



## The Role of Digital Media in Determining the Direction of Indonesia's Democracy in 2023

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### Abstract

*This study aims to see the role of digital media in determining the direction of democracy and public opinion. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with case studies in Indonesia and unit analysis using Nvivo 12 Plus software, which is analyzed with Computer Assistant Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDS) and crosstab. The urgency of the media as an essential actor in democracy is because it can present broad information, active participation, responsiveness, and diversification of perspectives that shape public opinion. The results of this study show that there are three important points. 1) Digital media is able to create spaces for democratic actors in various sectors then, 2) Digital media is an informative and participatory domain, and the last is 3) Digital media is a supervisor of democracy in Indonesia; criticism suggestions and evaluations are straightforward to do by several actors in it. The media is responsible for ensuring the continuity of a healthy democracy. We need cooperation among governments, the private sector, and civil society to support democratic values in media. Criticism, literacy, and active public participation on social media are crucial for maintaining democracy in the digital era.*

**Keywords:** digital media, democracy, Indonesia

**Paper type:** Research paper

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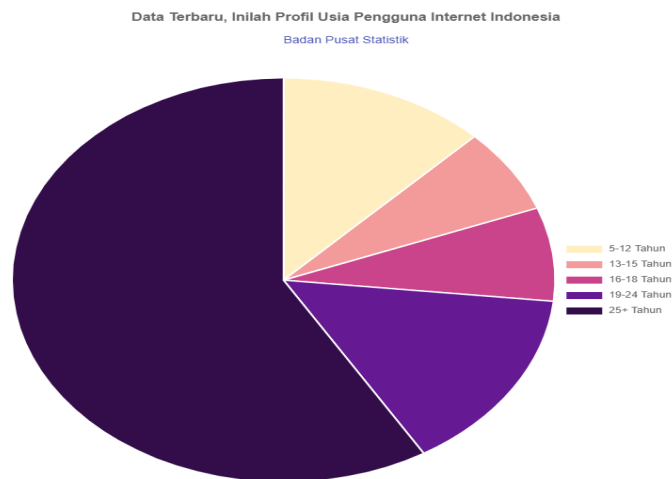
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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the use of the Internet in various countries has increased very rapidly. It was recorded that at the end of 2021, there were around 4 billion people in the global population. In Southeast Asia alone, around 8.5% were social media users, 10% were internet users, and 12.7% were global social media users. (Kemp 2021). People's need to access social media is very high, averaging around 7-9 hours daily. This can be a relatively long time to spend using the internet daily. The current practice of nation and state must be different from digitalization. Various aspects have now shifted from conventional mechanisms to digitalization. Digitalization has now been implemented by almost all social actors, such as the government, the private sector, and civil society (Lee, 2017). The application of ICT in various fields is expected to encourage innovation and creativity from social actors and encourage public participation in voicing their democratic aspirations and rights in decision-making and policy formulation (Beall et al., 2023).

**Figure. 1**  
**The age profile of internet users in Indonesia**



*Source: Badan Pusat Statistics*

According to statistics released by BPS earlier, most individuals in Indonesia aged 25 years and above have used the internet in the past three months. This figure reached 58.63% of this age group. Adults' use of the Internet in Indonesia is extensive, encompassing activities such as work, purchasing goods, entertainment, and as a means of communication. The second position in the data is the age group of 19-24 years in Indonesia. In this

group, about 14.69% have used the internet. At the same time, 7.47% of adolescents aged 16-18 years are also recorded to have used the internet in the last three months. Meanwhile, the age group of 13-15 is in the following position. In this age group, about 6.77% have accessed the internet. Finally, in the age group of 5-12 years, about 12.43% of children already have internet access.

The rapid use of social media in various countries proves that digitalization in the current era is very high, digitalization in multiple aspects of life, be it carried out by the government, private parties, or even citizens. Social media conveys rights and criticisms to several parties, including the government. (Masferrer 2023). However, social media often has a detrimental impact because freedom of speech can sometimes offend some parties. Social media can have positive or negative effects depending on its use. (Kuznetsova & Tolbert, 2023). The use of social media can also be called far in suppressing authoritarianism in a country. Various issues and phenomena on the surface are usually complicated to hear and pay attention to. Social media can raise problems and phenomena that are on the surface, so they can be handled quickly (De Blasio & Sorice, 2018).

With the digitalization of democracy, people also criticize the government (Ahdarrijal and Pribadi 2024), which makes checks and balances occur between government and non-government (Lin, 2023). This Digital Democracy allows for more intensive interaction between the media and civil society (Orozco et al., 2023), Creates open data and ensures the sustainability of democracy through the protection of freedom. Democratic freedom is often one of the strategies to support the successful implementation of digital-based government in various countries (Shanahan, 2023), Not only as an implementation of policies or regulations but also as a place to supervise the government.

As stated by Orozco et al., 2023; Paricio-Esteban et al., 2023 The existence of digitalisation in today's democratic world creates several gaps in it—the digital divide between urban and rural communities. Sometimes, social inequality is caused by limited infrastructure, thus indirectly reducing participation in digital democracy. In addition, freedom in today's digital age leads to a lack of formal oversight of digital media, which will result in the dissemination of inaccurate and balanced information that affects participation

in democratic processes as the level of trust in the public decreases due to false news or information (Sardini 2018). In its implementation, the democracy that was initially conventional and then switched to digital does not always run optimally, but several obstacles exist. Indianto S. et al., (2021) revealed that there are several obstacles to the implementation of digital-based democracy in the digital era as follows:

Several aspects of the implementation of digital democracy can support its success, including credibility, data validity, balanced reporting in digital media, and increased political participation, especially among young people through digital media. There is also the need for public awareness in accessing information in the digital space and the ability to sort, select, and test the information received (Akbar et al. 2021; Widiastuti 2016). Social media is a place to debate and speak out in the mass media, providing criticism and advice to several actors in the government and non-government realms.

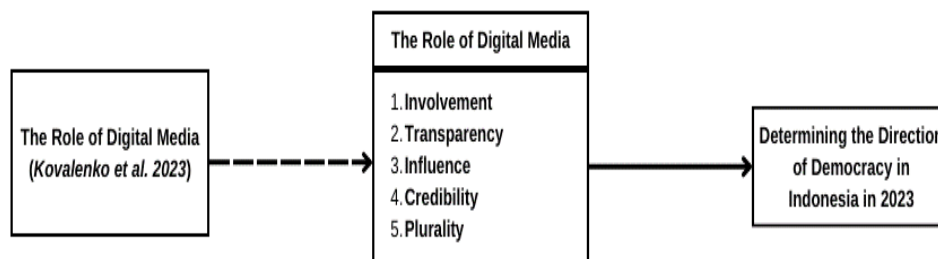
The urgency of using digital media as an essential actor in democratic progress because it can present broad information as it is known that the use of digital media will make it easier for anyone to get information quickly, the dissemination of information that is said to be difficult to hear with digital media will be easily raised to the surface so that some circles of society can listen to it. In addition, by encouraging active participation between the public, the private sector, and also the government as actors that dominate today, Responsive and diversifying perspectives that shape public opinion on democracy, digital media encourages all groups to give their views, with a diversity of viewpoints between several individuals and groups will result in the renewal and improvement of democracy. That way, it can be said that the urgency of media in digitalization will affect the democratic direction of each individual because, indeed, digital media can influence the opinions of each individual and group.

Normative conditions with the existence of digital media affect democracy (Aljasir 2024; Podkalicka and Mundell 2024). Democracy, with the existence of digital media, will make it easier for each individual to get information, but in reality, the amount of information obtained on social media is not accurate or a hoax (Ebadi and Amiri 2024). The public tends to get false

information about some phenomena. In addition, it is easy for a person to find hate speech and various forms of verbal abuse on social media (Pérez-Seijo and Silva-Rodríguez 2024). This situation is straightforward in vulnerable moments like the campaign season. Many found in some media various forms of socialization to slander one of the people who intended to bring down one of the partners; It is a form of directing the opinions of individuals and groups to choose and determine the direction in the future. The current state of digital media is critical and is the main determining factor in determining the democratic direction of every element of society (Boulianne, Copeland, and Koc-Michalska 2024).

The formation of democratic direction and promotion of opinion can often be determined from social media. The presence of several actors to direct opinion to the future can disrupt the health of democracy. Democracy in society will be formed naturally with content, news, information, and devices used in the media to be instilled in society (Rahayu & Ellyanawati, 2023). The existence of the media is very crucial in the current era. It is known that almost all 190 million Indonesians have used social media and spend nearly 7-8 hours a day accessing social media. How the role of digital media determines the direction of democracy in Indonesia will be discussed later in this study and will be discussed comprehensively and systematically.

**Figure. 2**  
**Frame of Mind**



*Source: Created by author*

The role emphasises the active contribution of the parties involved. In the context of governance, this theory highlights how actors such as the media, interest groups, or political institutions play a role in shaping the direction and dynamics of democracy (Arant et al. 2023). The indicators of the role of digital

media, according to (Kovalenko et al. 2023), include 1) engagement, 2) transparency, 3) influence, 4) credibility, and 5) plurality.

## **METHODS**

This research uses descriptive qualitative research methods with case studies in Indonesia. This qualitative method was chosen because it has the potential to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (Firmansyah and Masrun 2021), namely the Role of the Media as a Key Player in Determining the Direction of Democracy in Indonesia. The data collection process is in the form of searching for literature studies from reputable national and international journals such as Scopus and Scholar, where researchers critically evaluate various library materials relevant to the journal materials to be used as references. This study uses Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDS) and analyses social media data and articles processed through features found in the Nvivo 12 plus software (Hafidhah and Yandari 2021). This step aims to build a solid theoretical base and ensure that research makes new contributions to the existing literature. The data that has been analyzed can then be presented in the form of crosstab and word cloud analysis (Edhlund and McDougall 2018). Using the right keywords, the analysis results are critical and can be described in the research results.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Creating Spaces for Democratic Actors in Various Sectors**

In the current era of digitalization, the media has become an essential thing for conveying information; in addition to disseminating information, the media is also known as a forum for democracy; a democracy that utilizes information and communication technology is known as E-Democracy. Democracy can provide convenience for connections between social actors from the government, private, and civil society sectors at this time. The media has a central role in determining the direction of democracy in Indonesia. As guardians of freedom of speech and a key source of information for society, the media plays a vital role in shaping public opinion, delivering news, and facilitating democratic discussion. In Indonesia, a country with cultural diversity and complex socio-political backgrounds, the media

serves as a bridge between government and society. First, the media provides a platform for the various views and voices in society. By presenting information reasonably and rationally, the media helps people form informative and informed opinions. This is important in creating a solid knowledge base for citizens to participate in the democratic process.

Like several literature studies that write about media, both conventional and digital, it is stated that media is an intermediary to convey messages (Payson et al., 2022), but also has a significant impact on the way we understand the world (Altalidi, 2022). Meanwhile, Hiltunen, (2022) Sees the media as an integral part of the public sphere that facilitates citizen participation in discussions and exchange of ideas, providing an essential role in shaping public opinion. On the other hand, McInnis et al., (2022) Highlight the potential of media as a tool of power and propaganda used to control people's thoughts and perceptions. McInnis et al. describe media as a means of mass communication that involves various forms, such as newspapers, radio, television, and the internet, providing information, entertainment, and shaping public opinion. Media has a vital role in shaping social and cultural representation (Dumdum, 2022; Groicher et al., 2022; Quayson, 2022), while De Fina, (2022) Sees it as a tool for education and communication, which has the potential to increase people's understanding and participation in democratic life (Akçöltekin & Genç, 2022; Lajevardi et al., 2022). In general, media encompasses a wide range of platforms, from traditional to social media in today's digital age, and has a critical role in shaping people's social and cultural dynamics (Lynch et al., 2022).

The media cannot be separated from democracy as a result and cause contained in it. Democracy is the basic idea that all citizens have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Democracy has several fundamental principles, including popular sovereignty, freedom of speech, human rights, protection of minorities, and elections. One of the critical aspects of democracy is popular sovereignty. Citizens make political decisions or elect those they elect as their representatives. Models of democracy can vary, ranging from direct democracy, in which citizens are directly involved in decision-making, to representative democracy, in which citizens elect representatives to represent them in the decision-making process. Freedom of expression is also a pillar of democracy. Citizens can express opinions, express their ideas, and criticize the

government without fear of repression. This creates an environment that allows for discussion and exchange of ideas, an essential element in a democracy.

Democracy also places importance on human rights. Every individual is recognized as having fundamental rights that must be respected and protected by the state. Minority protection is also crucial to a democratic system, avoiding potential majority actions that could harm minority groups. Elections are the primary mechanism in a representative democracy. Citizens elect their leaders and representatives through periodic elections. This process creates accountability and allows citizens to change leadership according to their preferences. Although democracy is considered a system of government that supports freedom and popular participation, its implementation may vary worldwide. Challenges such as corruption, inequality, and lack of citizen participation can affect the effectiveness of democracy. However, democracy remains a cherished model for promoting justice, human rights, and responsible governance.

Democracy and the critical role of the media are interrelated in shaping a responsive and participatory social order (Umeda, 2022). As the primary source of information, the media has a crucial role in supporting democratic values. They provide equitable access to political information, give citizens a deep understanding of critical issues, and ensure informed participation in democratic processes, especially during elections (Figuerola, Vilca, and Mendoza, 2022; Kampourakis, 2022).

In the context of supervision and control of power, the media serves as an accountability guard by providing critical coverage of government and public institutions (Cronert 2022). They help uncover irregularities, prevent abuse of power, and strengthen the principles of transparency in a democratic order. The media has also become a vital public discussion forum, providing space for various political views and opinions (Kušnířová et al., 2022). Interview programs, political debates, and opinion columns give a platform for diverse voices, support the value of pluralism, and ensure more inclusive representation in decision-making (Žuk & Paczeński, 2022). In the digital information age, the media is responsible for combatting propaganda and disinformation. They act as filters that give people a better understanding of facts and truths, preventing the spread of false information



that could threaten the integrity of democratic processes (Giacomini 2022; Lum 2022).

In addition, the media became critical in mobilizing people to participate in political life. Political campaigns, election coverage, and monitoring of political processes through the media help create citizen engagement and increase participation in the overall democratic process. The close correlation between democracy and the role of the media makes a mutually supportive foundation. A strong democracy requires an accessible, accountable, and independent press to maintain the balance of power. Instead, influential media need a democratic context supporting free speech, information access, and civic participation. Thus, this symbiotic relationship plays a vital role in shaping and maintaining democratic principles in society.

The media also plays a vital role in policing and criticizing the government. By providing space for journalistic investigations, the press can expose non-compliance, corruption, and abuse of power. This contributes to government accountability and maintains a balance of power, which are crucial aspects of democracy. In addition, social media has become a significant force in shaping public opinion and mobilizing people. These platforms allow citizens to participate directly, voice their opinions, share information, and organize common goals. This changes the dynamics of public political involvement and gives citizens a more active role in policy formation. However, keep in mind that the role of the media also has challenges, such as the spread of false information or bias. Therefore, protecting and improving media literacy is essential to ensure that the media can perform their role as well as possible. Overall, the role of the media as a critical player in democracy in Indonesia creates a vital stage for public participation, government transparency, and the exchange of ideas that are fundamental to the survival of a healthy democracy.

In the dynamic context of Indonesia, the media also plays a role in shaping national identity and building a shared understanding of democratic values. Media provides a space to convey stories and perspectives from different ethnic, religious, and cultural groups, creating interdisciplinary dialogue essential for social stability. In addition, elections are one of the crucial moments in the democratic system. The media liaises between potential leaders and voters, conveying their vision, programs, and performance records. Through broadcasting debates, campaign

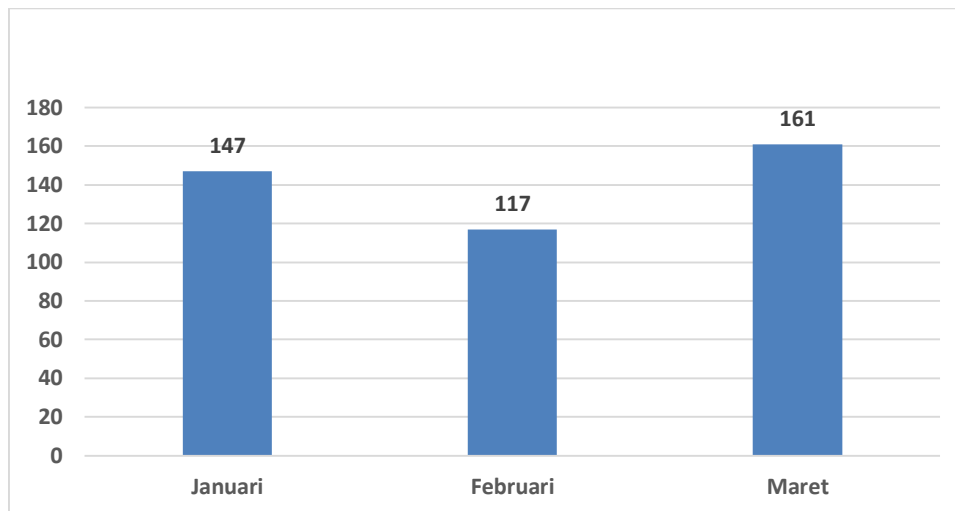
coverage, and independent analysis, the media helps voters to make intelligent, informed decisions. In the digital age, media is no longer limited to traditional platforms such as newspapers and television. Online media, including news portals, blogs, and social platforms, provide space for a broader range of opinions and faster news presentation. However, challenges such as spreading false information and filter bubbles must also be overcome to maintain information integrity.

### **Digital Media as an Informative and Participatory Realm**

In addition, the media plays a role in educating the public about its democratic rights. Counseling on voting rights, freedom of expression, and information disclosure is integral to informing citizens of their roles and responsibilities in a democracy. The media can shape public opinion by presenting news, analysis, and views. The use of in-depth narratives and careful representations can influence how an issue is understood by society. However, problems arise when the media tends to be biased or not neutral. Specific political or economic interests can affect how news is presented, creating the risk of non-objective information delivery.

The phenomenon of hoaxes and fake news is also a severe problem of the influence of the media on public opinion in Indonesia. Information can quickly spread through social media platforms without verification in the digital age. This can create erroneous, confusing public perceptions and undermine trust in democratic institutions and processes. The media can also be a tool to mobilize public opinion and influence the outcome of elections. Unbalanced reporting or black campaigning can affect perceptions of political candidates and parties. In addition, social media can amplify political polarisation and create filter bubbles, where individuals are constantly exposed to the same views, isolating them from diverse opinions.

**Table 1.**  
**Hoax News Report First Quarter 2023**



*Source: Kemkominfo RI*

Table 1 shows that in the first quarter, data from Kominfo RI recorded 425 cases of fake news or hoaxes. In the first month, there were 147 cases; in February, it fell to 117 cases, and it rose again in March to touch 161 cases of fake news. The cases are dominated by health, government, fraud, politics, international, and defamation.

At this time, the buzzer phenomenon is often interpreted as a tool to lead opinions and determine the direction of democracy in Indonesia. A buzzer is an individual or group rewarded or incentivized for spreading a particular message, supporting or attacking an opinion, or influencing public opinion through social media and online platforms. In a political context, buzzers can manipulate public opinion, direct narratives, and even lead democratic processes. One of the negative impacts of the buzzer phenomenon is the occurrence of disinformation and manipulation of public opinion. Buzzers are often used to spread fake news, amplify certain political narratives, or attack opponents. They can create an atmosphere that is not conducive to healthy democratic discussion by creating conflict and polarisation among societies.

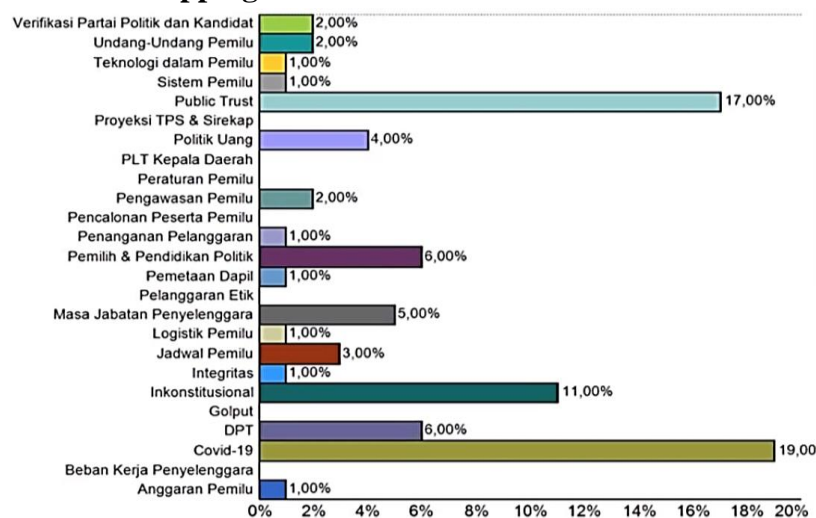
**Figure. 3**

Source: *Kominfo RI*

Figure 3 shows the findings of hoax issues from year to year, from 2018 to March 2023. There were 11,357 reports, which indicates that digital media is still a field for spreading fake news, not only in one focus but 12 focuses on spreading hoax news. According to the Ministry of Communication and Information data, many cases of spreading hoaxes in health, government, fraud, politics, international, crime, disasters, defamation, religion, myths, trade, and education.

## Media as Evaluators of Democracy in Indonesia

**Figure. 4**



*Source: Nvivo 12 Plus*

In addition, buzzers can also be used to disrupt the integrity of elections. In the campaign process, buzzers can be used to spread adverse narratives against specific candidates or manipulate public perceptions of political parties. This can lead to unfair and unequal elections. The buzzer phenomenon also creates challenges related to transparency and accountability. Many buzzers work outside the scope of oversight and regulation, making tracking the message's source and destination difficult. This creates ambiguity in democratic processes, where people may struggle to distinguish between legitimate and manipulative information.

In today's digital era, there must be caution when using media, especially social media. Behind the positive effect of conveying information quickly, monetizing phenomena at the bottom to rise to the surface, and making it easier for us to provide criticism and advice to several ruling actors in this Indonesian country. The government, private sector, and even the public must be careful on social media during the campaign season and in the general election. The ability to lead and determine the direction of public views on the subject matter is something that often happens at this time. Ability and knowledge have become a way to filter information from outside, which can be applied in using social media as a tool for healthy democracy today.

**Table 2.**  
**The State of Digital Media in 2023**

Normative	Positive Factual	Negative Factual
Dissemination and ease of obtaining information	Fast and extensive access to information	Spread of fake news or hoaxes
Privacy and Data Protection	More robust protected security with digitization	The rise of cybercrime
Digital advertising regulation	Ease of promotional media	The vulnerability of media partisanship
Literacy, ethics in digitalization	Effectiveness and efficiency in gaining literacy	Hate speech and media crimes

*Source: Created by Author*

Based on Table 2 above, several aspects related to digitalization and the use of social media are divided into three categories: Normative, Positive Factual, and Negative Factual. In the element of dissemination and ease of obtaining information, access to information has become faster and broader with

digitalization. However, on the other hand, the emergence and spread of fake news or hoaxes have a significant negative impact.

Privacy and Data Protection aspects show that digitalization protects data security more. However, cybercrime is a severe challenge threatening individual privacy and data security. Digital advertising regulations illustrate that digitalization provides convenience in terms of promotional media. However, the vulnerability of media alignment in terms of regulation is an issue that needs further attention. In the aspect of literacy and ethics in digitalization, effectiveness, and efficiency in obtaining literacy increase. However, the emergence of hate speech and crime in the media has a negative impact that needs to be overcome to achieve a safer and more ethical digital environment.

## **CONCLUSION**

Three critical points can be concluded in the role of digital media in determining the direction of democracy and public opinion: 1) The growth of the internet and social media use significantly affects how people form opinions, participate in democratic processes, and interact with governments. Digitalization, especially in applying Information and Communication Technology (ICT), creates new spaces for innovation, creativity, and public participation. The implementation of ICT in various sectors, both by the government, private sector, and civil society, is expected to strengthen democracy by increasing transparency, accountability, and efficiency in governance. Social media has also become a tool for voicing aspirations, giving criticism, and mobilizing people to participate in political decisions. Nonetheless, the digital divide between cities and villages and the risk of disinformation and manipulation of public opinion by buzzers are challenges that must be overcome. Criticality in consuming digital information, high media literacy, and appropriate regulations are the keys to maintaining the integrity of democracy in the digital era. Furthermore, the 2nd) Digital media as an informative domain stimulates participatory activities. The establishment of democracy by digital media can be through its ability to present broad and accessible information, enabling the dissemination of previously complex information. It stimulates active participation from various parties, creates responsiveness, diversifies perspectives, and shapes public opinion. Digital media encourages all walks of life to give their

views and provide renewal and improvement in democracy. Finally, 3) The role of digital media is to monitor and shape national identity, present news somewhat, and educate the public about democratic rights, which shows that the media has a great responsibility to ensure the continuity of a healthy democracy. Along with technological advancements, people need to understand that the role of the media is not only as a tool to convey information but also as a prime mover in shaping the direction of democracy. Criticism, literacy, and active participation in using social media will help people evaluate information wisely and ensure that democracy continues to work well in this digital age.

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