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The Digital Era: Transformation of Elementary School Students' Character through Social Media Interaction

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Abstract

The digital age presents significant challenges and roles in molding the character of elementary school students through social media. Today's youth are exposed to diverse information and interactions via online platforms, presenting new challenges in instilling positive values, attitudes, and behaviors. This study aims to explore how social media influences the character formation of elementary school students in the digital age. Employing a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach, the research involves 27 sixth-grade elementary students, along with teachers and parents as informants. Research tools include observation sheets illustrating social media's influence on character formation and interviews with teachers and parents. The research findings indicate that social media plays a significant role in shaping students' character. Most students demonstrate positive attitudes toward character values potentially influenced by social media, including time discipline, creativity, independence, responsibility, environmental awareness, a strong social spirit, and a high curiosity for new experiences.

Keywords: digital age, social media, student's character.

Abstrak

Era digital menimbulkan tantangan dan peran yang besar dalam membentuk karakter siswa sekolah dasar melalui media sosial. Anak-anak saat ini terpapar berbagai informasi dan interaksi melalui platform online, yang menciptakan tantangan baru dalam menanamkan nilai-nilai, sikap, dan perilaku positif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana media sosial memengaruhi pembentukan karakter siswa sekolah dasar di era digital. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif dan pendekatan fenomenologis, penelitian melibatkan 27 siswa sekolah dasar kelas enam, serta guru dan orang tua sebagai informan. Instrumen penelitian meliputi lembar observasi yang menggambarkan pengaruh media sosial pada pembentukan karakter dan wawancara dengan guru dan orang tua. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa media sosial memiliki peran signifikan dalam membentuk karakter siswa, dengan sebagian besar menunjukkan sikap positif terhadap nilai-nilai karakter yang mungkin terpengaruh oleh penggunaan media sosial meliputi: religiusitas, toleransi, moral yang baik, disiplin waktu, kreativitas, kemandirian, tanggung jawab, kepedulian terhadap lingkungan, semangat sosial yang kuat, dan rasa ingin tahu yang tinggi terhadap hal-hal baru.

Kata kunci: era digital, media sosial, karakter siswa.

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of digital technology has brought about significant positive impacts that can be effectively leveraged (Ren & Li, 2023; Suriagiri et al., 2022). However, alongside this progress, there are also negative impacts that must be addressed, posing a new challenge in human life in this digital era. These challenges have permeated various aspects of life, including the formation of character (Hutson & Ratican, 2023).

Character refers to the mindset individuals possess to embody values of goodness in their actions and behaviors, which then become a distinguishing feature of the individual (Yulia et al., 2022). Individuals with character are those capable of making decisions and taking responsibility for the outcomes of those decisions (Berges Puyo, 2020; Moh. Ahsan, 2023). Thus, to confront the challenges of this era, learners must possess strong character. The role of schools in shaping individual character is pivotal. Schools significantly influence the values, attitudes, and behaviors of students through the environment, education, and experiences they provide to foster positive character development (Jančius et al., 2021; Rahayu et al., 2024; Samsinar & Fitriani, 2020).

Education stands out as a critical factor in shaping an individual's character and personality (Yusnan, 2022). Character education is especially crucial to implement from an early age in the current millennial era, particularly at the elementary school level. The desirable characters to instill encompass values such as discipline, patriotism, tolerance, religiosity, collaboration, self-reliance, and a love for reading (Aziz & Badrus Zaman, 2023; Handrianto et al., 2023; Santoso et al., 2020). However, it is important to recognize that technology can have both positive and negative impacts on education. Hence, character development from a young age is essential for nurturing moral principles and serves as the cornerstone for shaping the nation's identity (Chan, 2020; Sunandari et al., 2023).

Character, as described by Ritonga (2022), is the accumulation of interactions and learning that individuals acquire from their environment. The more frequent an individual's interactions with others or the environment, the stronger the influence on the formation of that individual's character. This perspective aligns with the viewpoints of Mustakim et al., (2024); Mulang & Putra (2023), who assert that character education involves applying moral and religious values to students through education, encompassing values applied to oneself, family, peers, educators, environment, and the Almighty God. Character learning should ideally occur in a relaxed state, with focused minds, reaching the alpha state. The advancement of the digital era has led to technology increasingly dominating students' lives in schools, making the implementation of character education more challenging. The emergence of various issues due to declining morality, such as conflicts, freedom of association, lifestyle

changes, and others, indicates a weakening in the management of student characters in the education realm. This trend suggests that students' life patterns and perspectives are becoming more pragmatic. As noted by Bhat (2021); Magomedov et al. (2020), this technological progress has both positive and negative impacts.

The concept of character education has been a focal point in several previous studies, with authors delving into various research areas, particularly the instillation of character education in elementary school students within the digital era. For instance, Mustoip et al. (2023); Shoshani & Shwartz (2018) conducted a study investigating Character Formation in Early Childhood Education and Elementary School. Similarly, Fadillah & Sabella (2022) focused on the Influence of Character Development in the Digital Era for Students. In such contexts, character education is deemed essential for strategic development, offering learners the opportunity to receive a holistic education that humanizes individuals in all aspects physical, mental, soulful, and emotional. According to Anurogo et al. (2023), education in schools plays a pivotal role in addressing the myriad challenges posed by the digital era. It is crucial for elementary school children to learn about ethics and etiquette in using the internet and to establish strong foundational knowledge before engaging in the digital world. Therefore, the implementation of digital-based character education in elementary schools becomes paramount to achieve a balance among students' attitudes, knowledge, and skills, involving teachers and other school members in the process (Sing Yun, 2023; Sitorus et al., 2023)

Although numerous studies have addressed the importance of character education in the digital era, most prior research has primarily focused on the general influence of technology on students' character development. For instance, Déchène et al. (2024); Pratiwi et al. (2021) highlighting the implementation of character education in elementary schools without specifically examining the role of social media. Other studies, such as those conducted by Lestari (2024), have examined the influence of character education in the context of the digital era but have not thoroughly explored students' interactions with social media and how these interactions shape their values, attitudes, and behaviors. Previous research has predominantly focused on aspects of formal education while paying less attention to the influence of social media in shaping students' moral identity, ethics, and behavior. Moreover, existing studies have yet to extensively explore practical strategies that schools can implement to manage the positive and negative impacts of social media on students' character development. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by specifically exploring how social media influences the character development of elementary school students and identifying effective approaches to managing the impact of social media within the context of character education in the digital era.

This study examines the impact of social media on character development in students, the roles of teachers and parents in shaping students' character, and the challenges of character development in the digital era. This research was conducted to build upon previous studies, which not only focused on the challenges faced by elementary school students in the digital age but also on the significant role of social media in shaping their character. Moreover, the use of a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method in this research adds a unique contribution by offering a profound understanding of how social media influences the character formation of elementary school students. The primary objective of this research is to

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explore how social media affects the character development of elementary school students in the digital era. Therefore, this research seeks to enhance understanding of the role of social media in shaping the values, attitudes, and behaviors of elementary school students. This study is crucial for providing a deeper insight into how social media influences the character development of elementary school students and for identifying effective strategies to positively manage its impact. This can be achieved through data collection methods such as documentation, interviews, and observations to gain a comprehensive understanding of elementary school students' interactions with social media and how these interactions impact their character development.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive and phenomenological approach to collect data in a natural setting and understand the phenomena that occur (Handayani et al., 2021). The choice of a descriptive method is based on its ability to provide a detailed picture of the individuals, conditions, language, phenomena, or groups under study Salnita (2019). This study involves 27 sixth-grade students from SDN 26 Mataram as the research subjects over a period of 2 days, with teachers and parents of these students participating as informants. The researchers were actively involved in the data collection process. Data validity in this research is ensured through the triangulation technique, specifically data source triangulation, which aims to enhance data collection by utilizing various types of relevant data (Yaswinda et al., 2020).

This study employs observation as the primary data collection method, conducted while students interact with social media. Interviews were carried out with several teachers and parents to gain deeper insights. Documentation was conducted concurrently with observations, focusing on students' social media usage. This approach aimed to investigate the challenges and roles of the digital era in shaping students' character through social media.

The data analysis in this study followed the process outlined by Miles and Huberman (1984), as elucidated by Sugiyono (2016). Qualitative data analysis was conducted interactively and continuously until data saturation was reached. The analysis consisted of the following steps: (a) Data collection: Processing the collected data by analyzing, describing, and summarizing it. (b) Data reduction: Selecting, summarizing, or making brief descriptions of the data, grouping them to form a research transcript, focusing on relevant data while discarding unnecessary data. (c) Data display: Presenting the data in narrative form to facilitate understanding of the phenomena and to plan the next steps based on the understanding gained. (d) Drawing conclusions and verification: Summarizing the data into conclusions to review and ensure that it supported the research, addressing the initial problems formulated by Nasution et al. (2019). These steps are illustrated in Figure 1.

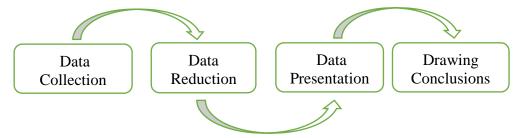


Figure 1. Miles and Huberman's (1984) Data Analysis

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Impact of Social Media on Character Development in Students

Character education is considered more significant than moral education because it extends beyond mere right and wrong concepts to include the cultivation of habits of goodness in life. It aims to foster awareness, deep understanding, and a sense of concern and commitment to applying virtues in daily life (Imawan & Ismail, 2023; Maidugu & Isah, 2024; Sigalingging, 2024). Character education is a process of developing and educating individuals to build their character and instill life values through knowledge, enabling them to become beneficial individuals for themselves and their environment. Therefore, character can be defined as an individual's inherent tendency to respond to situations morally, demonstrated through actions such as good behavior, honesty, responsibility, respect for others, and other noble character values.

The interviews with sixth-grade teachers revealed that social media can impact students' character values in various ways, depending on their interactions, the content they consume, and their behavior online. The findings of this study align with research conducted by Alshammari et al. (2024); Palvia et al. (2018); Pujiono (2021) which states that social media continues to evolve in terms of both quality and quantity, thereby possessing significant potential as a learning tool. Similarly, Papademetriou et al. (2022); Purwaningsih et al. (2022); Rashid & Asghar (2016) found that social media is used as a learning tool to enhance student achievement. Social media use has positive effects, such as providing support and motivation and strengthening social engagement. However, negative influences include cyberbullying, exposure to inappropriate content (e.g., violence, gambling, pornography, and misinformation), and experiences of online harassment, which can affect moral values, ethics, dependence, and mental health. Therefore, managing social media's impact on students' character depends on how parents, educators, and students handle it. Responsible use, active monitoring, and open discussions about fundamental principles can help mitigate negative effects and enhance positive ones.

The aforementioned study is consistent with the findings of Alshammari et al. (2024); Matanari et al. (2020); Mua et al. (2024), which indicate that children's character can be observed through their behavior, such as demonstrating religious values by diligently practicing religious rituals, respecting parents and teachers, showing affection for friends, and displaying politeness. Khoirroni et al. (2023); Rizal & Munip (2017) it also emphasizes that character education encompasses several fundamental concepts, including character, values, and education. The indicators of characteristic values include religiosity, tolerance, discipline, creativity, independence, sense of responsibility, environmental awareness, social spirit, curiosity, and good morals. Character education aims to cultivate positive character traits for future application and eliminate negative traits to prevent their recurrence. Character education also contributes to realizing Indonesia's national vision of enlightening the nation's life and creating a just and prosperous society., environmental consciousness, and a strong social spirit (Retnaningtyas & Zulkarnaen, 2023).

The Challenges of Character Development in The Digital Era

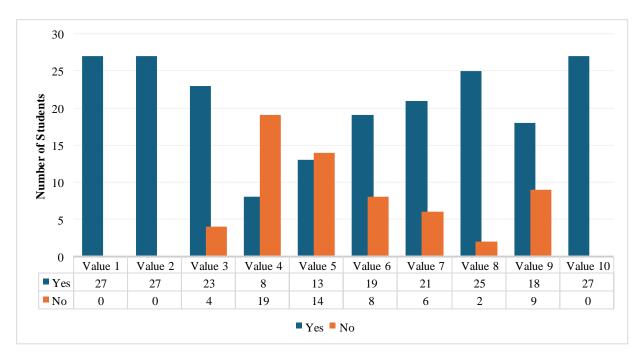
From interviews with sixth-grade teachers, it was noted that the digital era and the use of social media play a role in shaping students' character, with both positive and

negative impacts. The use of digital media, including social media, by children under the legal age can have significant effects, both adverse and beneficial. Aligned with this research, Borba (2021) asserts that the digital era also presents challenges and plays a crucial role in education, particularly in shaping the character of elementary school students who are easily influenced by new experiences. Martin et al. (2023); Wahyuningsih et al. (2024) also contends that some of the primary challenges faced include: 1) Influence of digital content, exposing students to various types of digital content, both positive and negative. 2) Risks of technology addiction, as elementary school students are more susceptible to the risks of excessive gadget and social media use due to limited self-control and understanding of technology usage boundaries. 3) Potential for bullying, with elementary school students facing social pressure, harassment, or intimidation online. 4) Changes in social interaction, as the use of technology can impact how children socially interact.

This is consistent with the interviews and studies referenced by Martzoukou (2022), it is evident that building character in the digital era has led to children becoming increasingly passive and finding it challenging to socialize with family and society. Many children today prefer watching TV over playing with friends, leading to a loss of valuable time for play, learning, skill development, and family bonding. The allure of phone screens further exacerbates this trend. Additionally, as highlighted by Ananda et al. (2022), the digital era has negative effects, including bullying, which can leave victims feeling inferior, lacking confidence, and experiencing low self-esteem, often resulting in a reluctance to socialize with peers. On the other hand, research by Fikriyah & Faiz (2019) indicates that globalization has brought about changes in human life, with people in this era embracing globalization through technology and readily available information.

In interviews with sixth-grade teachers, it was observed that the digital era significantly impacts education in several ways: 1) Online character education: the digital era offers opportunities for online character education, allowing schools and parents to utilize social media to impart positive values and character lessons. 2) Collaborative learning: social media can serve as a platform for collaborative learning and sharing positive experiences, enabling students to learn together and support one another. 3) Digital skills development: acquiring digital skills and media literacy is crucial in shaping students' characters, enabling them to use social media responsibly and intelligently. The interview findings are consistent with the research conducted by Jannah (2020); Suroso et al. (2021), technological advancements have both negative and positive effects, with many positive effects in today's era of globalization, such as children feeling comfortable in a fun world under the guidance of parents and teachers. Based on these interviews, the observation results include 10 character values exhibited by students using social media, as depicted in Graph 1:

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Graph 1. Observational Results of Student Character Value

Graph 1 illustrates that all 27 students exhibit value 1, 2, and 10, which are religious attitudes: Performing the five daily prayers and reciting the Qur'an. Tolerance: Mutual respect, honoring differences, and showing empathy toward others, and good morals: Politeness and good manners, as well as proper conduct. Regarding value 3, time discipline: Students consistently arrive at school on time and complete their school assignments according to the schedule without procrastination, 23 students demonstrate this behavior, while 4 students do not. For value 4, a creative attitude: Students utilize social media for creative ideas, 8 students possess this trait, while 19 do not. Value 5, independence: Maintaining cleanliness and orderliness, is displayed by 13 students, with 14 not showing this trait. Value 6, a sense of responsibility: Completing homework, cleaning the house, attending school, is demonstrated by 19 students, while 8 do not exhibit this trait. Value 7, concern for the environment: Not littering, maintaining cleanliness, and helping one another, is shown by 21 students, with 6 not displaying this trait. Value 8, a strong social spirit: Always socializing and playing with peers, is exhibited by 25 students, with 2 students not showing this trait. Value 9, a high curiosity for new things: Students consistently watch and follow videos or content created by others, is demonstrated by 18 students, with 9 students not displaying this trait. In summary, the research findings indicate that the majority of students exhibit values of religiousness, tolerance, good morals, time discipline, creativity, independence, responsibility, concern for the environment, a strong social spirit, and a high curiosity for new things. While there are some differences in certain aspects, most students show positive attitudes towards these values.

The findings of this study are consistent with the research conducted by Adiyono et al. (2024); Veronika et al. (2023) which highlights significant challenges such as the conflict of traditional values with the impact of digitaltechnology, while simultaneously identifying great opportunities, additionally, students tend to integrate the digital era as virtual literacy in alignment with the activities and goals they aim to achieve. Students primarily use social

media for general purposes, such as consuming entertaining content, and as a platform for sharing videos or photos. However, they do not use social media for negative purposes. Therefore, the majority of sixth-grade students demonstrate a positive attitude towards these values, which can be attributed to the role of teachers and parents in educating and guiding students to use social media positively.

The Roles of Teachers and Parents in Shaping Students' Character

The digital age presents challenges for parents, as noted by one sixth-grade parent in an interview. Difficulties faced include disruptions in sleep patterns, lack of physical activity, gadget addiction, exposure to inappropriate content, and other issues related to their child's mobile phone use. Some parents choose not to allow their children to use mobile phones (including social media) due to concerns about its impact on their character. To address these challenges, parents need to actively engage in their children's digital lives by teaching them how to stay safe online, managing their screen time, and maintaining a balance between digital activities and other important activities for their development. Despite these challenges, digital devices (e.g., mobile phones) can also facilitate learning, especially in self-directed online learning, and provide convenience in completing tasks. According to Aslanidou (2019); Bhamani et al. (2020); Hutchison et al. (2020), parents can support their children's learning by using activity books, actively participating in school routines, and engaging in interactive activities with parents and teachers at home and in class.

Consistent with the interview above, the interview conducted by Japar (2024); Matanari et al. (2020) also supports this, revealed that teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' character through education, as instilling character values in children is a process that takes time. This aligns with interviews with several parents of sixth-grade students regarding addressing the negative impacts of social media on students' character. Parents can actively engage in their children's online activities and learning, educate them about the impact of social media, online ethics, and privacy, and establish rules for screen time and content, with consequences for rule violations. While social media can offer benefits to elementary school children, its proper use should be supervised by both teachers and parents, as depicted in Figures 2 and 3 below:



Figure 2. Students using social media independently



Figure 3. Students using social media under parental guidance

Social media can facilitate students' participation in social and constructive activities, enabling them to engage with peers, share interests and accomplishments, and contribute to

positive initiatives. Therefore, consistent with the research conducted by Haque et al. (2023); Zhang et al. (2024) which states that teachers and parents can utilize social media to enhance students' learning outcomes by facilitating communication, providing a learning platform, enabling class discussions and forums, assigning tasks, and making announcements. For parents, this involves collaborating with teachers and engaging in educational discussions about their children. The interviews underscore the importance of using social media in the digital age wisely, with clear instructions and the support of parents and teachers. Such use can aid in the development of strong and positive character traits in students. This research aligns with the findings of Alkhasanah et al. (2023); Haluti et al. (2023); Hukubun et al. (2024); Noor & Damariswara (2022), which emphasize the critical role of teachers and families in shaping children's characters in the contemporary digital era. Therefore, parents and teachers play key roles in guiding children to navigate social media positively and avoid negative influences while maintaining their character.

CONCLUSION

In today's digital era, social media has become a significant aspect of elementary school (SD) students' daily routines. Their exposure to information and online interactions greatly impacts the development of their character. However, managing the negative effects of social media use poses considerable challenges. Some key challenges include cyberbullying, the dissemination of misinformation, and exposure to harmful online content. Social media use significantly influences students' character values, with the majority demonstrating a positive attitude towards character formation. Hence, it is crucial for teachers and parents to guide students in using social media positively and fostering strong characters, including moral values, empathy, religious, tolerance, discipline, creative attitude, independence, concern for the environment, a strong social spirit, a high curiosity for new things, and responsibility. To address the challenges of the digital era, educators and parents must collaborate to develop effective strategies that integrate digital literacy and character education into the daily lives of SD students. These efforts will enable students to understand and navigate the impact of social media wisely, while also developing resilient and positive characters that will serve them well in the future. This study may not fully capture the effectiveness of various strategies implemented by educators, parents, and the community in addressing these challenges. Therefore, future research is encouraged to explore innovative approaches to leveraging social media as a tool for character education, including the development of programs or educational content designed to engage elementary school students and reinforce positive values.

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