

Combating Misinformation: A Student-Led Digital Citizenship Initiative in University WhatsApp Spaces

Introduction

In modern university environments, digital communication platforms such as WhatsApp play a central role in sharing academic information, coordinating activities, and maintaining peer interaction. However, these platforms have also facilitated the rapid spread of misinformation. Unverified messages are often forwarded without critical evaluation, leading to confusion, misunderstanding, and sometimes panic among students. This project explores how small, practical interventions can promote responsible digital behaviour among university students.

The Problem

Misinformation in student WhatsApp groups has become increasingly common. Many students forward messages without verifying their authenticity, especially when the information appears urgent or important. This behaviour contributes to the spread of false information, reduces trust among group members, and undermines the credibility of digital communication spaces. The lack of digital literacy and critical evaluation skills further worsens the problem.

Intervention

To address this issue, I conducted a micro-awareness campaign within a university WhatsApp group. I shared a carefully crafted message encouraging members to verify information before sharing it. The message emphasized three guiding principles: truth, usefulness, and respect. Additionally, I posed a reflective question asking members whether they had ever encountered or shared unverified information. This approach encouraged participation without blaming individuals and created a safe environment for discussion.

The shared message prompted interaction among group members. Several participants responded to the reflective question, acknowledging their experiences with misinformation. The engagement provided direct evidence of participation and awareness within the group.

Impact

The intervention generated measurable engagement among group members. Several participants admitted that they had previously shared unverified information, while others expressed appreciation for the reminder. The discussion, although brief, encouraged a shift towards more responsible digital behaviour. It demonstrated that even a small initiative can influence attitudes and practices in online communities, promoting accountability and critical thinking.

Reflection

This project provided valuable insights into the role of individual responsibility in promoting digital citizenship. I developed important soft skills such as communication, leadership, and critical thinking. Initiating a discussion in a peer group required confidence, clarity, and sensitivity. I also learned that effective civic engagement does not necessarily require large-scale actions; even small, well-planned interventions can create meaningful change. The experience reinforced the importance of ethical participation in digital spaces and continuous awareness.

Conclusion

This project demonstrated that misinformation in digital spaces can be effectively addressed through small, intentional actions. By encouraging verification and critical thinking, students can contribute to more reliable and trustworthy online communities. The initiative highlights the importance of responsible digital citizenship and shows that even simple interventions can lead to meaningful behavioural change.

Context Capsule

This capstone project focused on addressing misinformation within a university WhatsApp group. The main challenge identified was the frequent sharing of unverified information, leading to confusion among students. A micro-awareness intervention was implemented by sharing a message promoting responsible digital behaviour and engaging members through a reflective question. The responses indicated increased awareness and willingness to verify information before sharing. The project demonstrated that small actions can influence behaviour while helping develop key soft skills such as communication, leadership, and critical thinking.