



## The Impact of Social Media on Changes in Behavior and Morality of Adolescents from the Perspective of Islamic Education

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### Abstract

The rapid expansion of social media has transformed the behavioral and moral landscape of university students, creating both educational opportunities and ethical challenges. This study aims to examine the influence of social media on behavioral and moral changes among students at Universitas Negeri Medan from the perspective of Islamic education. Using a quantitative descriptive approach, data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 50 active students who regularly use social media platforms. The findings indicate that social media serves a dual function. On the positive side, it supports learning, facilitates access to information, broadens religious understanding, and encourages the dissemination of beneficial knowledge. Conversely, excessive and uncontrolled use contributes to reduced study time, increased consumptive tendencies, emotional comparison, and potential weakening of moral values. The study further reveals that students recognize the importance of digital ethics and perceive Islamic education as a relevant framework for guiding responsible online behavior. The novelty of this research lies in integrating digital behavior analysis with Islamic educational perspectives to evaluate students' moral orientations in contemporary digital environments. The findings provide practical insights for educators and higher education institutions in promoting ethical digital engagement and strengthening character education in the digital era.

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of information and communication technologies (ICT) has fundamentally transformed the structure of social interaction, particularly among adolescents and university students who constitute the most active digital users. Social media platforms have evolved beyond mere communication tools into complex socio-cultural environments where identity formation, knowledge exchange, and value construction take place simultaneously. In contemporary higher education

contexts, students are increasingly embedded in digital ecosystems that shape not only their academic engagement but also their behavioral patterns and moral orientations (Alé-Ruiz et al., 2024; Zahid & Darmawan, 2025). Empirical evidence indicates that the intensity of social media usage among young people continues to rise globally, making it a dominant factor influencing attitudes, ethics, and social behavior in the digital era (Aulia et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2021).

Within this context, social media presents a paradoxical role. On the one hand, it offers unprecedented opportunities for learning, self-expression, and access to diverse knowledge resources. Studies have demonstrated that social media can support informal learning environments, facilitate collaborative knowledge construction, and enhance students' engagement with educational content (Sivakumar et al., 2023; Suartama et al., 2024; Chatterjee & Parra, 2022). In particular, for Muslim students, social media serves as a medium for accessing religious knowledge, including Islamic lectures, sermons, and scholarly discussions, which can strengthen religious awareness and spiritual motivation (Minarti et al., 2023; Hilman, 2025; Putra et al., 2024). These positive dimensions position social media as a potentially transformative tool in education, including within the domain of Islamic education.

Nevertheless, there are numerous challenges that are related to the benefits of social media. An increasing amount of literature presents the adverse effects of the uncontrolled and excessive use of social media, such as addiction, lack of academic focus and moral degradation (Khotrun Nada et al., 2024; Winata & Sufyanto, 2024). More importantly, the social media has been linked to the fact that social media communication ethics are eroded, misbehavior is even made a norm, and more harmful content is exposed to them including misinformation, violence, and pornography. The interactive and anonymous characteristics of the digital environment enable the users to behave with a lack of accountability, which increases the possibility of engaging in unethical activities, such as cyberbullying, hate speech, and spread of misinformation (Harahap et al., 2024; Ando & Ozarchevici, 2024; Susilowati, 2025; Monge, 2024). These phenomena imply that social media is not an objective space of technology but an active agent that influences the moral landscape of young people in the present day.

Psychologically speaking, social media also impacts emotional well-being and self-perception. Social comparison can be caused by exposure to edited online identities, which may result in feelings of anxiety, envy, and inadequacy (Yao et al., 2024; Ismail et al., 2025). These emotional reactions can also have additional impacts on the interpersonal relationship and self-regulation abilities of students. Therefore, the social media effects on human behavior are not confined to behavioral changes, but extend to cognitive, emotional, and moral aspects of human development (Hunking et al., 2024; Qureshi et al., 2025; Ekwunife et al., 2025; Lind, 2023).

Reactive to these challenges, the role of education - especially Islamic education - becomes all the more important. Development of the moral character (akhlaq) is a major goal of Islamic education, and spiritual, ethical, and social values are all included in the process (Hibatillah & Husni, 2022; Khoiriah & Sujanto, 2026). Contrary to secular methods where the cognitive and moral development are typically divorced, Islamic education takes the holistic approach whereby the cognitive and moral development are not usually separated. In this context, technological innovations, such as social media, are not disliked but are supposed to be applied in a manner that will comply with the ethical and religious standards. As noted in earlier research, Islamic education could be used as a normative guideline to digital behavior by inculcating such values as honesty, responsibility, modesty, and self-control (Mubarok & Rahmah, 2022; Nugraha & Hidayat, 2022; Ridlo, 2026; Luthfi, 2025; Muhammad & Lawal, 2025).

Although the growing interest to social media and youth behavior is evident, the existing literature shows that it has multiple limitations. To begin with, most of the existing literature is inclined to discuss the effects of social media in general terms without considering religious or ethical perspectives. Although research has been conducted on both positive and negative impacts, the research lacks a more in-depth normative examination based on value-based education systems like the Islamic education. Second, prior literature often concentrates on students in the lower grades of school, and very little attention is usually given to students in higher grades of school or students attending university. Third, there is still a gap in the empirical research that integrates behavioral analysis with moral evaluation based on context-specific indicators, especially in the context of Indonesian higher education.

In addition, previous studies tend to either follow a pure qualitative research where the researcher looks at the data through the lens of narratives or a pure quantitative research where the researcher analyzes the data in terms of statistical associations. Consequently, the clarity of the role of social media in shaping the morals, particularly in connection with religious beliefs, is still unclear (Rahayu et al., 2025; González-Bailón & Lelkes, 2023). Research that will not only quantify behavioral tendencies but also explain them within a coherent ethical and educational viewpoint is needed.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the impact of social media on behavioral and moral changes among university students through the lens of Islamic education. Focusing on students at Universitas Negeri Medan (UNIMED), this research provides an empirical investigation into how social media usage patterns relate to students' academic behavior, social interaction, and moral orientation. Unlike previous studies that treat morality as a general concept, this research contextualizes moral behavior within the framework of Islamic values, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of digital ethics in Muslim societies.

The novelty of this study lies in three main aspects. First, it integrates descriptive quantitative data with an interpretive analysis grounded in Islamic educational principles, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social media and morality. Second, it introduces a contextualized measurement of digital morality that reflects both behavioral indicators and religious ethical standards. Third, it contributes to the emerging discourse on digital ethics by positioning Islamic education as a relevant and adaptive framework for addressing contemporary technological challenges.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the patterns of social media use among university students, examine its impact on their academic and social behavior, and evaluate its implications for moral development from the perspective of Islamic education. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically by enriching the literature on digital behavior and moral education and practically by providing insights for educators and institutions in developing strategies for fostering ethical digital engagement among students.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

In this study, the quantitative descriptive research design was used to investigate how the use of social media can be related to changes in the behavior and morality of students in the context of Islamic education. A quantitative methodology was chosen as it provides a systematic way of measuring the behavioral dispositions and moral orientations through structured measures and can be used to objectively interpret patterns across respondents. The descriptive analysis was deemed suitable

because the study does not intend to demonstrate any causality between variables but rather identify the trends and distributions of responses (Lund, 2023).

The study is based on the premise that the engagement of social media can be operationalized into some measurable variables like frequency of use, type of interaction, and perceived impact on everyday behavior. Likewise, moral constructs, especially those based on Islamic educational values, can be translated into measurable variables such as communication ethics, self-control, responsibility, and the ability to adhere to religious norms in digital settings. This method is consistent with the prior research stating the significance of measuring digital behavior to comprehend its ethical consequences (Winata & Sufyanto, 2024; Fikri et al., 2023).

### **Setting and context of the research**

Universitas Negeri Medan (UNIMED), Indonesia a state-owned institution, was chosen as the study site because of the active engagement of students with digital technologies on an academic and social level. The choice of this location was made due to its relevance since university students are a group of individuals with high involvement in social media usage and exposure to a variety of online materials.

The data collection was conducted during the period of two months, between October and November 2025, including the preparation of the instruments, their distribution, and analysis. The context of higher education in Indonesia offers a valuable context of this research because the students are placed in a socio-cultural environment in which the religious values, especially Islamic teachings, still shape the behavioral norms. Thus, social media usage in this context can be studied to gain a more contextualized insight into the concept of digital morality.

### **Population and Sample**

The population of this study included all active undergraduate students at Universitas Negeri Medan. However, due to feasibility considerations, a purposive sampling technique was applied to select respondents who met specific criteria. Participants were required to be (1) actively enrolled students and (2) regular users of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, or WhatsApp.

A total of 50 respondents participated in the study. This sample size is considered adequate for descriptive quantitative analysis aimed at identifying general behavioral patterns (Cohen et al., 2018). The use of purposive sampling ensures that the selected respondents possess relevant characteristics aligned with the research objectives, particularly in terms of exposure to social media usage.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire designed to measure students' social media usage and moral behavior. The questionnaire employed a Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, to capture respondents' perceptions and behavioral tendencies in a quantifiable manner. This method is widely used in social research due to its efficiency and ability to standardize responses across participant.

The instrument consisted of three main components: demographic information, indicators of social media usage, and indicators of moral and behavioral orientation. The social media variables were adapted from prior studies (Winata & Sufyanto, 2024; Triastuti et al., 2017), including aspects such as frequency of use, purpose of engagement, and perceived influence on daily activities. Meanwhile, moral indicators were derived from the concept of digital ethics and Islamic moral values, including communication etiquette, responsibility, self-regulation, and avoidance of harmful or misleading content (Khoiriyah, 2024; Rahmawati & Yusuf, 2021).

The questionnaire was distributed online to facilitate accessibility and ensure efficient data collection. Respondents completed the survey voluntarily and anonymously, which helped minimize response bias and encouraged more honest answers.

### **Instrument Validity and Reliability**

To ensure the accuracy and consistency of the measurement instrument, validity and reliability tests were conducted. Construct validity was assessed using the Pearson product-moment correlation, which evaluates the correlation between each item and the total score. Items with correlation coefficients above the acceptable threshold ( $r > 0.30$ ) were considered valid.

Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to measure internal consistency. A Cronbach's alpha value greater than 0.70 indicates acceptable reliability for social science research (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The results of the reliability analysis confirmed that all variables met the required standards, indicating that the instrument consistently measures the intended constructs.

Table 1. Results of Validity and Reliability Test

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>	<b>r-value (range)</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Social Media Usage	5	0.45–0.78	0.81	Valid & Reliable
Behavioral Change	5	0.42–0.76	0.79	Valid & Reliable
Moral Orientation	10	0.47–0.82	0.84	Valid & Reliable

Source: Primary data processed by the authors, 2026

Table 1 shows that all items have correlation coefficients above 0.30, indicating acceptable construct validity. The Cronbach's alpha values for all variables exceed 0.70, confirming that the instrument demonstrates good internal consistency and reliability.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The data obtained were determined according to descriptive statistical methods on the basis of percentages of the students according to their responses about social media use and moral conducts. The choice of descriptive statistics is explained by the fact that it is a clear and systematized overview of respondent tendencies, without making any inferential assumptions.

The analysis was done by calculating the percentage of responses of each Likert-scale category, and interpreting the prevailing patterns across variables. Moreover, the results were viewed in the context of Islamic education, which made it possible to contextually examine the way digital behavior of students corresponds to moral and religious values. This interpretive method enhances the analytic richness of the research by bridging the gap between the analytical and normative approaches to the issue.

The ethical considerations were rigorously followed during the research process. They were not forced to participate in the study, and they were informed about the purpose and scope of the study before filling out the questionnaire. This was done by not gathering personally identifiable information, hence anonymity and confidentiality. These are procedures that are in line with the established ethical

considerations in the social science research which include respect to the rights of the participants and data protection.

In spite of its contributions, this study has a number of limitations. To begin with, the sample size is rather small and can restrict the ability to generalize the results. Second, the fact that self-reported data are used presents the risk of response bias whereby participants might not give answers that are socially desirable. Third, the nature of the analysis is descriptive and thus cannot be used to make causal inferences. Further investigation on the relationships between the use of social media and the development of moral is recommended in the future research, by using bigger samples and more sophisticated methods of analysis, such as regression or structural equation modeling.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings derived from the questionnaire administered to 50 students at Universitas Negeri Medan (UNIMED). The results are structured into three main dimensions in accordance with the research variables outlined in the methodology: (1) social media usage patterns, (2) behavioral impacts, and (3) moral and ethical orientations. Each subsection presents both tabulated data and analytical interpretation to ensure clarity and consistency.

### Social Media Usage Patterns

This subsection presents the intensity and patterns of social media usage among students, focusing on frequency, functional use, and awareness of content. The distribution of responses is visualized to highlight dominant trends across indicators.

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of students' responses regarding social media usage patterns.

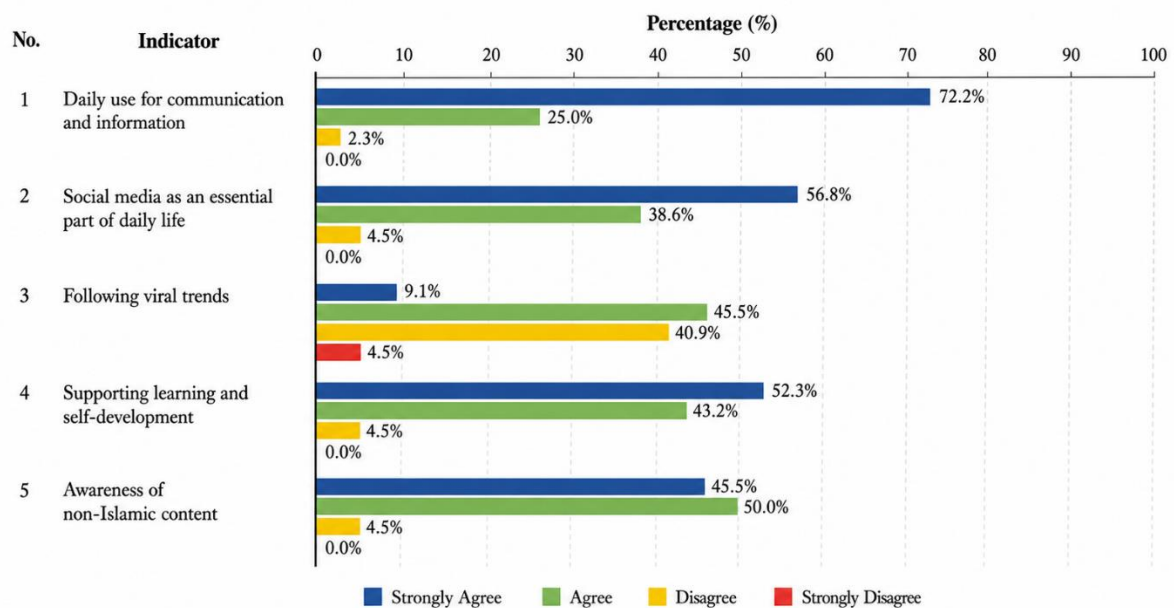


Figure 1. Social Media Usage Patterns among Students (n = 50)

Source: Primary data processed by the authors, 2026

As shown in Figure 1, students demonstrate a high level of engagement with social media, particularly in daily communication and learning-related activities. The figure highlights dominant trends, including widespread daily use and strong awareness of content-related issues. These patterns are further explained in detail in Table 2.

Table 2. Social Media Usage Patterns among Students (n = 50)

Indicator	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Daily use for communication and information	72.2	25.0	2.3	0.0
Social media as an essential part of daily life	56.8	38.6	4.5	0.0
Following viral trends	9.1	45.5	40.9	4.5
Supporting learning and self-development	52.3	43.2	4.5	0.0
Awareness of non-Islamic content	45.5	50.0	4.5	0.0

Source: Primary data processed by the authors, 2026

Table 2 shows that social media usage among students is highly intensive. Nearly all respondents (97.2%) reported daily use, indicating that social media has become deeply embedded in students' routines. Similarly, 95.4% of respondents perceive social media as an essential component of their daily life, reflecting its role beyond communication into lifestyle integration.

Furthermore, 95.5% of respondents agreed that social media supports learning and self-development. This suggests that students actively utilize digital platforms for educational purposes. At the same time, 95.5% acknowledged that not all content aligns with Islamic teachings, indicating a critical awareness of ethical issues in digital environments.

### Behavioral Impacts of Social Media

This subsection presents findings related to academic behavior, social interaction, and psychological responses.

Table 3. Behavioral Impacts of Social Media Use (n = 50)

Indicator	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Decreased study time	15.9	54.5	27.3	2.3
Influence on communication and interaction	11.4	59.1	25.0	4.5
Judging others based on appearance	4.5	27.3	45.5	22.7
Increased consumptive behavior	20.5	68.2	9.1	2.3
Feelings of anxiety or envy	0.0	38.6	40.9	20.5

Source: Primary data processed by the authors, 2026

As shown in Table 3, social media significantly affects students' academic behavior, with 70.4% reporting reduced study time. This indicates that excessive digital engagement may interfere with academic discipline.

In terms of social interaction, 70.5% of respondents agreed that social media influences their communication patterns, suggesting a shift toward digitally

mediated interaction. However, most respondents (68.2%) rejected the idea of judging others based on social media appearance, indicating a degree of critical awareness.

Additionally, 88.7% of respondents acknowledged increased consumptive behavior influenced by social media, highlighting the role of digital content in shaping lifestyle choices. Emotional responses were also observed, with 38.6% reporting feelings of anxiety or envy, suggesting the presence of social comparison effects.

### Moral and Ethical Orientations

This subsection focuses on students' moral awareness and ethical behavior in digital contexts from an Islamic education perspective.

Table 4. Moral and Ethical Orientations in Social Media Use (n = 50)

Indicator	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Maintaining manners in online interaction	59.1	40.9	0.0	0.0
Avoiding spreading unverified information	68.2	31.8	0.0	0.0
Islam teaches social media ethics	38.6	54.5	6.8	0.0
Using social media to share goodness	45.5	54.5	0.0	0.0
Moral responsibility in digital activity	45.5	50.0	4.5	0.0
Social media broadens religious understanding	40.9	47.7	11.4	0.0
Weakening moral values without self-control	47.7	47.7	2.3	2.3
Reduced respect toward authority	9.1	61.4	22.7	6.8
Islamic education guides social media use	38.6	54.5	6.8	0.0
Balancing social media and worship	50.0	47.7	2.3	0.0

Source: Primary data processed by the authors, 2026

Table 4 demonstrates that students exhibit a strong level of moral awareness in digital environments. All respondents (100%) reported maintaining proper manners and avoiding the spread of unverified information, indicating high ethical consciousness.

Moreover, 93.1% agreed that Islam provides ethical guidance for social media use, and all respondents reported using social media to share positive content. This highlights the influence of religious values in shaping digital behavior.

However, 95.4% of respondents also acknowledged that social media can weaken moral values without self-control, emphasizing the importance of self-regulation. Additionally, 70.5% agreed that social media may reduce respect toward lecturers or parents, suggesting a potential shift in traditional moral norms.

These findings further indicate that Islamic education functions as a normative and guiding framework that shapes students' moral awareness and regulates their digital behavior, particularly in promoting ethical communication, self-control, and responsible engagement with social media.

## **Social Media as a Double-Edged Influence on Students' Behavior and Morality within the Framework of Islamic Education**

This paper indicates that social media is a two-sided influence that promotes and controls both the behavioral patterns and the moral orientations of students, and is mediated and regulated by the Islamic values of education. Instead of acting as a neutral technological platform, social media turns out to be a socio-digital setting that not only facilitates the development but also provides ethical challenges. The results point to the fact that students are not only passive users but active agents, who use the possibilities and threats of digital interaction within an ethical framework.

On the good side, the results confirm that social media is influential in enhancing the learning process and self-growth of the students. The extent to which the respondents have said they engage with digital platforms is a pointer that digital platforms are used extensively in order to access information, develop knowledge and increase access to academic resources. It is consistent with the previous studies that social media can contribute to the informal learning environment and to the development of the collaborative knowledge building outside of the traditional classroom setting (Chang-Tik & Song, 2023; Sivakumar et al., 2023). Social media, in this case, can be seen as an facilitating tool that can increase the intellectual stimulation of students and their exposure to a variety of opinions.

The research, however, shows that this positive role does come with behavioral problems, especially with regard to time management and academic discipline. The proportion of people who responded that they spend less time studying due to intensive use of social media was significant; it showed that excessive use might interfere with study time. This result aligns with previous studies that have shown that long-term use of social media has a negative effect on the productivity and concentration of students (Kazakov et al., 2024; Winata & Sufyanto, 2024). Therefore, although the social media is educational, its unregulated application can cause behavioral imbalances, which influence academic performance.

Besides academic behavior, the social media plays a significant role in the behaviour of students in terms of social interaction. The results show that there is a move towards digitally mediated communication where digital interaction is increasingly complementary or substitutive of face-to-face interaction. This change is indicative of larger shifts in communication norms in the digital era, as discussed by Abidjanova (2025), who argues that digital platforms redefine how people construct relationships and articulate identity. Even though these changes can increase the state of interpersonal relationships and the possible loss of direct social interaction.

Furthermore, the study identifies the emergence of consumptive behavior influenced by social media exposure. The high level of agreement among respondents regarding increased consumption suggests that digital content, particularly lifestyle representation and influencer-driven trends, plays a significant role in shaping students' preferences and aspirations. This finding supports previous research indicating that social media is a powerful driver of consumer behavior, especially among young users who are highly responsive to visual and aspirational content (Makaruke, 2025; Rzayeva et al., 2022; Ciocodeică et al., 2025). This phenomenon reflects the broader commercialization of digital spaces, where user behavior is shaped not only by information but also by embedded marketing strategies.

From a psychological perspective, the findings also reveal the presence of emotional responses such as anxiety and envy resulting from social comparison. Although not experienced by all respondents, these emotions indicate that exposure to curated representations of others' lives may influence students' self-perception and emotional well-being. This is consistent with studies showing that social media use is

associated with increased social comparison and negative emotional outcomes (Yao et al., 2024). These findings suggest that the impact of social media extends beyond observable behavior to include internal psychological processes.

Despite these challenges, one of the most significant contributions of this study lies in its identification of strong moral awareness among students. The findings indicate that students generally maintain ethical communication, avoid spreading unverified information, and recognize the importance of responsibility in digital interactions. This suggests that moral values continue to play a central role in shaping digital behavior, even in highly mediated environments. Such findings support theoretical perspectives on digital ethics that emphasize the importance of moral judgment and self-regulation in online contexts (Anom & Rasanjani, 2026; Ciocodeică et al., 2025).

Crucially, Islamic education emerges as a key moderating framework that influences how students interpret and respond to social media. The findings indicate that students perceive Islamic teachings as a source of ethical guidance that helps them navigate digital challenges. Islamic values such as honesty, self-control, and responsibility are reflected in students' efforts to use social media ethically and to balance digital engagement with religious practices. This aligns with previous studies highlighting the role of religious education in fostering moral resilience and guiding behavior in the digital era (Mubarok & Rahmah, 2022; Nugraha & Hidayat, 2022).

At the same time, the study reveals a critical tension between moral awareness and behavioral practice. While students demonstrate a high level of ethical understanding, they also acknowledge that social media can weaken moral values when used without self-control. This indicates that awareness alone is not sufficient to ensure consistent moral behavior, and that self-regulation plays a crucial role in translating values into practice. This finding contributes to the broader discourse on digital ethics by emphasizing the gap between moral cognition and actual behavior in online environments.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by integrating social media usage, behavioral change, and moral orientation within a unified analytical framework. Unlike previous studies that examine these variables separately, this research demonstrates their interconnected nature and highlights the mediating role of behavior and the moderating role of Islamic education. This integrated perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of how digital environments interact with moral systems.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest the need for a more holistic approach to digital education. Educational institutions should not only focus on technological skills but also integrate moral and ethical dimensions into digital literacy programs. In particular, Islamic education can be strengthened as a framework for guiding students' digital behavior, ensuring that technological engagement aligns with ethical values. Educators also play a crucial role in modeling responsible digital practices and fostering critical awareness among students.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The relatively small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings, and the use of self-reported data may introduce bias. Additionally, the descriptive nature of the analysis does not allow for causal conclusions. Future research is recommended to employ larger samples and advanced analytical techniques, such as structural equation modeling, to further examine the relationships between social media usage, behavior, and morality. Comparative studies across different cultural or religious contexts would also provide deeper insights into the role of values in digital environments.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that social media functions as a double-edged influence that simultaneously shapes students' behavior and moral orientation within the framework of Islamic education. While social media contributes positively to learning, access to information, and personal development, it also presents challenges such as reduced academic discipline, increased consumptive behavior, and potential shifts in social interaction patterns. Importantly, the findings reveal that students possess a high level of moral awareness, particularly in maintaining ethical communication and responsibility in digital environments. Islamic education plays a crucial role as a normative and moderating framework that guides students in navigating these challenges and aligning digital behavior with moral values.

Theoretically, this study contributes by integrating social media usage, behavioral change, and moral orientation into a unified framework, while positioning Islamic education as a moderating factor in digital ethics. Practically, the findings highlight the need to integrate digital literacy with value-based education to strengthen students' ethical engagement with technology. However, this study is limited by its relatively small sample size and reliance on self-reported data. Future research should employ larger samples and advanced analytical methods to examine causal relationships, as well as explore cross-cultural perspectives to deepen understanding of digital morality in diverse contexts.

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