

The Role of Social Media in Shaping Teenagers' Social Behavior in the Digital Era

Samsidar

Universitas Islam Negeri Sulthan Thaha Jambi, Indonesia

Email : dharsamsidar@gmsil.com

Abstract

Social media has become an integral part of adolescents' lives in the digital era. The use of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp influences the way adolescents interact, form self-identities, and understand social norms. This study aims to analyze the role of social media in shaping adolescents' social behavior, using a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews and participant observation of 20 adolescents in Jambi City. The results showed that social media has positive impacts, such as expanding social networks and increasing self-confidence. However, negative impacts were also identified, including increased risk of cyberbullying, social pressure, and decreased direct social interaction. These findings emphasize the importance of digital literacy and the active role of parents and educators in guiding adolescents to use social media wisely.

Keywords: Social Media, Social Behavior, Teenagers

1. Introduction

The development of information technology has changed the way humans communicate and interact. Social media, as a product of technological progress, has become the main means for teenagers to interact, share information, and form self-identity. In Indonesia, high internet penetration among teenagers makes social media an inseparable part of everyday life.

Teenagers are at a developmental stage that is vulnerable to external influences, including social media. The use of social media can affect adolescents' social behavior, both positively and negatively. On the one hand, social media allows adolescents to expand their friendship networks and express themselves. On the other hand, there are risks such as cyberbullying, social pressure, and social isolation.

Previous studies have shown that social media can influence adolescent social behavior. For example, research by Ginting et al. (2024) found that social media has a significant impact on

adolescent social behavior in Rianiate Village, including changes in interaction patterns and increased risk of risky behavior. Another study by Putri et al. (2024) identified that social media can strengthen social bonds but also cause negative behaviors such as cyberbullying and social pressure. However, there is still a gap in understanding how social media shapes adolescent social behavior, especially in a local context such as Jambi City. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the role of social media in shaping adolescent social behavior in the digital era.

2. Research methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and participant observation of 20 teenagers aged 15–18 years in Jambi City who actively use social media. The selection of participants was carried out by purposive sampling to ensure diversity in social backgrounds and levels of social media use. Data analysis was carried out using a thematic approach to identify emerging patterns and themes related to the influence of social media on adolescent social behavior.

3. Discussion

Social media has evolved into a central platform for adolescent social interaction, transforming the way teenagers communicate, share experiences, and construct their social identities. Platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok are not only tools for instant messaging or sharing visual content, but also serve as arenas where teenagers engage in identity exploration, self-expression, and peer bonding. Compared to traditional face-to-face interactions, many teenagers perceive online communication as a more comfortable and accessible means to express their thoughts, emotions, and personal experiences, which facilitates the formation of interpersonal relationships.

One of the significant functions of social media for adolescents is its role in identity formation. Through carefully curated posts, photos, and stories, teenagers can present an idealized version of themselves to their peers. This digital self-presentation allows for experimentation with various aspects of their identity in a relatively safe space. However, this also introduces certain psychological vulnerabilities. The desire to project a socially desirable image often leads to a reliance on external validation, such as likes, comments, and followers. Consequently, this can create pressure to conform to perceived social standards, fostering unhealthy comparisons with others, which may contribute to decreased self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and heightened levels of anxiety.

Moreover, the digital nature of social media introduces risks such as cyberbullying. Teenagers are particularly susceptible to online harassment, which can take the form of negative comments, rumor-spreading, doxxing, or exclusion from virtual peer groups. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying often occurs outside the purview of adult supervision and can persist beyond school hours, amplifying its psychological impact. The anonymous and far-reaching nature of online platforms can intensify these experiences, leading to feelings of isolation, depression, or emotional distress in victims.

In addition to psychological effects, social media use may influence behavioral and social development. Adolescents who become overly reliant on virtual interactions may experience a decline in direct interpersonal communication. The preference for texting, commenting, or posting rather than face-to-face conversation may hinder the development of essential social skills, such as empathy, non-verbal communication, and conflict resolution. Over time, this can weaken the ability of teenagers to navigate complex social environments in the offline world.

Given the pervasive influence of social media on adolescent development, the role of digital literacy becomes increasingly critical. Educating teenagers about the responsible and ethical use of social media is imperative. Programs that promote awareness of online risks, encourage critical thinking about digital content, and foster resilience against social pressure can empower adolescents to navigate social media in a healthy manner. Furthermore, active guidance and supervision from parents, educators, and policymakers can mitigate negative consequences while reinforcing positive uses of digital platforms for learning, creativity, and community engagement.

In conclusion, while social media offers substantial opportunities for adolescents to connect, express, and explore, it also presents complex challenges that affect their psychological and social well-being. A balanced approach that includes education, open communication, and supportive environments is essential to help teenagers use social media as a constructive tool for growth rather than a source of harm.

4. Conclusion

Social media plays a significant role in shaping the social behavior of teenagers in the digital era. While social media offers opportunities to expand social networks and express oneself, there are risks to be aware of, such as cyberbullying, social pressure, and decreased direct social interaction. It is important for teenagers to be equipped with adequate digital literacy and get support from their surroundings to use social media in a healthy and responsible manner.

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