

Bridging the Digital Divide: Enhancing Elderly Legal Literacy for Digital Crime Prevention in Urban Communities

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Abstract

This study aims to examine how digital legal literacy can reduce cybercrime risks among elderly individuals in urban Thailand. As technology rapidly advances, older adults face increasing risks of online fraud due to their limited digital literacy and lack of awareness about legal protection. This study examines the legal knowledge gap among elderly individuals in urban communities, focusing on their understanding of digital rights, cybersecurity laws, and fraud prevention. It draws on two key frameworks: Digital Literacy and Legal Awareness, which stresses the importance of knowing online rights, and Community Participation, which emphasizes the role of collective efforts in closing this gap. The research explores the experiences of elderly residents in Misu Wann 2 and Krang Sapan Khlong Tan communities in Watthana District, Bangkok, assessing their awareness of cyber fraud, identity theft, and scams. Surveys and interviews reveal that while many elderly individuals use digital platforms for communication and financial transactions, they lack awareness of cybersecurity laws, data protection policies, and official reporting channels. This makes them highly susceptible to scams and online exploitation. To address this issue, the study proposes a community-driven strategy combining legal education with digital skills training. Initiatives include accessible literacy programs, partnerships between public and private sectors, and community-based cybersecurity awareness campaigns. Policymakers, media professionals, and local leaders must collaborate to develop tailored educational initiatives that help elderly individuals safeguard themselves online. By fostering a strong legal-literacy network, this approach can empower older adults to navigate the digital world safely, reduce cyber risks, and ensure they can fully exercise their legal rights in an increasingly digital society.

Keywords: elderly, law, welfare, rights, quality of life

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Introduction

According to the United Nations (2023), Asia is home to over 600 million people aged 60 and above, highlighting the urgency of digital inclusion for older adults. Thailand has formally transitioned into an aging society. The elderly now comprise more than 20% of the national population, a demographic shift bringing about urgent legal and digital challenges. While digital platforms dominate communication, financial transactions, and public services, older adults often find themselves excluded from this transformation due to limited digital and legal literacy. This research addresses the vulnerability of the elderly in urban communities, particularly their exposure to digital crimes such as online fraud, scams, and identity theft.

As society becomes increasingly digitized, the capacity to critically engage with legal and technological information becomes essential. Elderly individuals are especially vulnerable, as many have had limited exposure to formal digital education. These gaps are compounded by low levels of legal awareness, particularly concerning rights in cyberspace, digital transaction safety, and avenues for legal redress. This disconnect creates fertile ground for exploitation, especially in low-income or information-deprived urban areas.

To address this concern, the study proposes a novel educational approach: the development and implementation of a legal literacy board game tailored to elderly learners. This board game is designed not merely as a recreational activity, but as a pedagogical tool grounded in the principles of community participation and experiential learning. The project is embedded within a participatory framework, ensuring that elderly voices and lived experiences shape the development and delivery of the educational content.

Theoretical Framework

This research employs two central frameworks: (1) the *Older Persons' Rights Protection Theory*, which emphasizes the right to legal recognition, healthcare, and security; and (2) *Community Participation Theory*, which posits that community-based action is essential to ensure sustainable knowledge transfer and empowerment.

The *Community Participation Theory*, as articulated by Arnstein (1969) and later adapted for grassroots legal education (Chintawee, 2018), underlines the strategic direction of this study. Participation is conceptualized not merely as consultation, but as active co-creation. The legal literacy board game exemplifies this by integrating participatory design: elderly participants are invited to contribute their experiences with fraud or legal difficulties, which are then converted into realistic scenarios in the game. This fosters a sense of agency, inclusion, and ownership over the educational process.

Board games offer a unique platform for intergenerational and peer-based learning. Informed by constructivist learning theories, this method allows elderly participants to test their knowledge, discuss consequences of choices, and learn legal vocabulary in an informal and engaging setting. The tactile and interactive elements of board games are especially suited to elderly learners who may face barriers to screen-based learning, including visual impairments or discomfort with digital interfaces.

Moreover, by structuring the game around key areas of legal concern—such as reporting scams, understanding contract clauses, or recognizing cyber threats—players are gradually exposed to rights-based thinking. This mode of learning also reduces intimidation often

associated with formal legal education, making abstract legal principles accessible through storytelling, role-play, and community dialogue.

The integration of a board game into legal literacy efforts reflects the broader theoretical commitment to democratizing knowledge and empowering marginalized populations. Through playful yet purposeful learning, elderly individuals are repositioned not as passive recipients of aid but as capable actors in safeguarding their digital and legal autonomy.

Research Methodology

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the elderly's legal and digital literacy in preventing cybercrime. The study aimed to explore not only the current level of knowledge and behavior among elderly individuals but also the contextual factors influencing their awareness and participation in digital safety.

Research Design

A descriptive and exploratory research design was adopted to examine the relationship between legal literacy, digital literacy, and vulnerability to cybercrime among older adults. The study was conducted in two urban communities in Bangkok: Misu Wann 2 and Krang Sapan Khlong Tan (Watthana District). These locations were selected because they represent distinct socioeconomic characteristics and varying levels of digital exposure.

Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of elderly individuals aged 60 years and above living in the two selected communities. A total of 120 participants were included in the study, with 60 respondents from each community, selected through purposive sampling. Key informants—such as community leaders, local volunteers, and representatives from social welfare organizations—were also interviewed to gain institutional perspectives on elderly digital safety and legal support systems.

Data Collection

Data was collected using three instruments:

- 1) **Structured Questionnaire:** Designed to measure digital literacy, awareness of cyber laws (e.g., the Computer Crime Act B.E. 2550 and the Personal Data Protection Act B.E. 2562), and behaviors related to online safety.
- 2) **In-depth Interviews:** Conducted with 15 key informants to gather qualitative insights into community dynamics, challenges in digital access, and perceptions of legal protections.
- 3) **Field Observation:** Researchers observed digital usage behavior and community engagement activities related to technology training and legal awareness.
- 4) The data collection took place between May and July 2024, ensuring sufficient representation of both communities.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) to assess the levels of digital and legal literacy. Inferential statistics, including chi-square tests, were used to identify significant differences between the two communities.

Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic content analysis, categorizing responses under key themes aligned with the theoretical framework (Digital Literacy & Legal Awareness and Community Participation).

Research Ethics

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Srinakharinwirot University. Participation was voluntary, and all respondents provided informed consent. Data confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

Conceptual Framework

The methodology was guided by an integrated conceptual model that connects Digital Literacy and Legal Awareness Theory with Community Participation Theory. This framework provided a foundation for analyzing how community engagement and access to legal knowledge influence the elderly's capacity to prevent and respond to digital crime.

Findings

The study reveals a significant gap in digital and legal literacy among elderly individuals in urban communities of Bangkok, particularly within the Misu Wann 2 and Krang Sapan Khlong Tan communities. While most participants actively use digital tools, mainly smartphones and social media, for communication, financial transactions, and entertainment, their understanding of cybersecurity laws, data protection rights, and online fraud prevention remains limited.

Survey results indicate that over two-thirds of respondents have encountered suspicious online messages or scam attempts, yet fewer than one-fourth were aware of the proper legal channels for reporting digital crimes. Interviews further reveal that although the elderly are willing to learn about digital safety, they often perceive legal language as complex and inaccessible. Many participants rely heavily on family members or neighbors for online transactions, which exposes them to additional privacy and financial risks.

Analysis through Digital Literacy and Legal Awareness Theory highlights that the lack of integrated digital-legal education leaves elderly individuals vulnerable to exploitation. Similarly, under the Community Participation Theory, it becomes evident that the absence of structured local initiatives and intergenerational learning programs contributes to this persistent knowledge gap.

Nonetheless, the study found positive indicators of potential improvement. When elderly participants engaged in community-based digital workshops or received informal guidance from youth volunteers, their confidence in recognizing and responding to online threats increased. These findings underscore the need for community-led legal-literacy initiatives that combine accessible technology training, interactive learning methods, and culturally relevant

communication strategies to protect the elderly from digital crimes and promote safer digital participation.

Table 1

Quantitative Summary of Elderly Legal and Digital Literacy in Urban Communities
(*N* = 120)

Indicators	Misu Wann 2 (n = 60)	Krang Sapan Khlong Tan (n = 60)	Total (%)	Interpretation
1. Use of digital devices (smartphones, LINE, Facebook)	93%	97%	95%	High engagement with digital tools
2. Awareness of cybercrime laws (Computer Crime Act, PDPA)	28%	42%	35%	Moderate knowledge, but still limited
3. Awareness of personal data protection and privacy	31%	48%	39%	Uneven understanding between communities
4. Ability to identify online fraud or scam messages	37%	52%	45%	Practical awareness developing but inconsistent
5. Knowledge of legal reporting mechanisms (police, hotline, online complaint)	22%	33%	27%	Very low awareness of legal recourse
6. Participation in community or training in digital safety	18%	41%	29%	Community-driven programs improve literacy
7. Confidence in using digital services securely	43%	58%	51%	Medium confidence; linked to education exposure

Statistical Summary

- Mean Awareness Score (0–100 scale):
 - *Misu Wann 2*: 39.0
 - *Krang Sapan Khlong Tan*: 53.0
 - *Overall Mean*: 46.0
- Standard Deviation (SD): 9.7 – indicating moderate variation between communities.
- Chi-square Test: $\chi^2 = 4.86$, $p < 0.05$, suggesting a significant difference in legal literacy levels between the two communities.

The quantitative findings confirm that while most elderly individuals are digitally connected, their legal awareness regarding online safety remains low. The higher literacy level in Krang Sapan Khlong Tan is attributed to greater exposure to community-based training and peer support networks. The results reinforce the theoretical assumption that community participation directly correlates with digital-legal empowerment, supporting the integrated framework of this study.

Discussion

Empirical comparisons between the Mису Wann 2 and Krang Sapan Khlong Tan communities affirm the critical role of localized structural variables. Communities with histories of civil society engagement and proactive local leadership exhibited measurably higher levels of digital competency and legal understanding. These differences underscore that community readiness and existing social capital can either accelerate or hinder the effectiveness of legal-digital literacy initiatives.

Notably, the integration of a legal literacy board game emerged as a transformative pedagogical intervention. Far from being a mere educational novelty, the game served as a strategic entry point into complex legal discourse, allowing participants to interact with substantive content in a form that was both accessible and culturally meaningful. Its effectiveness lay not only in simplifying legal concepts but in fostering collective dialogue, encouraging peer learning, and validating the real-life experiences of the elderly participants.

The theoretical framework of Community Participation, particularly as adapted to legal education, finds tangible expression in this context. By situating legal empowerment within participatory, experience-driven methods, the intervention bridged the traditional gap between normative legal frameworks and the everyday realities of elderly citizens. This approach reinforced a sense of agency, diminished the intimidation often associated with legal systems, and contributed to the construction of localized resilience against digital harms.

Recommendations

To transform these insights into practical and scalable actions, a multi-stakeholder framework is proposed for governments, academic institutions, private sectors, and community organizations to collaborate in advancing both digital and legal literacy for older adults.

Institutionalize Legal Literacy for the Elderly

Integrate legal and digital awareness into Thailand's national aging policy. Ministries and local authorities should implement ongoing community training on digital rights, data protection, and cybercrime prevention, delivered through health centers and senior clubs.

Develop and Distribute Board Game Kits Nationwide

Expand the participatory board game initiative into a nationwide learning toolkit, translated into regional languages, and disseminated through temples, schools, and local administrative offices. Collaboration with law faculties can ensure pedagogical validity and legal accuracy.

Establish Elderly Cyber Protection Units (E-CPU)

Build local volunteer groups composed of trained youth mentors, legal advisors, and community leaders to assist with cybercrime reporting, awareness workshops, and personalized guidance for older digital users.

Expand Community Media Campaigns

Utilize accessible media such as local radio, LINE groups, and community television to broadcast educational content on digital fraud prevention. Storytelling and dramatized examples should make legal information relatable and memorable for elderly audiences.

Promote Intergenerational Digital-Legal Mentorship

Pair elderly individuals with university students in law and ICT fields to foster mutual digital-legal learning. This approach promotes intergenerational solidarity and enhances both empathy and resilience against online risks.

Monitor and Evaluate Legal Literacy Impact

Implement regular impact assessments to measure improvement in legal knowledge, digital behavior, and reduction in online victimization. Feedback mechanisms should guide adaptive revisions of educational content and methodologies.

Advocate for Inclusive Policy Reform

Encourage policymakers and civil society to formally recognize the digital rights of the elderly as part of Thailand's digital transformation agenda. This includes ensuring access to online justice mechanisms, legal aid, and safe e-government services.

Conclusion

Crucially, the study's comparative fieldwork reveals that the success of such interventions is inextricably linked to localized social dynamics, especially the role of community leadership, prior exposure to civic initiatives, and the presence of trust networks. The differentiated outcomes observed between the Mису Wann 2 and Krang Sapan Khlong Tan communities affirm that effective legal empowerment strategies must be designed with sensitivity to local histories, cultural narratives, and institutional readiness.

The findings further suggest that when legal knowledge is delivered through mechanisms that integrate emotional safety, peer exchange, and community collaboration, it can serve as a foundation for sustained digital engagement. The board game's impact extended beyond information transmission; it catalyzed social bonding, reinforced shared responsibility, and cultivated a sense of digital citizenship among elderly participants.

Therefore, the promotion of legal literacy among the elderly should no longer be viewed as an ancillary element of public policy but as a central pillar in Thailand's broader agenda for digital inclusion, human security, and equitable access to justice. In empowering elderly citizens to navigate the digital world with confidence and competence, such initiatives lay the groundwork for a more resilient, rights-aware, and socially cohesive society.

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Contribution and Originality

This study contributes to the emerging discourse on digital inclusion and legal empowerment of the elderly in developing urban contexts. It is one of the first empirical studies in Thailand to integrate legal literacy education with digital safety awareness through a community-based pedagogical innovation – the legal literacy board game. The originality lies in combining Digital Literacy and Legal Awareness Theory with Community Participation Theory, producing a participatory learning model that bridges the gap between formal law and everyday digital experience. The findings provide a transferable framework for policymakers and educators across Asia to design age-friendly, culturally grounded, and technology-assisted legal education programs aimed at preventing digital victimization among older adults.

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