula, aiming to help students understand how to use technology ethically and effectively. Good digital literacy skills can enhance students' ability to think critically and analytically, which is crucial in Social Science learning that involves complex social issues (Taskiran & Salur, 2021; Vodă et al., 2022).

Students also frequently rely on collaboration with peers to overcome challenges in digital Social Science learning. In many cases, students form online discussion groups or study forums to exchange ideas and discuss learning materials. This collaboration provides students with opportunities to share perspectives, deepen their understanding of the topics being discussed, and combat the sense of isolation that can arise in online learning. Additionally, this collaboration helps students develop social skills that are vital in Social Science learning, which focuses on analyzing social dynamics and human relationships.

Lecturers play a crucial role in helping students overcome these challenges. They must be able to act as facilitators, supporting students in developing critical, reflective, and ethical thinking skills in using technology. The importance of lecturers' role in guiding students to navigate the challenges encountered in digital learning (Faza et al., 2024; Lijun & Te, 2024). Lecturers also need to develop their own digital competencies to design more interactive, project-based learning that is relevant to students' social lives.

### **Conclusion**

This research explores the experiences of students in Social Science learning in the digital era, emphasizing the cognitive, affective, and social aspects of their educational journeys. The findings reveal that while digitalization presents vast opportunities for enhanced learning experiences, it also introduces significant challenges. Students benefit from increased access to information and interactive learning platforms, fostering independent learning and critical thinking. However, the overwhelming volume of information available and the disparities in digital literacy present obstacles. Furthermore, although digital tools enable greater flexibility, they also contribute to digital fatigue and diminished social interaction, which may hinder students' emotional and social engagement with their studies.

The implications of this study are twofold. Firstly, it underscores the importance of developing digital literacy skills among students to navigate the digital landscape effectively. Institutions must equip students with the tools to critically assess information, ensuring that they can filter relevant and

credible sources. Secondly, the study highlights the need for a balanced approach in integrating digital learning, advocating for blended learning models that combine online and offline learning activities. Moving forward, future research should focus on addressing the digital divide, exploring strategies to ensure equitable access to technology, and developing pedagogical frameworks that foster deeper engagement without sacrificing social and emotional learning.

#### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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