

Islamic Education and the Influence of Social Media on the Character Formation of Students

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Abstract: *This research aims to analyze the influence of social media on the character formation of students and to examine the role and strategies of Islamic education in responding to this dynamic. The study uses a qualitative method with a library research approach. The results indicate that social media has a paradoxical influence, bringing positive impacts such as expanded access to knowledge and positive social networks, but also significant negative impacts such as distortion of values, cyberbullying, and degradation of learning concentration. Islamic education, with its paradigm of tawhid (monotheism) and akhlak (morality), faces significant challenges in filtering values within the fluid digital space. The main finding of this research is that effective strategies require a tripartite integration: strengthening value-based Islamic digital literacy in educational institutions, enhancing the educational role of parents in digital supervision, and developing creative da'wah (Islamic propagation) and educational content by various stakeholders. This research concludes that the transformation of Islamic education in the digital era is no longer optional but a necessity to ensure students become not only smart social media users but also individuals with resilient Islamic character.*

Keywords: *Islamic Education, Social Media, Character, Morality (Akhlak), Digital Literacy, Muslim Youth.*

Introduction

The digital era, characterized by the convergence of information and communication technologies, has fundamentally transformed the structure of human social interaction (Castells, 2010). Social media, as one of its most influential manifestations, has become an inseparable lifeworld for the younger generation. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) no longer function merely as communication tools; they have evolved into dynamic arenas for identity construction, value negotiation, and worldview formation (boyd, 2014). In Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, this transformation intersects with a deeply rooted religious value system that shapes the lives of the majority of its citizens. Muslim students, as digital natives, stand at a

crossroads between Islamic values cultivated within family and school environments and the heterogeneous—sometimes contradictory—flows of information and cultural expressions circulating on social media (Hasan, 2018).

Islamic education, whose primary mission is to nurture *insan kamil*—individuals who are spiritually devoted and morally upright—faces an increasingly complex existential challenge. Traditionally, Islamic education operated within relatively controlled environments such as *pesantren*, *madrasah*, and family settings. Today, however, educational spaces extend into boundless and largely unfiltered digital environments (Rohman & Hairudin, 2020). The tension between values of modesty, politeness, and *ukhuwah Islamiyah* taught in Islamic education and the hedonistic, individualistic, and unrestricted expressive cultures often encountered online creates cognitive dissonance and moral vulnerability among students. In this context, value-based Islamic digital literacy becomes essential. Digital literacy must be understood not merely as technical proficiency, but as the critical and ethical capacity to evaluate, select, and produce digital content aligned with *maqashid syariah*—the higher objectives of Islamic law (Ihsan & Sultoni, 2021).

Based on this background, this study seeks to analyze the patterns and magnitude of social media's influence on the attitudes, behavior, and character formation of Muslim students. It further examines the dimensions in which social media may either erode or strengthen core Islamic educational values, including *aqidah* (creed), *akhlak* (morality), and *ibadah* (worship). Additionally, it explores strategic roles that Islamic educational institutions, families, and communities can adopt to mitigate negative influences while optimizing the constructive potential of digital media in shaping Islamic character.

The objectives of this research are threefold. First, it aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the influence of social media on Muslim students' character development. Second, it seeks to evaluate the capacity of Islamic education to respond to both challenges and opportunities within the social media ecosystem. Third, it proposes an integrative and applicable strategic framework to strengthen character formation in the digital age. Theoretically, this research contributes to the

contemporary discourse in Islamic Education, particularly within the sociology of education and digital media studies, and addresses gaps concerning the integration of Islamic values into digital literacy frameworks (Nurhikmah et al., 2022). Practically, the findings may serve as a reference for teachers, ustaz, parents, educational managers, and policymakers within the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education in designing curricula, training programs, and regulatory frameworks that effectively guide students in navigating digital realities.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research design using a library research approach. The qualitative paradigm is considered appropriate because the objective of this research is to conduct an in-depth, critical, and comprehensive analysis of concepts, theoretical frameworks, and previous empirical findings related to Islamic education, social media, and character formation. Library research enables the researcher to explore, compare, and synthesize scholarly perspectives systematically, thereby constructing a coherent analytical framework grounded in academic discourse (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The subjects of this research consist of theoretical constructs and empirical studies addressing Islamic education, social media dynamics, and moral or character development. The object of the research is the dynamic interaction among these three domains, with particular emphasis on identifying patterns of influence and formulating responsive educational strategies within contemporary digital contexts.

Data collection was conducted through documentation techniques, involving the systematic identification, selection, and review of relevant written sources. Primary data sources include authoritative books on Islamic education and peer-reviewed international and national journal articles discussing digital media, education, and character development. Secondary sources comprise seminar proceedings, research reports, policy documents, and credible publications from relevant institutions that support and enrich the primary academic discourse (Sugiyono, 2019).

The collected data were analyzed using content analysis and hermeneutic-interpretative approaches. Content analysis was applied to identify recurring themes, conceptual patterns, and argumentative structures across the literature, while hermeneutic interpretation was employed to understand the contextual meaning and underlying assumptions of the texts. The analytical process involved data reduction to select essential and relevant information, systematic narrative presentation of findings, and conclusion drawing accompanied by continuous verification to ensure consistency and credibility (Miles et al., 2014). Thematic analysis guided the synthesis process, enabling the development of a structured and coherent interpretation aligned with the research objectives.

Result and Discussion

Islamic education is understood as a systematic and holistic process aimed at guiding and developing the human fitrah—encompassing physical, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions—so that individuals grow into servants of Allah (‘abdullah) and responsible stewards (khalifah) on earth, characterized by noble conduct (Al-Attas, 1991). Its purpose extends beyond the mere transmission of knowledge (ta‘lim) to the cultivation of refined character (tahdzib al-akhlak) and the formation of an Islamic personality (syakhshiyah Islamiyah) reflected consistently in thought, speech, and action. Core values emphasized within this framework include monotheism (aqidah), devotion in worship, honesty (shiddiq), trustworthiness (amanah), humility (tawadhu’), compassion (rahmah), responsibility, and intellectual reasoning (‘aqliah) (Marimba, 1989). While firmly rooted in the Qur’an and Hadith as authoritative sources, Islamic education remains contextually adaptive, responding to changing social realities without compromising its essential normative foundations.

From an educational standpoint, social media refers to internet-based platforms that enable users to construct profiles, share content, and engage in networked interaction (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Its participatory nature, convergence of multimedia formats, and rapid virality make it a powerful instrument within contemporary educational environments, including Islamic education.

Adolescents, as the dominant user group, demonstrate strong tendencies toward self-presentation, heightened sensitivity to peer influence, and impulsive forms of digital interaction (Livingstone, 2008). Consequently, social media operates as a double-edged phenomenon: it offers expansive opportunities for collaborative learning and knowledge exchange while simultaneously functioning as a source of distraction and misinformation (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

Extensive research has examined the influence of social media on adolescent behavior and character formation. On the positive side, digital platforms can broaden supportive social networks, facilitate access to constructive learning communities including religious communities and provide spaces for creative expression and civic engagement (Ellison et al., 2007). However, negative consequences are often more visible and complex. Empirical studies reveal associations between intensive social media use and heightened anxiety, depressive tendencies, and feelings of inferiority driven by social comparison (Twenge & Campbell, 2019). Furthermore, social media can amplify hate speech, cyberbullying, exposure to pornography, and extremist narratives that undermine virtuous and tolerant values (Barlett et al., 2021). From a cognitive perspective, the culture of rapid scrolling and fragmented attention may diminish sustained concentration and depth of critical thinking (Carr, 2010).

The digital era thus presents both significant challenges and transformative opportunities for Islamic education. A primary challenge lies in the phenomenon of de-authorization, whereby teachers and parents are no longer perceived as the sole or primary sources of knowledge (Wahid, 2019). Islamic values must compete within a global digital arena saturated with diverse ideologies and cultural expressions. Nevertheless, social media also offers unprecedented possibilities: it can serve as an effective medium for da'wah, foster interactive and contextual learning, and provide access to global Islamic scholarship (Asrofi et al., 2020). Accordingly, the role of educators evolves from information transmitters to facilitators, moral guides, and developers of critical digital literacy grounded in Islamic values.

This research employs a qualitative design using a library research approach. The approach is appropriate for the objective of conducting a comprehensive and in-

depth analysis of conceptual frameworks, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings related to Islamic education, social media, and character formation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather than generating primary field data, the study synthesizes existing scholarly works to construct a coherent analytical framework.

The subjects of the study consist of theoretical discourses and empirical research findings concerning Islamic education, social media dynamics, and moral development. The object of analysis centers on the dynamic interaction among these domains, particularly patterns of influence and strategic responses within educational contexts.

Data collection was conducted through systematic documentation of relevant written sources. Primary data sources include authoritative works on Islamic education and peer-reviewed national and international journal articles. Secondary sources encompass seminar proceedings, institutional research reports, and credible online publications (Sugiyono, 2019). These materials were selected based on relevance, academic credibility, and conceptual contribution to the research focus.

Data analysis utilized content analysis combined with hermeneutic-interpretative techniques. The process involved data reduction to identify central themes, systematic narrative presentation, and conclusion drawing with ongoing verification (Miles et al., 2014). Thematic analysis ensured that synthesis remained aligned with the research objectives and produced an integrated and coherent discussion.

Social media usage patterns among Muslim students reflect a complex interplay between religious identity, adolescent psychosocial development, and the techno-social architecture of digital platforms (boyd, 2014). Muslim students inhabit overlapping normative spheres: the structured and value-regulated environment of family, madrasah, or pesantren, and the globalized, participatory, and fluid ethos of digital culture (Wahid, 2019). This duality fosters hybrid religious and social experiences in which identity is continuously negotiated.

Usage trends indicate a preference for visually driven and short-form video platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts, which deliver rapid

gratification and aesthetic appeal (Nasrullah, 2017). Engagement-based algorithms shape visibility and influence, transforming digital validation likes, comments, shares into symbolic capital that shapes adolescent self-image (Twenge & Campbell, 2019). Muslim students actively participate in this performative culture while navigating religious normative boundaries concerning modesty, gender interaction, and self-presentation.

Content consumption patterns reveal dual tendencies. Many students follow religious scholars, preachers, and Islamic influencers who package religious teachings in accessible formats, reflecting efforts to maintain Islamic identity in digital spaces (Hamid, 2019). Simultaneously, mainstream content frequently promotes hedonistic, materialistic, or ethically questionable norms, generating cognitive negotiation processes (Barendregt, 2018). The resulting hybrid identity blends Islamic affiliation with global digital citizenship.

The moral impact of social media is inherently paradoxical. Constructively, digital platforms expand access to Islamic scholarship, facilitate virtual faith communities, and enable large-scale charitable or da'wah initiatives (Asrofi et al., 2020; Hamid, 2019). Creatively engaged students may utilize these platforms to promote positive Islamic narratives and responsible digital expression.

Conversely, negative influences are systemic and subtle. At the level of spirituality (qalb), digital *riya'*, envy (*hasad*), and online backbiting (*ghibah*) challenge sincerity and ethical discipline (Syarif, 2021; Nafi'ah, 2021). At the intellectual level (*'aql*), misinformation and algorithm-driven authority undermine traditional scholarly epistemology (Muzakki, 2020), while fragmented attention culture weakens reflective reasoning (Carr, 2010). At the behavioral level (*amal*), cyberbullying, hate speech, cancel culture lacking *tabayun* and *islah* (Arif, 2020), and consumerist patterns influenced by digital advertising erode core Islamic values such as dignity (*hizr al-'irdh*), contentment (*qana'ah*), and moderation.

Islamic education faces profound epistemological, pedagogical, and environmental challenges. The decentralization of knowledge authority disrupts *sanad*-based traditions (Muzakki, 2020). Conventional lecture-based pedagogies

struggle to compete with interactive and visually engaging digital formats (Huda et al., 2022). Meanwhile, weakened parental mediation and reactive school policies create gaps in digital mentoring (Rokhman et al., 2022).

To address these realities, Islamic education must adopt an integrative and progressive approach. Curriculum reconstruction should embed Islamic digital literacy across disciplines, connecting *aqidah*, *akhlak*, and *fiqh* with contemporary digital dilemmas (Huda et al., 2022). Pedagogical transformation toward blended learning, project-based engagement, and critical content analysis from a *maqashid syariah* perspective is essential. Institutions should also cultivate students as ethical Islamic content creators, combining technical competence with scholarly responsibility.

Family strengthening remains equally vital. Structured digital parenting education, reflective dialogue at home, and parental role modeling are critical components of moral guidance (Subhi et al., 2020). At the policy level, coordinated ecosystem support including national ethical guidelines, digital literacy campaigns, and collaboration with platform providers can reinforce value-based digital engagement (Huda et al., 2022).

Through institutional transformation, family empowerment, and supportive policy ecosystems, Islamic education can reposition itself from a reactive stance to an active architect of digital civilization. The ultimate objective is the formation of a generation that embodies *akhlak karimah* consistently across both physical and virtual domains ritually devout, digitally responsible, critically discerning, and constructively engaged in shaping an ethical digital future.

Conclusion

Based on the preceding discussion, it can be concluded that social media has emerged as a significant and influential factor in the character formation of Muslim students. Its impact is complex and ambivalent: on one hand, it provides broad opportunities to strengthen Islamic identity, expand access to religious knowledge, and foster virtual communities grounded in shared values; on the other hand, it presents substantial challenges to the internalization of Islamic moral principles.

Exposure to contradictory value systems, algorithm-driven content dynamics, and fragmented authority structures can weaken the cultivation of *aqidah*, *akhlak*, and responsible social conduct in digital spaces.

Conventional Islamic education has not yet fully adapted to this disruptive transformation. Epistemologically, it faces a shift in knowledge authority from sanad-based scholarship to decentralized digital information flows. Methodologically, traditional pedagogical approaches often struggle to compete with the interactive and engaging nature of social media platforms. Environmentally, the weakening synergy among school, family, and community further complicates moral guidance in the digital sphere. These realities demonstrate that partial, reactive, or prohibitive approaches are no longer sufficient.

What is required is an integrative and transformative strategy. Educational institutions must strengthen curriculum resilience and enhance teacher competence in integrating Islamic digital literacy into learning processes. Families must provide intelligent, dialogical, and compassionate digital accompaniment that nurtures responsibility rather than fear. At the broader level, supportive public policies and a healthy digital ecosystem developed through collaboration among government, educational stakeholders, religious organizations, and digital platforms are essential to reinforce value-based engagement in cyberspace.

Ultimately, Islamic education must evolve toward a paradigm capable of preparing students to become ethically grounded digital citizens. Such individuals are not only ritually devout but also socially responsible in virtual environments, embodying *akhlak karimah* consistently across both physical and digital domains.

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