



The Impact of Social Media on Changes in Behavior and Morality of Adolescents from the Perspective of Islamic Education: A Study on Unimed Students

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Article Info

Article History:

Received: 10 December 2025

Revised: 18 January 2026

Accepted: 28 January 2026

Keywords:

Morality

UNIMED Students

Social Media

Islamic Education

Adolescent Behavior

Abstract

The rapid development of social media has had a significant influence on the behavior and morality of adolescents, including university students as part of the digital generation. This study aims to analyze the impact of social media use on behavioral and moral changes among UNIMED students from the perspective of Islamic Education. The research method used is a qualitative approach with data collection techniques such as observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that social media has two main tendencies: it provides positive impacts such as increased access to information, religious motivation, and broader spiritual insight, especially when students access Islamic preaching and educational content. However, social media also brings negative impacts, including a decline in communication ethics, addiction, lack of self-control, exposure to content that contradicts Islamic values, and weakened direct social interactions. These behavioral changes affect students' moral quality, such as decreasing politeness, orderliness, and discipline. From the perspective of Islamic Education, there is a need for strengthening digital literacy, instilling noble moral values, and providing guidance from educators to help students use social media wisely. This study emphasizes the importance of integrating Islamic character education in responding to the dynamics of social media development so that students can develop positive behavior and morality in accordance with Islamic teachings. Kata Kunci: Akhlak, Mahasiswa UNIMED, Media Sosial, Pendidikan Islam, Perilaku Remaja.

INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology in the digital era has brought significant changes to people's behavior and patterns of interaction, particularly among teenagers and university students. Social media has become a new space that allows young people to express themselves, build networks, and access information quickly and without boundaries. Data shows that internet use among teenagers has increased rapidly from year to year, making social media one

of the dominant factors influencing the formation of character, ethics, and morals in the younger generation (Aulia et al., 2022).

Previous studies reveal that social media has both positive and negative impacts. On the positive side, social media can serve as an educational tool, including in the field of religion. Teenagers are reported to frequently access religious content such as Islamic sermons, short lectures, and other religious information that can help increase their motivation for worship and their understanding of Islamic teachings. However, guidance is still needed to ensure that teenagers are able to filter credible information and avoid shallow or misleading content (Lutfiah, 2025). Conversely, social media can also produce negative effects such as addiction, moral degradation, deterioration of communication ethics, and exposure to harmful content such as pornography, violence, and inappropriate behavior that can damage their moral development (Nada et al., 2024).

Studies examining teenagers' ethical behavior also indicate that social media can encourage unethical actions such as cyberbullying, the spread of hoaxes, and neglect of communication ethics. This occurs due to the anonymity and the high degree of freedom of expression in the digital world, which often leads teenagers to act without considering moral values or social responsibility (Harahap et al., 2024). This condition further emphasizes that social media is an interactive space that significantly influences the mindset, attitudes, and morals of the younger generation.

The author's situation as a lecturer and researcher working with university students also reinforces the urgency of this study. In various academic settings, the author often finds students more focused on social media activity than on the learning process. At UNIMED, the author has observed changes in communication behavior, social interaction, and the way students express their identities. Many students admit that their clothing style, manner of speaking, and ways of thinking are heavily influenced by the content they consume on social media every day. In many academic advising sessions, the author has heard directly from students that the intensity of social media use affects their motivation for worship, the quality of their social interactions, and even the way they understand Islamic teachings.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Definition of Social Media

Social media is one of the developments in information technology that has brought significant changes to modern human life. In general, social media can be defined as a digital platform that provides space for users to communicate, interact, and share information through the internet. According to Fauzi (2021), social media is an interactive communication tool that enables users to participate in the exchange of information quickly and broadly without being limited by space or time.

Social media plays a crucial role in the lives of today's teenagers. They use it as part of their lifestyle and self-identity. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and WhatsApp serve as spaces for self-expression, entertainment, and expanding social connections. However, this situation also presents new challenges for education and the moral development of adolescents.

From the perspective of Islamic education, social media is not only seen as a communication tool but also as a medium that can contain values of da'wah and learning. Islam encourages its followers to utilize technological advancements in positive ways, as stated in Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13, that humans were created in nations and tribes to know one another. This means that social media can be a means of strengthening Islamic brotherhood when used ethically and in accordance with Islamic values. Conversely, misuse of social media may lead to slander, gossip, and moral degradation.

Types and Functions of Social Media

Social media comes in various types depending on its functions and purposes. Wulandari (2023) classifies social media into several major categories: 1) Social networking sites, such as Facebook and Instagram, used for building social relationships; 2) Content-sharing platforms, such as YouTube, TikTok, and Pinterest, which facilitate users in sharing creative works; 3) Microblogs, such as Twitter (X), which emphasize short messages; and 4) Direct communication platforms, such as WhatsApp and Telegram.

The main functions of social media include communication, entertainment, promotion, learning, and self-actualization. In education, social media has potential as an effective and interactive learning tool. Nugraha and Hidayat (2022) mention that wise use of social media can help teachers and students develop creativity and enhance digital literacy.

However, from an Islamic point of view, the function of social media must align with moral values. Muslims are encouraged to use social media as a means of promoting good and preventing wrongdoing (*amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*). Using social media unethically such as spreading false information, exposing others' faults, or posting inappropriate content is considered a violation of Islamic norms. Therefore, the function of social media should be directed toward goodness and community benefit.

The Influence of Social Media on Teen Behavior

The development of social media has a significant influence on adolescent behavior, both positively and negatively. According to Amalia (2021), social media can affect teenagers' mindsets, lifestyles, and social behaviors. Excessive use often causes adolescents to prioritize their online image over real-life interactions.

Positively, social media can broaden knowledge, support learning processes, and strengthen interpersonal communication. Many teenagers use social media for productive activities, such as sharing knowledge, writing creative works, or promoting small businesses. However, negative impacts include declining communication ethics, gadget addiction, reduced empathy, and the imitation of inappropriate behaviors displayed by influencers.

Wulandari (2023) states that moral degradation among teenagers often begins with consuming non-educational content. Teenagers easily follow viral trends without considering religious values. The desire for social recognition such as likes and followers also drives them to engage in actions that conflict with Islamic norms. In Islam, such behavior reflects weak self-control (*mujahadah an-nafs*), even though maintaining dignity and good character is strongly emphasized.

Mubarok and Rahmah (2022) add that Islamic education must play an active role in guiding teenagers so that they can use social media to spread goodness. Through moral education and Islamic-based digital literacy, adolescents are expected to distinguish positive content from harmful influences.

The Concept of Akhlak in Islamic Education

Akhlak (morals) is a fundamental aspect of Islamic education. Etymologically, akhlak derives from the word *khuluq*, meaning character or disposition. Amalia (2021) defines akhlak as traits embedded within a person that encourage them to act naturally without coercion. In Islam, akhlak covers not only human relationships but also the relationship between humans and Allah SWT.

Islamic education views akhlak as the ultimate goal of the educational process. This aligns with the Prophet Muhammad's statement: "Indeed, I was sent to perfect noble

character.” Therefore, every aspect of Islamic education must aim to develop character based on faith and piety.

Nugraha and Hidayat (2022) emphasize that moral education must be developed integratively through learning, exemplification, habituation, and supportive environments. In the digital era, moral education must adapt to new challenges, especially the influence of social media, which often introduces values contrary to Islamic teachings. Thus, Islamic education has a strategic role in instilling moral values to help teenagers filter information and behave in accordance with Islamic principles. The development of akhlakul karimah is essential for countering negative influences from social media.

Factors Influencing Teen Moral Behavior

Teen morality is shaped by various internal and external factors. Fauzi (2021) explains that internal factors include faith, religious knowledge, personality, and self-control, while external factors involve family environment, school, peers, and social media.

The family environment plays the most significant role in shaping adolescent character. Parents who provide religious education and moral guidance will help develop well-mannered children. Conversely, lack of attention and supervision may lead teenagers to seek role models outside the home, including on social media.

Peer influence and social media culture also significantly shape behavior. Teenagers desire acceptance, which makes them prone to following popular trends—even if these trends contradict Islamic values. Amalia (2021) notes that weak moral education at school and limited spiritual guidance make teenagers vulnerable to negative behaviors. Therefore, Islamic education must strengthen moral values such as faith, honesty, responsibility, and modesty (*haya*). When these factors work together harmoniously, teenagers will develop strong moral resilience against harmful social media influences.

Islamic Educational Perspectives on the Use of Social Media

Islamic education has a comprehensive view of social media use. Islam does not reject technological advancement; instead, it encourages its beneficial and responsible use. According to Mubarok and Rahmah (2022), social media can serve as a medium of da’wah, education, and dissemination of Islamic values when used wisely.

However, Islam also warns against the dangers of using social media without proper ethics. Surah Al-Isra verse 36 states: “And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge.” This verse forms the basis for prohibiting Muslims from spreading unverified information or engaging in meaningless activities online.

In education, Nugraha and Hidayat (2022) argue that educators must instill Islamic-based digital literacy in students. As educated individuals, students must understand that every activity online carries moral responsibility before Allah. Using social media in an Islamic manner means utilizing technology to spread benefit, maintain dignity, and avoid misleading content. This, Islamic education plays a strategic role in preparing a generation that is not only technologically skilled but also morally and spiritually grounded in facing the challenges of social media globalization.

METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative, descriptive approach to demonstrate the relationship between social media use and the morality of UNIMED students, based on questionnaire data. This method was chosen because it provides a measurable

picture of moral changes in the digital age. As stated by Khoiriyah (2024) and Winata & Sufyanto (2024), the impact of social media on student behavior can be objectively identified through data.

The study was conducted at Medan State University (UNIMED) because students are among the most active social media users. This aligns with the findings of Triastuti et al. (2017), which stated that students are most vulnerable to the impacts of digital content. The study ran from October to November 2025, from developing data collection tools to analyzing the information.

The population in this study included all UNIMED students, while the sample was determined using a purposive sampling technique based on the criteria of active students and social media users. This technique was chosen following the methodology used in the study by Fikri et al. (2023), which examined the relationship between social media and morality. The sample size ranged from 40 to 50 respondents.

Data collection was conducted through a closed-ended questionnaire using a Likert scale and distributed online. Indicators for social media use were taken from Winata & Sufyanto (2024), Fikri et al. (2023), and Triastuti et al. (2017), while the morality indicator refers to the concept of digital morality according to Khoiriyah (2024), Suwahyu (2023), and Rahmawati & Yusuf (2021). The questionnaire method was chosen because it is efficient for measuring behavioral tendencies on a large scale.

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire that included respondents' personal information, a social media usage scale, and a student morality scale. The indicators were developed based on previous research, such as that by Haryanto (2020) and Siregar et al. (2024), which discussed digital morality and adolescent life values. The measurement tool was tested for validity and reliability using Pearson correlation and Cronbach's alpha.

The data were analyzed descriptively to evaluate the percentage of social media use and student moral categories based on the Likert scale. This method draws on descriptive analysis applied by Setiawan (2019) and Suwahyu (2023). The results are then interpreted within the context of Islamic education, referring to the concept of morality according to Khoiriyah (2024) and Rahmawati & Yusuf (2021) to determine whether social media supports or harms student morality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the study based on descriptive analysis of questionnaire data collected from 50 students of Universitas Negeri Medan. The analysis focuses on patterns of social media use, students' perceptions of its impact on behavior, and moral orientations in the context of Islamic education. The findings are organized into four subsections: general patterns of social media use, academic and social behavioral impacts, moral and ethical orientations, and the overall tendency of social media influence on students' morality.

Patterns of Social Media Use Among Students

The findings indicate that social media use among UNIMED students is characterized by high intensity and frequency. The majority of respondents reported daily engagement with social media for communication and information-seeking purposes. A substantial proportion of students also perceived social media as an important part of their daily lives as university students. These results demonstrate that social media has become a dominant medium in students' daily activities and interactions.

The data further reveal that students perceive social media as a supportive tool for learning and self-development. More than half of the respondents expressed strong agreement that social media contributes positively to their academic processes and

personal growth. At the same time, a considerable proportion of students acknowledged that not all content on social media aligns with Islamic teachings. This indicates that while students actively use social media for various purposes, they also possess awareness of the normative and ethical dimensions of digital content.

In addition, the results show that students are moderately influenced by viral trends circulating on social media. Although only a small proportion of respondents strongly agreed that they frequently follow viral trends, a significant number expressed agreement, indicating that digital trends play a role in shaping students' preferences and behaviors. Overall, these findings suggest that students' social media use is intensive, multifaceted, and accompanied by a certain degree of critical awareness.

Table 1 presents the distribution of students' responses regarding social media use, behavioral effects, and moral orientations, providing a quantitative overview of the dominant response patterns.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents' Responses on Social Media Use and Moral Perspectives (n = 50)

No	Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	N
1	I use social media every day to communicate and find information	72.2	25.0	2.3	0.0	50
2	Social media has become an important part of my daily life as a university student	56.8	38.6	4.5	0.0	50
3	I often follow trends that are going viral on social media	9.1	45.5	40.9	4.5	50
4	Social media helps me in the learning process and self development	52.3	43.2	4.5	0.0	50
5	Not all content on social media aligns with Islamic teachings	45.5	50.0	4.5	0.0	50
6	Since being active on social media my study time has decreased	15.9	54.5	27.3	2.3	50
7	I judge others based on their appearance on social media	4.5	27.3	45.5	22.7	50
8	Social media influences how I interact and communicate with others	11.4	59.1	25.0	4.5	50
9	Social media makes some students more consumptive	20.5	68.2	9.1	2.3	50
10	I feel anxious or envious when seeing other people's lives on social media	0.0	38.6	40.9	20.5	50
11	I maintain proper manners when interacting on social media	59.1	40.9	0.0	0.0	50
12	I avoid spreading information whose truth is unclear	68.2	31.8	0.0	0.0	50
13	Islam teaches ethics in using social media	38.6	54.5	6.8	0.0	50
14	I use social media to share goodness and knowledge	45.5	54.5	0.0	0.0	50
15	Moral responsibility is needed in every digital activity	45.5	50.0	4.5	0.0	50

16	Social media broadens my understanding of religion and Islamic education	40.9	47.7	11.4	0.0	50
17	Social media can weaken moral values if used without self control	47.7	47.7	2.3	2.3	50
18	Social media causes some students to be less respectful toward lecturers or parents	9.1	61.4	22.7	6.8	50
19	Islamic education guides wise use of social media	38.6	54.5	6.8	0.0	50
20	I balance social media use with beneficial and worship related activities	50.0	47.7	2.3	0.0	50

Behavioral Impacts of Social Media on Academic and Social Life

The descriptive analysis shows that social media has measurable effects on students' academic and social behaviors. A notable proportion of respondents reported that their study time has decreased since becoming active on social media. This finding indicates that intensive engagement with digital platforms may affect students' time allocation and academic discipline. However, the responses also demonstrate variation, suggesting that the impact of social media on academic behavior is not uniform across students.

The results further indicate that social media influences students' patterns of interaction and communication. A majority of respondents agreed that social media affects the way they interact with others. This suggests that digital communication practices shape students' interpersonal behaviors, potentially altering traditional modes of social interaction.

In relation to social perception, most respondents disagreed with the statement that they often judge others based on their appearance on social media. This finding indicates that although students are exposed to visual and representational content, they do not predominantly use social media as the primary basis for evaluating others. Nevertheless, the presence of respondents who expressed agreement shows that social media still plays a role in shaping social judgments for some students.

The data also reveal that students perceive a tendency toward consumptive behavior influenced by social media. A large proportion of respondents agreed that social media contributes to increased consumptive tendencies among students. This indicates that digital content, advertisements, and lifestyle representations may influence students' consumption patterns and material aspirations.

Moreover, emotional responses to social media exposure were identified in the findings. A considerable proportion of respondents reported feeling anxious or envious when observing others' lives on social media. Although not all students experienced such emotions, the data suggest that social media can generate psychological effects that influence students' emotional states and self-perceptions.

Moral and Ethical Orientations in Social Media Use

The results of the study also reveal important patterns related to students' moral and ethical orientations in using social media. A majority of respondents reported that they attempt to maintain proper manners when interacting on social media and avoid spreading unverified information. This indicates that students generally demonstrate awareness of ethical norms in digital communication.

Furthermore, a significant proportion of respondents expressed understanding that Islam teaches ethical principles in the use of social media. Students also reported

efforts to use social media as a medium for sharing beneficial knowledge and positive values. These findings suggest that religious values influence students' attitudes and behaviors in digital contexts.

The data also indicate that students perceive moral responsibility as an important aspect of digital activities. Most respondents agreed that moral responsibility is necessary in every form of online engagement. In addition, a substantial proportion of respondents acknowledged that social media can weaken moral values if used without self-control. This reflects students' awareness of the potential moral risks associated with uncontrolled digital consumption.

The findings further show that students believe Islamic education can serve as a guideline for using social media wisely. This perception highlights the role of religious education as a normative framework that shapes students' digital behavior. Students also reported efforts to balance social media use with beneficial activities and religious practices, indicating attempts to integrate digital engagement with moral and spiritual considerations.

However, the results also reveal concerns regarding moral changes in social relations. A considerable proportion of respondents agreed that social media contributes to reduced respect toward parents or lecturers among some students. This indicates that digital influences may affect traditional moral values related to authority and respect, although the extent of this impact varies among individuals.

The results of this study demonstrate that social media has become an inseparable component of students' daily lives, particularly in communication, information access, and learning activities. The high proportion of respondents who reported daily use of social media confirms its pervasive role in shaping students' academic and social experiences. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that social media platforms function as dominant channels for communication and knowledge acquisition among university students in the digital era (Khan et al., 2021; Sivakumar et al., 2023).

The findings further reveal that students generally perceive social media as a supportive medium for learning and self-development. A significant proportion of respondents agreed that social media facilitates the learning process and broadens their understanding of religious and educational issues. This result supports earlier studies showing that social media can enhance informal learning, collaborative knowledge construction, and access to educational resources beyond formal classroom settings (Greenhow & Lewin, 2019; Tazhenova et al., 2024). At the same time, the presence of a minority of respondents who expressed less positive perceptions suggests that the educational benefits of social media are not uniformly experienced, which may be influenced by individual differences in digital literacy and learning strategies.

Despite its perceived benefits, the findings indicate that social media also generates complex psychological and behavioral effects among students. Some respondents reported feelings of anxiety or envy when observing others' lives on social media, reflecting the emotional consequences of digital comparison. This phenomenon is consistent with previous studies showing that intensive social media use can contribute to negative emotional states, including anxiety, social comparison, and reduced well-being (Yao et al., 2024). These results suggest that social media does not merely function as a neutral technological tool but also influences students' emotional and psychological experiences.

The study also highlights students' awareness of the moral implications of social media use. A substantial proportion of respondents acknowledged that not all content on social media aligns with Islamic teachings and that uncontrolled use of

social media may weaken moral values. This awareness reflects the internalization of ethical and religious norms in digital contexts, indicating that students actively evaluate digital content through moral and religious perspectives. Such findings resonate with theoretical perspectives on digital ethics, which emphasize the importance of moral judgment and self-regulation in online environments (Chang et al., 2019).

Moreover, the results demonstrate that students perceive Islamic education as a normative framework guiding their digital behavior. Most respondents agreed that Islamic education provides ethical guidance for responsible social media use and encourages the dissemination of positive and beneficial content. This finding supports previous studies that emphasize the role of religious and moral education in shaping ethical behavior in digital spaces. It also suggests that Islamic education remains relevant in addressing contemporary challenges posed by digital technology.

However, the findings also reveal certain behavioral shifts associated with social media use. Some respondents reported a decrease in study time and changes in patterns of interaction with others. These results indicate that the integration of social media into students' daily lives is not entirely balanced and may affect academic habits and interpersonal relationships. This observation is consistent with research showing that excessive social media use can disrupt academic focus and alter social interaction patterns.

CONCLUSION

The development of social media has a strong influence on the behavior and morals of UNIMED students. On one hand, social media can serve as a positive medium to broaden knowledge, enhance religious motivation, and strengthen the understanding of Islamic values through da'wah and educational content. However, on the other hand, uncontrolled use leads to various negative impacts such as declining communication ethics, weakened self-control, increased addiction, and exposure to content that contradicts Islamic teachings. These conditions affect the moral quality of students, particularly in terms of politeness, discipline, and social interaction. Therefore, the development of social media must be approached critically and wisely so it does not hinder the character formation of students.

Suggestions

Efforts to strengthen digital literacy integrated into the learning process—particularly within the context of Islamic Education—are needed so that students can better select and use social media responsibly. Educators are expected to play an active role in providing moral guidance and instilling noble moral values as a foundation for engaging with social media. Students also need to increase self-awareness and discipline in controlling the time they spend and the content they consume. Additionally, the university can provide character development programs and digital ethics training as preventive measures against potential behavioral deviations. Through these efforts, social media use is expected to bring positive impacts aligned with Islamic teachings and support the development of better morals.

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