

Character Education In The Digital Era Overcoming Hate Speech Through Social Media Ethics Awareness Among Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the role of character education in building digital ethics awareness among students of Medan Aviation Polytechnic as an effort to address the issue of hate speech on social media. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this research delves into the factors influencing students' digital behavior, including legal literacy, self-control, and moral education. The results indicate that 95% of students have witnessed hate speech on social media, and 40% of them admit to having been involved in such practices. However, only 25% of students have a deep understanding of digital legal regulations. Character education proves to be effective in enhancing emotional intelligence, empathy, and critical thinking skills among students, thus contributing to the reduction of hate speech intensity. This study recommends the integration of digital ethics into the curriculum, the development of continuous training programs, and multidimensional collaboration between educational institutions, families, and communities to create an inclusive and responsible digital culture.

Keywords: Character Education, Hate Speech, Digital Ethics

INTRODUCTION

In the global digital era, hate speech has become a serious challenge that threatens social order in various parts of the world.(Sukarwoto et al., 2023). Social media, which was originally created as a means of communication and collaboration, has now often become a space for the spread of destructive narratives. This phenomenon not only impacts individuals, but also triggers intergroup conflict, exacerbates polarization, and damages social harmony.(Mansyur, 2020). The United Nations (UN) in its report revealed that hate speech in the digital world has increased rapidly in the last decade, with more than 40% of internet users reporting having been victims or witnesses of digital harassment.(Ruslinia et al., 2023).

In Indonesia, the dynamics of hate speech are becoming increasingly complex due to the diversity of ethnicities, religions, races and groups (SARA).(Sairah, 2021). As a country with more than 300 ethnic groups and 270 million people, Indonesia has a fairly high potential for identity conflict. Data from the Ministry of Communication and Information shows a 300% increase in cases of SARA-based hate speech during the 2020–2023 period, most of which were triggered by political polarization, religious sentiment, and ethnic stereotypes.(Law et al., 2024). As a multicultural country with 270 million people from more than 300 ethnic groups, Indonesia is highly vulnerable to potential identity-based conflicts.(Nofrianri, 2016). This conflict is exacerbated by the weak digital literacy among the community, especially the younger generation who are active users of social media.(Akbar & Rahma, 2024)..

Students as part of the digital native generation are often the main actors in social media dynamics.(Akbar et al., 2023). They grow and develop in a digital ecosystem that demands speed,

openness, and responsiveness. However, behind the advantages of this technology, there are major challenges in building awareness of social media ethics. Various studies show that low understanding of digital regulations and lack of self-control are the main factors driving hate speech in online spaces (Pratiwi & Yunarti, 2022).

In the context of higher education, Medan Aviation Polytechnic has a strategic role in forming a young generation that is not only technically competent, but also has high moral awareness and digital ethics. (Wimatra, Ayub; Nur, 2022). Students not only need to be equipped with technical competence, but also ethical skills in communicating in digital space. (Akbar et al., 2023). Character education is one of the fundamental approaches in building this awareness. Character education aims to internalize moral values such as empathy, tolerance, and social responsibility. With this approach, students are expected to be able to develop emotional intelligence and critical thinking skills that can fortify them from the negative influence of social media. (Afif et al., 2024).

This research is motivated by the urgent need to create a safer and more constructive digital environment. This study aims to explore in depth the role of character education in shaping the digital ethics awareness of students at the Medan Aviation Polytechnic. This study focuses on identifying patterns of hate speech dissemination among students, communication mechanisms that have the potential to damage social cohesion, and prevention strategies through an innovative moral education approach. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study will reveal the effectiveness of character education in encouraging changes in students' digital behavior, as well as provide concrete recommendations for educational institutions to integrate digital ethics into the curriculum.

This study starts from the premise that character education is not only relevant in the context of individual moral formation, but also has a strategic role in creating an inclusive and ethical digital culture. This study will not only provide empirical insights into the dynamics of students' digital behavior, but also offer a new conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between character education, digital literacy, and social cohesion. Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide important contributions to the development of educational policies in the digital era.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative descriptive exploratory approach. This approach is used to gain in-depth insights into student behavior and the effectiveness of character education in building social media ethics including moral education, self-control, legal understanding, and compliance with digital norms. To further clarify the stages in this study, the following is a research flow diagram.

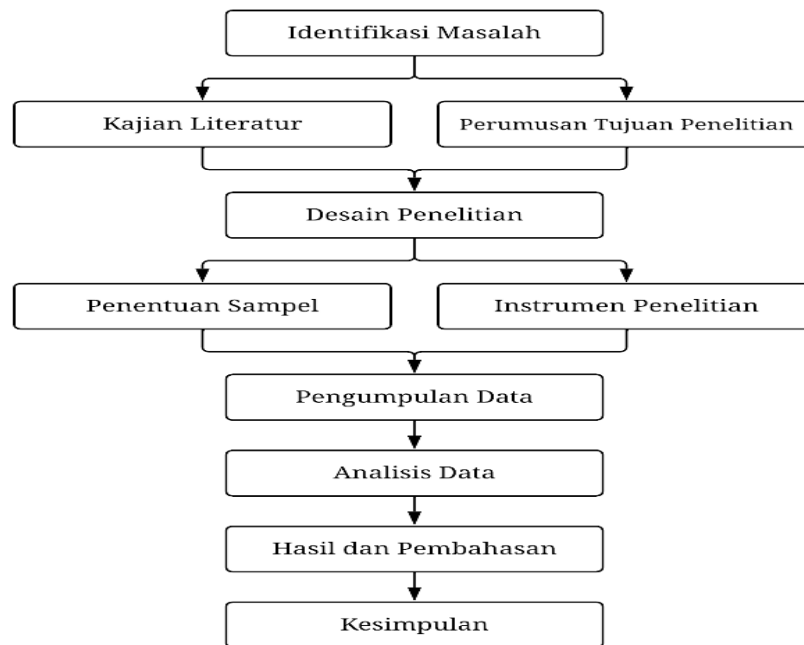


Figure 1. Research Flowchart

The data sources in this study consist of primary data sources and secondary data sources. Primary data sources were obtained directly from the research subjects, namely students of Medan Aviation Polytechnic and secondary data sources were obtained from relevant documents, literature, and official reports.

Data collection techniques used in this study include in-depth interviews, observations, questionnaires and document analysis. In-depth interviews involved 10 students and 5 lecturers to understand the experiences, perceptions, and implementation of character education related to social media ethics. Observations were made on student activities on social media (platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp) to record behavioral patterns and responses to issues on social media. Questionnaires were distributed to 50 students to measure their understanding of the law, self-control, and ethical norms on social media and document analysis involved a review of the character education curriculum, social media ethics guidelines, and campus policies related to hate speech.

This study uses thematic analysis techniques to process qualitative data. The analysis process is carried out through three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions. Data reduction is filtering relevant information, identifying key themes around character education and digital ethics, presenting data by creating a theme matrix, data visualization, and analytical narratives and drawing conclusions, namely an in-depth analysis of the relationship between themes and the formulation of recommendations. The following is the data processing framework used in this study.

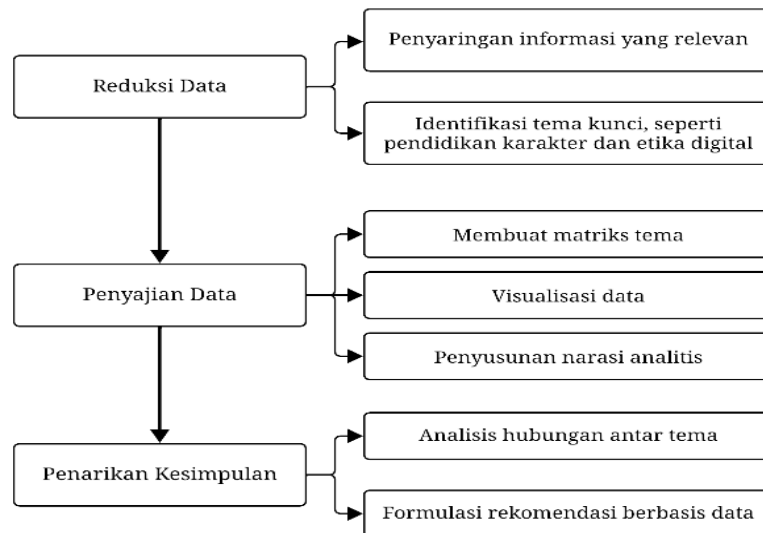


Figure 2. Data Processing Framework

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on research findings, the low level of legal understanding among students, especially regarding hate speech, is an urgent issue to be addressed.(Akbar et al., 2023). With only 25% of students understanding the legal framework of digital communication in depth (Pratiwi & Yunarti, 2022).there is a serious gap between the increasingly massive use of social media and relevant legal awareness. This situation emphasizes the importance of a more systematic educational approach to improving digital legal literacy. The results of interviews and observations show that character education interventions are able to encourage critical reflection by students on their communication practices on social media.(Discipline et al., 2023). Character education cannot be understood simply as a transfer of values, but rather a deep internalization process that involves the reconstruction of critical consciousness.

As many as 85% of students expressed the need for further training in digital ethics (Juwandi et al., 2019). This percentage reflects an intrinsic awareness of the moral challenges in cyberspace and a desire to develop more responsible communication competencies.(Superior et al., 2024). This indicates that students are not merely passive, but actively aware of the importance of developing comprehensive digital literacy. Research reveals that moral education has a significant correlation with a decrease in the intensity of hate speech (Prasetya et al., 2019). This finding confirms the importance of moral education as one of the pillars in building healthier and more harmonious communication, especially in the digital era which is full of virtual interactions.(Akbar & Margaretha, 2024). As part of efforts to reduce hate speech, an ecological approach is essential. This approach recognizes that hate speech is not only the result of individual factors alone, but is also influenced by group dynamics and broader social structures.

Implications and Recommendations

The research findings underline the need for a multidimensional approach to addressing hate speech (Krisnanda, 2020). Key recommendations include the integration of digital ethics

into the curriculum, the development of ongoing training programs, and collaboration between educational institutions, parents, and law enforcement. The implications of this research go beyond the academic realm, touching on the dimensions of policy and social practice. The recommendations produced are not merely normative, but are based on an in-depth analysis of the complexity of students' digital behavior. A transformative approach requires not only curriculum changes, but also the reconstruction of educational paradigms that are more responsive to technological and social dynamics (Morgan, 2014). This requires the active involvement of the entire educational ecosystem in creating a more dignified digital space.

Discussion Research.

Research at Medan Aviation Polytechnic discusses the dynamics of students' social media use with a focus on hate speech and character education. With a holistic approach that combines social, psychological, and educational aspects, this study reveals the complexity of students' digital behavior. The mix-method method is used to explore previously unidentified hidden dimensions. Adopting a critical research paradigm, this study not only describes the phenomenon but also seeks the root of the problem and encourages social transformation. This study emphasizes the importance of character education to shape responsible digital behavior in the era of social media.

Research shows that hate speech is a serious problem in the digital space of students, with 95% of students witnessing it and 40% directly involved. The causal factors include psychological conditions, social pressure, low digital literacy, and lack of regulation on social media. Hate speech is understood not only as an individual problem, but the result of a complex social system. Solutions to overcome this problem include increasing students' digital literacy through online communication ethics education, collaboration with social media platforms to strengthen regulations, and developing algorithms to detect problematic content. The government also needs to strengthen regulations and sanctions, and promote public campaigns about the dangers of hate speech. A holistic approach involving individuals, educational institutions, technology platforms, and the government is expected to create a safer, healthier, and more inclusive digital space.

Research shows low legal understanding among students regarding hate speech, with only 25% having a thorough understanding of the legal framework for digital communication. This reflects a serious gap between massive social media use and minimal legal literacy. The cause is an education system that has not integrated digital legal literacy comprehensively, as well as a learning approach that emphasizes theory rather than practical context. This lack of understanding makes students vulnerable to violating digital law, such as engaging in hate speech, without realizing the legal consequences. This situation contributes to the increasing number of cases of violations of the law in the digital space, even by individuals with no malicious intent, but who do not understand the applicable rules. To overcome this problem, a more systematic and contextual educational approach is needed to improve students' digital legal literacy, so that they are more aware and responsible in using social media.

Character education plays an important role in shaping students' digital behavior in a transformative way. With an integrative approach, character education increases students' ethical awareness and self-control skills in online communication. The results of the study show that character education encourages students to reflect on their behavior on social media, not just

through the transfer of values, but through the internalization and reconstruction of critical awareness. The dialogical and reflective approach helps students understand the complexity of ethics in the dynamic digital space. Digital behavior transformation requires a multidimensional approach that combines moral development, analytical skills, empathy, and social awareness. This process requires the active involvement of various parties, including educational institutions, parents, and the community, to create an environment that supports the internalization of positive values in the digital era.

As many as 85% of students stated the need for digital ethics training to face moral challenges in cyberspace. This training aims to build responsible communication competencies, critical thinking, and wise action in the digital era. The training strategy must be dynamic, involving case studies, simulations, interactive discussions, and cross-disciplinary experts. Flexible e-learning platforms can be used to facilitate learning and critical reflection. Continuous evaluation is needed so that the material remains relevant to current digital challenges. This training not only forms students who are individually aware and resilient, but also helps create a healthy and ethical digital ecosystem.

Moral education plays an important role in reducing hate speech by developing empathy, emotional intelligence, and critical thinking skills. An ecological approach is needed because hate speech is influenced by individual, group, and social structure factors. Reduction efforts require digital literacy training, awareness campaigns, respectful online communities, and policies and regulations that support responsible communication. Long-term success requires cross-sectoral collaboration, including the integration of character education into the curriculum, government regulations, and safe digital platforms. This collaboration will build a more tolerant society that is ready to face the challenges of digital communication.

The study emphasizes the importance of a multidimensional approach to addressing hate speech in the digital world. Key recommendations include the integration of digital ethics into the curriculum, ongoing training programs, and collaboration between educational institutions, parents, and law enforcement. A transformative approach is needed, involving the reconstruction of educational paradigms to be more responsive to technological and social dynamics. These recommendations are based on an analysis of students' digital behavior and aim to create a more dignified digital space through the active involvement of the entire educational ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

Character education has a strategic role in shaping students' digital ethics awareness, especially in overcoming the problem of hate speech on social media. The findings show that low digital literacy, legal understanding, and self-control are the main factors influencing the prevalence of hate speech among students. Through an integrative and holistic character education approach, students are able to improve their emotional intelligence, empathy, and critical thinking skills which contribute to reducing destructive communication practices. In addition, students' need for digital ethics training shows the importance of integrating digital legal literacy into the higher education curriculum. This study recommends a multidimensional approach, involving educational institutions, parents, and policy makers to create an inclusive, ethical, and responsible digital environment. With this strategy, it is hoped that a more positive and harmonious digital culture can be created in the dynamic technological era.

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