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The Negative Impact of Social Media Use On Character Building in The Digital Age

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ABSTRACT: Social media in the digital age has both positive and negative impacts on human life. The increasing and inappropriate use of social media can lead to a decline in morals and ethics related to character building. This article aims to examine the negative impact of social media use on character building in the digital age. The Systematic Literature Review (SRL) method was used in this study based on the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items For Systematic Reviews And Meta Analyses) guidelines through three stages, namely identification, screening, and inclusion. The results of this study indicate that there are negative impacts of social media use that affect character building. These negative impacts include a decline in morals and ethics, psychological and social problems, threats of digital crime and violence, the negative influence of inappropriate content, a culture of appearance and consumptive lifestyles, and a lack of supervision and character education. Therefore, it can be concluded that social media use has a negative impact on character building in the digital age.

KEYWORDS: Character Building, Social Media Use, The Digital Age.

INTRODUCTION

The digital era is a time that has transformed life in the virtual world with the creation of social media as a means of communication between individuals (Yujie et al., 2022). Social media was first introduced in the early 2000s on simple platforms such as Friendster and MySpace. Meanwhile, the development of social media today is growing through platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube, with users now reaching billions worldwide (Qadir & Ramli, 2024). Social media platforms typically encourage users to create profiles, post content, participate in discussions or exchange opinions, and communicate privately or in groups as a means of interaction that facilitates community building (S & Thomas, 2023). Research by Tantri et al., (2023) reveals that technological advances in the digital age have both positive and negative impacts on individuals' lives.

Social media is ingrained in human life, so it will have both positive and negative effects depending on how it is used (Adhikari, 2022). Saleh, (2023) explains that social media has a positive influence in helping people establish relationships as a means of interaction and modern two-way feedback. The use of social media as a platform for social interaction in everyday life facilitates communication, strengthens relationships, simplifies information searches, and fosters the formation of specific communities (Gazi et al., 2024). The function of social media is to provide users with a free space to access various information by forming interactions such as commenting and sharing content widely (Anurogo et al., 2023). In addition, social media is a place of entertainment, especially for children and teenagers (Amalia et al., 2024). The use of social media can affect the emotional well-being of adolescents, influencing relationships between individuals, self-expression, self-exploration based on interests, and entertainment (Weinstein, 2018).

Technology in the digital age, which is growing continuously, has the potential to cause a crisis of character values that will hinder character building (Maryam, 2023). Ruchiyat et al., (2024) explains that the importance of strengthening character education in the face of technological developments can be achieved through collaboration between teachers, schools, and parents. Character building is not only influenced by formal education, but can also be influenced by the use of social media, which makes it easier for individuals to access information anywhere and anytime (Rosyidah & Ismeirita, 2023). The increasing use of social media will have an impact on the decline of morals and ethics as an important part of individuals' daily interactions (Rahman et al., 2023). Social media usage must be monitored carefully to avoid unfriendliness and cyberbullying on social media (Harrison & Polizzi, 2022).

Research conducted by Gultom et al., (2024) reveals that social media use has an influence on character formation, especially during adolescence when individuals are searching for their identity. In this regard, character building is influenced by the negative impact of social media use. Negative impacts arise when users do not use social media properly, leading to problems such as depression, anxiety, and bullying (Damota, 2019). The inappropriate use of social media will cause misinformation or certain problems that affect an individual's mental health, behavior, and attitude (Gazi et al., 2024).

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Hidayat et al., (2024) revealed that misuse of social media can cause problems such as the spread of hoaxes, cyberbullying, online fraud, increased anxiety, and depression, which can lead to a decline in individual character. In addition, the use of social media has caused a moral crisis, such as the rampant spread of pornographic and violent content among teenagers (Amalia et al., 2024). Gutandjala, (2020) revealed that the popularity of culture on social media can pose challenges that impact identity and social crises, thereby influencing the character formation of Indonesia's younger generation. In this regard, character formation is related to the use of social media, where individuals are required to apply digital developments based on comprehensive moral values and involving all elements of society (Lickona, 2022). Character values need to be instilled by providing an understanding of right and wrong, and developing positive attitudes and habits in order to train individuals' morals (Rijal & Kosasih, 2022).

Previous studies have discussed various influences on social media use. The author is interested in examining the negative impact of social media use on the process of character building in the digital age. The strength of this study is its ability to analyze based on theory and previous research results by mapping the negative impacts of social media and how changes in digital behavior influence character building.

METHOD

This study was conducted by examining and analyzing in depth the negative impact of social media use on character building in the digital age. The type of research used in this study was qualitative research using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. SLR is a method that aims to present views on a topic to be studied based on scientific evidence from previous research studies (Ramayanti et al., 2025). The steps that need to be considered are: 1) identifying questions, 2) developing procedures, 3) establishing a database as a search source, 4) selecting relevant results, 5) extracting data based on individual studies, 6) presenting the results of the study. The data sources obtained by the author in this study were scientific data based on previous studies through journal articles. Data collection was carried out by searching for previous research results through Science Direct and Google Scholar using keywords related to social media use, character building, and the digital era in relation to this study for the period 2020-2025.

This study is based on the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items For Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses) guidelines, which are carried out in a gradual and systematic manner. PRISMA 2020 was used in this study with the aim of systematically examining the negative impact of social media use on character building in the digital age. The stages of using PRISMA are summarized in a diagram, starting from identifying relevant studies, screening based on research criteria, and the final stage of selecting literature.

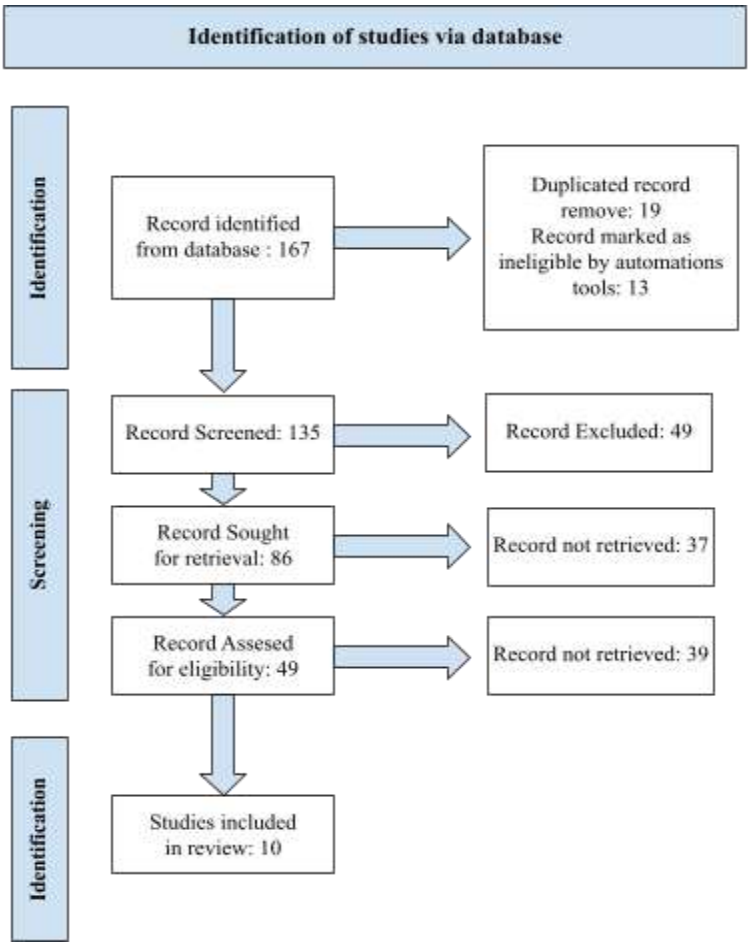


Figure 1. Literature Collection Using the PRISMA Method

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social media has become ingrained in human life as a means of communication, information, and providing opportunities according to human needs. This can have both positive and negative effects depending on each individual's use of social media. This discussion will outline the negative impacts of social media use on the formation of individual character in the digital age.

Table 1. Results of Article Review Research

No.	Author, Year	Research Title	Findings
1.	(Tampubolon et al., 2024)	The Influence of Technology and Social Media on Student Character Building	The excessive use of technology and social media has negative impacts such as a decline in morals, manners, apathetic behavior, addiction, and irresponsibility.
2.	(Leonardo & Quimson, 2020)	#Likeorunlike: A descriptive study on the effects of social media on the moral development of the young people	Social media has negative impacts such as cyberbullying, hoaxes, hate speech, anger, and damage to moral values and mindsets among the younger generation.
3.	(Hidayat et al., 2024)	Impact of Social Media on Adolescent Mental Health and Ethical Development: A Qualitative Study on Early Character Formation in Sarolangun Regency	Technology continues to evolve, providing benefits while also posing challenges through the misuse of social media and causing problems such as cyberbullying, depression, online fraud, and increased anxiety, which can affect students' character.
4.	(Rahman et al., 2023)	Pendidikan Karakter Dalam Era Digital: Bagaimana Teknologi Mempengaruhi Pembentukan Moral Dan Etika	The use of technology in the digital age has a major impact on the formation of moral character and ethics, posing a significant threat if technology is not used wisely.
5.	(Bolu-steve et al., 2022)	Influence Of Social Media on In-School Adolescents' Morals: Implications for School Counselors	Sexually explicit images or messages widely circulated on social media have a negative impact on the morals of teenagers in schools in Ekiti State.
6.	(Ichsan et al., 2024)	The Influence of Social Media on the Formation of Student Morals in the Digital Era	The impact of social media is not only as a means of communication, but the use of social media can influence the mindset, ethics, and behavior of students, thereby affecting their character development.
7.	(Sundarsih & Sudiarti, 2023)	National Characters: The Effect of Social Media on Youth in The Digital Era	High levels of social media use that focus on physical appearance and lifestyle will cause individuals to tend to have lower Pancasila character values.
8.	(Payasi & Jain, 2025)	Exploring the Impact of Social Media on Youth's Social Skills and Interpersonal Relationships	The high use of social media has led to a decline in face-to-face communication, increased social anxiety, and difficulty in forming and maintaining relationships.
9.	(Tuhuteru et al., 2023)	Peran Media Sosial terhadap Pembentukan Karakter pada Anak Usia Dini	The use of social media by young children will have a negative impact on character development if parents do not supervise them and provide character education.
10.	(Bulmash, 2024)	Social media use and mistrust in authority: an examination of Kohlberg's moral development model	The negative impact of social media can be avoided if the level of moral development is higher, but if individuals have a higher level of moral relativism and intuitionism, they will be more easily influenced by the negative effects of social media.

The results of the literature analysis show that there are negative impacts of social media use that affect character formation. These negative impacts are as follows:

1. Decline in morals and ethics

The inappropriate use of social media will have a negative impact on morals and ethics in character building in the digital age. The analysis concludes that the decline in morals and ethics affects character building, as evidenced by a decline in politeness, self-control, responsibility, and susceptibility to negative content that causes individuals to ignore moral values.

2. Psychological and social problems

Psychological and social problems are negative impacts of social media use that can influence character formation in the digital age.

The analysis concluded that psychological and social problems influence character formation, as indicated by the emergence of apathetic behavior, a decline in concern for the social environment, anxiety, depression, and dependence on social media.

3. The threat of cybercrime and violence

The threat of digital crime and violence is prone to occur in the use of social media. These issues can influence character formation in the digital age. The analysis concluded that the threats of cybercrime and violence that can influence character formation include an increase in cyberbullying, hate speech, online fraud, and hoaxes. These impacts can encourage anger and negative mindsets that influence character formation, especially among teenagers.

4. The negative impact of inappropriate content

Social media has a wide variety of content containing information that is easily accessible to anyone. The analysis concluded that inappropriate content that will influence character formation includes the dissemination of sexual messages or images that can have a negative impact on the morals and behavior of individuals. If social media is not used properly, exposure to inappropriate content will have a negative influence on character formation in the digital age.

5. The culture of appearance and consumerist lifestyles

The prevalence of content related to appearance and lifestyle on social media influences character formation in the digital age. The analysis concludes that excessive focus on content related to physical appearance and hedonistic lifestyles can lead to a decline in self-confidence and individual character.

6. Lack of supervision and character education

The negative impact of social media use on character building can be caused by a lack of supervision and character education for children. The analysis concludes that children's use of social media will be vulnerable to absorbing deviant content if there is no parental guidance.

Based on this discussion, the negative impacts of social media use on character building in the digital age include a decline in morals and ethics, psychological and social problems, the threat of digital crime and violence, the negative influence of inappropriate content, a culture of appearance and consumerism, and a lack of supervision and character education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis in this study, it is known that the use of social media can have a negative impact on the formation of individual character in the digital age. Excessive and inappropriate use of social media poses a threat to the formation of moral and ethical character. The results reveal that the negative impact of social media use on character formation in the digital age includes a decline in morals and ethics, psychological and social problems, the threat of digital crime and violence, the negative influence of inappropriate content, a culture of appearance and consumptive lifestyles, and a lack of supervision and character education. This study provides a deeper understanding and insight into the negative impact of social media use on character formation in the digital age, so that it can be used as a guideline in analyzing the use of social media that has a negative impact on the formation of individual character in the digital age.

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