

The Role of Social Media in Shaping the Learning Behavior and Social Interactions of Middle School Students

Sapto Widodo^{1*}, Sigit Haryanto², Djajal Fuadi³

¹²³Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Surakarta, Indonesia

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of social media in shaping the learning behavior and social interactions of junior high school students. The phenomenon of high social media use among adolescents has prompted the need for an in-depth study of its influence on the learning process and social relations in schools. This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design, involving students and teachers of SMP Negeri 1 Kebakkramat as informants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results show that social media, particularly TikTok, WhatsApp, and Instagram, have become a routine part of students' lives. However, their utilization in learning remains low because students primarily use them for entertainment. The positive impact of social media is seen in easy access to information and accelerated communication, while the dominant negative impacts include distraction, decreased learning focus, and potential conflict in social interactions. The study also found that school policies regarding social media use are still advisory in nature and therefore unable to optimally direct students' digital behavior. This study confirms that social media plays a dual role as a learning and social space, but digital literacy and more systematic supervision are needed so that its use brings more benefits to students.

Keywords: *social media, learning behavior, social interaction, junior high school students, case study.*

Introduction

The development of digital technology has made junior high school students increasingly connected to social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube. Intensive daily use makes social media not just a means of entertainment but also a platform that influences students' motivation, focus, and study habits. This phenomenon of increasing social media usage among adolescents has also been found in research. Arif & Fauzan (2022) which shows that the majority of students access social media more than three hours per day.

A number of studies confirm that social media has both positive and negative influences on the learning process. Prasetyo et al. (2024) found that platforms like TikTok and YouTube can be alternative learning resources that increase student interest in the material when used in a targeted manner. However, other research by Arif & Fauzan (2022) shows that excessive social media use can reduce concentration and impact academic achievement. These findings illustrate that social media use needs to be understood in a balanced way.

Apart from impacting learning behavior, social media also influences students' social interactions. Ningrum et al. (2022) shows that social media expands the friendship networks of middle school students, allowing them to communicate more intensely with peers. However, research Raihan et al (2024) found that social media can lead to a decline in the quality of face-to-face communication and increase the risk of cyberbullying. This indicates that social media impacts adolescent social dynamics in both positive and negative ways.

Although there is a considerable amount of research on social media use, most studies only focus on one aspect, such as learning motivation, digital literacy, or the psychological impact of device use. Mulyani (2019) For example, some emphasize the effectiveness of social media in learning communication but fail to examine its impact on students' social interactions. Very few studies simultaneously analyze how social media plays a role in shaping junior high school students' learning behavior and social interactions in a single, integrated study.

To fill this gap, this study presents a novel approach by viewing social media as a digital socialization space that shapes learning behavior and social relationships among junior high school students. This approach is reinforced by the

* Corresponding author: saptowdd@gmail.com

findings. Raihan et al (2024), which emphasizes that students' social identities and behaviors are heavily influenced by digital interactions. Therefore, this study uses a sociology of education perspective to understand how symbols, meanings, and values in digital interactions influence students' academic and social lives.

For schools, teachers, and parents, understanding the role of social media has practical significance. Teachers need to understand how social media can be used to increase motivation and collaboration in learning, while also anticipating potential distractions and negative behaviors. Arif & Fauzan (2022) It also demonstrates the importance of parental guidance in managing social media use to make it more productive for children. With this information, learning and student development strategies can be tailored to the digital culture of the younger generation.

Theoretically, this research enriches the study of the sociology of education by examining social media as a modern agent of socialization that has a significant influence on the learning and social interactions of junior high school students. Given the high intensity of social media use, the urgency of this study is even stronger. In line with research Prasetyo et al (2024), social media is now part of students' learning and social lives, so a comprehensive understanding of its impact is needed for the development of relevant educational policies in the digital era.

Theoretical review

Social Media as a Social and Educational Space

Social media serves not only as an entertainment platform but also as a social and educational space that influences adolescent identity, interaction, and learning. From a sociological perspective, social media serves as a platform for digital self-image formation and symbolic interaction between users. For example, the study "Adolescent Communication Dynamics on Social Media" highlights that adolescents form dual identities (online and offline) through social media, and symbols (emojis, statuses, content) become an essential part of virtual communication. (Taufik et al., 2025).

Furthermore, social media as an arena for digital socialization can function as a "new public space" where values, norms, and social relations are formed and renegotiated. In the study of Social Identity Construction by Social Media, critical theories from Marcuse and Habermas are used to explore how algorithms and the social structures of platforms can influence the homogenization of adolescent identities. (Amelia et al., 2025).

Learning Behavior and Social Learning Theory (Bandura)

Student learning behavior is influenced not only by formal interactions at school, but also by observations and social interactions on social media. Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory explains that students can learn through observation, imitation, and modeling the behavior they see in their social environment. (Tullah, 2020).

In the context of social media, adolescents often observe the behavior of peers, influencers, or public figures and then imitate them, especially if the behavior is socially reinforced (e.g., "likes," comments, shares). The study "Analysis of Student Social Behavior Based on Bandura's Theory Perspective" shows that adolescents imitate the behavior they see on social media, which then influences their communication patterns, self-efficacy, and social identity. (Saputra, 2024).

The concept of observational learning is particularly relevant in the digital age, where role models are readily accessible. This process is then influenced by cognitive factors such as attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation, all core elements of Bandura's theory. (Tullah, 2020).

Social Constructivism and Active Learning

Social constructivism emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and collaboration: students are not passive recipients, but actively construct shared meaning. In the context of social media, platforms like TikTok can be a constructivist medium for learning because they enable digital interaction, reflection, and collaboration. The study "Social Constructivism in TikTok Social Media for Teaching and Learning Purposes" shows that TikTok can be used in a constructivist manner in 21st-century learning, where students actively participate, share ideas, and construct knowledge through digital social interactions. (Mustikasari et al., 2023).

Furthermore, research into integrated social studies learning in elementary schools reveals that constructivism theory is very effective when applied in the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model, because it encourages collaboration, problem solving, and the formation of contextual knowledge through real experiences. (Ahmad et al., 2025).

Symbolic Interactionism and Social Identity

Mead and Blumer's symbolic interactionism theory states that humans construct meaning through symbolic interaction. Symbols (language, expressions, gestures) have social meanings that are continually negotiated. In schools, symbolic interaction shapes students' social identities and the social meaning of learning activities. The study "School as a

Miniature Society: A Study of Symbolic Interactionism Theory" shows that schools are not only learning institutions, but also mini social arenas where symbols, interactions, and values are co-constructed.(Desrita, 2025).

In the social media space, this theory is also highly relevant. The study "Social Interaction in Social Media as Viewed from Goffman's Dramaturgical Theory" analyzes how teenagers manage their self-image on social media and in real-life, similar to Goffman's concept of front/back stage styles.(Jeremy, 2025).

In addition, in the study "Virtual Interactions of Teenagers on Social Media", it was found that teenagers form a digital self (online self) through a symbolic communication process on social media platforms, which reflects Mead's concept of mind, self, and society.(Rahman et al., 2025).

Social Construction of Emotions and Digital Identity

Interactions on social media not only construct social symbols, but also social emotions that contribute to adolescent identity. The study "Social Construction of Emotions in the Development of Adolescent Identity on Social Media" found that adolescents use social media accounts (e.g., two Instagram accounts) to express different emotions, one account for an idealized image (the first account) and another for authentic expression (the second account).(Paramitha & Kencana, 2025).

These findings are relevant to your research because they demonstrate how emotions and identities are constructed and navigated digitally, which in turn influences how students interact and learn through social media. From the synergy of these theories, the research will be able to analyze how social media functions as a socialization agent and a learning medium that shapes the learning behavior and social interaction patterns of junior high school students, not only from a cognitive perspective but also from an identity and emotional perspective.

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to deeply understand how social media shapes the learning behavior and social interactions of junior high school students. This approach was chosen because the phenomenon being studied is contextual, complex, and requires direct interpretation from students' experiences. The research location is SMP Negeri 1 Kebakkramat, with implementation time of approximately six months, from permitting to report preparation.

The research subjects consisted of seventh- to ninth-grade students who actively used social media, selected using purposive sampling based on their suitability to the research focus. Subject teachers and homeroom teachers were also interviewed as supporting informants to strengthen source triangulation. The number of informants was not determined from the outset but followed the principle of data saturation, where data collection was stopped when no new information emerged.

The research data sources came entirely from in-depth interviews. The instrument used was a semi-structured interview guide designed for two groups of informants: students and teachers. Student interviews focused on the types of social media they use, how they utilize social media in their learning, the positive and negative impacts on learning behavior, and its influence on social interactions. Meanwhile, teacher interviews explored their observations about students' social media usage patterns, its impact on the learning process and social behavior at school, and school policies or rules related to social media use.

Data collection was conducted through scheduling face-to-face interviews, audio recording with the informants' permission, and verbatim transcription for analysis purposes. Data analysis followed the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Initial codes from the transcripts were grouped into themes such as learning behavior, digital distractions, academic collaboration, or social interaction dynamics. Findings were then organized narratively and repeatedly verified to achieve consistency of meaning.

Data validity was maintained through source triangulation between students and teachers, member checking by confirming interpretations with informants, and reflective note-taking to mitigate researcher bias. Ethical aspects of the research were addressed through providing informed consent, anonymizing informants, secure data storage, and conducting interviews without disrupting students' learning processes at school.

With this research method, the data collected is expected to be able to provide an accurate and in-depth picture of the role of social media in shaping the learning behavior and social interactions of junior high school students.

Results and Discussion

Research result

1. Types of Social Media Used by Middle School Students

Based on student interviews, it was found that the most frequently used social media platforms were TikTok, WhatsApp, and Instagram. Nearly all students mentioned these three platforms as part of their daily activities. One student stated, "I usually use TikTok, WhatsApp, and Instagram every day" (Student 1). Another

student added that TikTok is used not only for entertainment but also as a source of quick information, while WhatsApp is used for communication with friends and class groups.

Teachers confirmed these findings. They stated that WhatsApp was the platform most frequently used by students for learning coordination, while TikTok and Instagram were used more for entertainment content consumption. This indicates that social media has become an integral part of middle school students' lives, both in academic and non-academic contexts.

2. Utilization of Social Media for Learning Activities

Some students use social media to support their learning, although not at a high level. Some students use Instagram or TikTok to watch videos explaining material. However, most students reported rarely using social media for learning. For example, one student said, "Rarely, mostly to look for impromptu references on TikTok or YouTube" (Student 2). This finding suggests that social media is primarily used as a supplementary reference source, not as a primary learning tool.

From the teachers' perspective, there is a stronger view that social media's potential for learning is actually enormous. Teachers mentioned that some of them have provided learning links via WhatsApp. One teacher stated, "I use WhatsApp for learning, sending materials and links, and I also utilize some educational content from social media" (Teacher 3). However, teachers also recognize that student interest in using social media as a learning tool is still low.

3. Positive and Negative Impacts of Social Media on Learning Behavior

Students mentioned a number of positive impacts, such as easier information retrieval, simpler explanations, or inspiration from educational creators. However, they acknowledged that distraction was the biggest impact of social media use. One student said, "Sometimes I want to study but end up scrolling through TikTok and lose track of time" (Student 4). This suggests that students are easily distracted by entertainment content.

Teachers share a similar view. They believe that social media often reduces learning focus, encourages procrastination, and reduces student concentration in class. One teacher stated, "Students are often distracted now, their focus often broken by notifications or scrolling" (Teacher 2). Other teachers also cited the potential for the spread of misinformation as an impact that needs to be monitored.

4. The Influence of Social Media on Students' Social Interactions

Students expressed that social media supports communication and closeness with friends, particularly through class WhatsApp groups. One student said, "Usually I communicate with friends using WhatsApp, it also makes coordination easier" (Student 3). However, some students also felt that in-person interactions at school sometimes decreased because students tended to communicate more actively through screens.

Teachers observe a similar situation. They believe that social media facilitates communication, but also has the potential to create social problems such as misunderstandings, conflicts over comments, or digital exclusion. Teacher 4 stated, "There are always small conflicts between students that stem from chats or stories." Thus, social media has two sides: strengthening relationships but also opening up opportunities for social friction.

5. School Policies and Practices on Teachers' Use of Social Media

Students explained that schools often provide recommendations rather than strict regulations regarding social media use. One student said, "The school just advises, it's not very strict. But during class time, they tell you to put your cell phone away" (Student 5). This indicates that regulations regarding social media use are still normative.

Teachers confirmed that the school has general guidelines such as maintaining ethics, using devices wisely, and avoiding negative content. Some teachers also use social media for learning, for example by sharing links to assignments, materials, or relevant educational content. Teacher 2 stated, "I utilize educational content from social media, so students are more responsive."

Discussion

1. Social Media as Part of Junior High School Students' Digital Life

The research results show that TikTok, WhatsApp, and Instagram are the primary platforms shaping students' daily lives. This finding aligns with the digital natives theory, which states that the modern generation lives in a digital ecosystem and considers technology a natural part of daily activities. Rapid access to information, entertainment, and communication makes social media a learning and social space at the same time.

2. Social Media Has Not Been Optimally Utilized for Learning

Although students access social media daily, their use of it for learning remains limited. Students prefer to use it for entertainment rather than education. This indicates that social media's potential for learning has not been fully maximized. Teachers who have tried utilizing social media for learning indicate that these platforms hold significant potential as a digital literacy tool, but the main challenges remain student motivation and distraction management.

3. Distraction and Decreased Focus as Dominant Impacts

The findings regarding distraction align with cognitive load theory, which states that exposure to rapid stimuli and engaging content on social media can reduce students' attention span. The habit of scrolling makes it difficult for students to maintain focus for extended periods. Thus, the negative impact of social media on learning behavior is not only wasted time but also altered attention patterns.

4. Balance of Online and Offline Social Interactions

Social media helps students build relationships, collaborate, and exchange information more quickly. However, digital interactions also pose the risk of conflict and misunderstanding. These findings support the literature suggesting that media-based social interactions carry an ambivalence: strengthening relationships while simultaneously creating potential friction. Therefore, digital communication literacy is crucial to prevent negative social impacts.

5. The Role of Schools and Teachers in Directing Social Media Use

Schools are still at the advisory stage, not yet at the systematic monitoring or strategic use of social media in learning. Teachers who have used social media as a learning tool demonstrate good practices that can be developed. Schools play a crucial role in creating a healthy digital culture, for example through education on digital literacy, social media ethics, and usage guidelines.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Conclusion

This research shows that social media plays a significant role in shaping the learning behavior and social interactions of junior high school students. First, social media—particularly TikTok, WhatsApp, and Instagram—has become part of students' digital routines and influences how they interact and communicate. Second, the use of social media for learning activities is still suboptimal; students use it more as a means of entertainment than as a learning resource, while teachers see significant opportunities to leverage it for teaching. Third, social media use has positive impacts such as easier access to information and accelerated communication, but negative impacts such as distraction, decreased focus, and a tendency to procrastinate are more dominant. Fourth, social media shapes students' social interactions in an ambivalent way: strengthening closeness and cooperation, but also triggering potential conflict and reducing the quality of face-to-face interactions. Finally, school policies regarding social media use are still advisory in nature, thus failing to effectively guide students' digital behavior.

Overall, this study confirms that social media functions as a learning space as well as a social space for junior high school students, but its undirected use causes negative impacts to be more prominent than its academic benefits.

Suggestion

Based on the research findings, several recommendations can be made. First, students need to increase their digital literacy awareness to better manage their time and attention when using social media, ensuring a more balanced balance between entertainment and learning. Second, teachers are advised to more actively utilize social media as a learning support tool, for example by sharing educational content, links to materials, or facilitating focused online discussions. Third, schools need to formulate more systematic social media policies, including providing education on digital ethics and cyber-conflict prevention. Fourth, further research could expand the focus to include psychological aspects, learning motivation, or differences in impact between types of social media to provide a more comprehensive picture of students' digital behavior.

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