The Impact of Peer-Group Communication and Social Media Use on Students' Characters

Muhammad Aminullah[a,1,*], Erwin Dyah Astawinetu[b,c,2], Nanda Saputra[b,3] , Al-Mahdi

[a]*Institut Agama Islam Al-Aziziyah, Jl. Mesjid Raya Km. 1,5 Kabupaten Bireuen Provinsi Aceh, Indonesia*
[b]*Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Jl. Semolowaru No.45, Kota SBY, 60118, Indonesia*
[c]*STIT Al Hilal Sigli, Jl. Perniagaan No.10, Kramat Dalam, Aceh 24114, Indonesia*
[d]*Universitas al-Ahgaff, F2PV+W7P, Fuwwah, Yaman*
[1]*aminullahtengku@gmail.com*; [2]erwin@untag-sby.ac.id; [3]Nanda.saputra2589@gmail.com; [4]Almahdisyauaib@gmail.com*
* corresponding author

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate (1) the effect of peer group communication on students' morals and (2) the effect that social media use has on students' values. This study was carried out in the Pancur Batu District of North Sumatra Province's Deli Serdang Regency, Indonesia. Our population was 1,207 Muslim students at the state junior high school in the Pancur Batu District, Indonesia. In the end, we selected 300 students as our samples using the proportional stratified random sampling technique. For the research instrument, we employed a questionnaire that was developed to collect information regarding peer group communication and the use of social media among junior high school students in Pancur Batu, Deli Serdang, Indonesia. Path analysis was used to analyze and synthesize research data. The analysis's findings indicate that social media usage and peer group communication both directly affect students' emotions and individuals' selves, with a path coefficient of 0.213 for social media use and 0.179 for peer group communication. According to the study's findings, peer contact and social media significantly and positively affect students' attitudes.

I. Introduction

Indonesia has the world's largest Muslim population, with 87 percent of the population being Muslim. According to the 2010 Central Bureau of Statistics data, Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism are the most generally practiced in Indonesia. In 2010, there were 207.2 (87.18%), 16.5 million (6.96%), 6.9 million (2.91%), and 4,012,116 people who practiced Islam, Christian, Catholic, and Hindu, in Indonesia, respectively. Meanwhile, Buddhism is practiced by 1,703,254 people (0.72 percent), and around 117.1 (0.05%) thousand individuals believe in Confucianism, the newest religion recognized by the Indonesian government (Riany et al., 2017).

Indonesia is a Muslim-majority nation that upholds Eastern culture, which is characterized by having gentle speech, being polite in socializing and dressing, a lack of individualism, respecting each other and helping each other selflessly, and having noble character (Effendi et al., 2020).

However, numerous moral problems have been reported in Indonesia, starting from elementary school education, junior high school, high school, and university. Recently, Indonesian teenagers have shown deplorable and concerning characteristics, far from the attribute expected by their families, society, and country. Meanwhile, they remain to bear the responsibility as the successors of the nation by having and maintaining good morals as taught by Islam. On the other hand, they have grown more independent of their religion's authority and farther from science (Sya'bandari et al., 2022). Additionally, students are one of the critical foundations for the country and the nation's next generation.

Previous studies have reported the recently declining students' morals as evidenced by students' habit of spending more time on activities that are less useful, such as hanging out on the side of the road with their group of friends, spending more time on *smartphones* than studying, sitting in discotheques or entertainment venues, hanging out freely without limits, being heavily involved in alcohol and drugs, while also being heavily involved in

criminal acts, brawls, and violence (Abbasi et al., 2021; Razzaq et al., 2018).

Therefore, the whole country has been affected by the deterioration in student morality, not only the believer of a single region. The norms of behavior, dress, speech and other aspects of eastern culture are upheld in Muslim-majority nations, yet these are all only symbols of the people's professed faith (Hidayat et al., 2020).

A similar declining morality was also identified among the students in Pancur Batu, Indonesia. Our observation results suggested that students in Pancur Batu presented highly questionable morality. Many students spend their time building tiny communal organizations on the side of the road, and some of them are even still primary school students. They leave the house every Sunday night and hang out by the side of the road with attire and hairdo, which do not adequately reflect their character. Besides, they also perform less honorable behaviors like illegal racing on the streets or violent crimes like beheading. These youth also engage in gambling, drug use, cockfighting, and other vices.

Peer communication and the use of media among junior high school students are the main contributing factors to the students' declining morale at State Junior High School in Pancur Batu District. Peers are groups of students with similar age ranges or academic levels. As peers provide a way for students to gain feedback on their skills, information, and socio-emotional support, it carries a significant impact on students' values and character. Those effects emerge due to the increased peer interaction experienced by junior high school students. They may do various activities through peer groups, including being innovative in creating new products, exchanging ideas, and exchanging knowledge. As a result, junior high school students spend more time with their friends than with their parents. Peer group communication can take place at home or school, directly or through cell phones, especially with the recent sophistication of knowledge and technology. They are no longer required to communicate face-to-face. Students at the State Junior High School in Pancur Batu Subdistrict frequently create small groups to interact with their peers and engage in social media activities during their leisure time. They spend a lot of time using internet web browsers, playing social media, and looking for information. Besides, they are also willing to work and save money, as is evident even from one of their confessions. When they have sufficient cash, they buy internet data packages for social media and online research.

The complexity of modern information technology has undoubtedly had a variety of effects on human life, particularly on adolescents in junior high school. Substantially, internet-based information technology has a number of beneficial effects, including easy means to communicate, locate information, and discover new things (Jevremović et al., 2022; Szymkowiak et al., 2021). However, its improper usage can negatively affect students' moral

character, such as making them less obedient to their parents and teachers because they are preoccupied with using social media (Rahmatullah et al., 2022). The other negative effects include students' neglecting their studies because they spend too much time playing online games (Baturay & Toker, 2019), decreased interest and motivation to learn because they are accustomed to the entertainment provided by social media on the internet, along with the use of online games (Nayak, 2018). Based on the context, this study aims to examine the effects of peer groups and social media use on the morality of state junior high school students in the Pancur Batu District.

II. Method

This field study examined how social media use and peer-to-peer interactions affected students' morals in the Pancur Batu District, Indonesia. This study is categorized as quantitative research as it has a correlational orientation, specifically to analyze the strength of the association between peer group communication factors and the impact of social media use on student morals.

This study was carried out in the Pancur Batu District of Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatera, Indonesia. Our population was 1,207 Muslim students enrolled in the State Junior High School of the Pancur Batu District, and 300 of those students were chosen for the research sample using a proportional stratified random selection method. The selection of students from Islamic-based schools is based on the educational program followed in Islamic institutions, which is more dominated by religious instruction and aims to influence students' attitudes and character to develop moral and ethical individuals. Consequently, it is highly suitable that this study be undertaken on students from Muslim schools.

To collect information regarding peer group communication and the use of social media among junior high school students in the Pancur Batu sub-district, Deli Serdang district, we used a questionnaire of moral character that was developed following our study needs. Path analysis was used to analyze and assess the research data. The questionnaire was tested before being distributed to respondents. Thirty participants who were not part of the sample were involved in this questionnaire testing to guarantee its accurate measuring power. The instrument test suggested that our questionnaire was valid and reliable. In this study, path analysis technique was applied to analyze the gathered data.

The statistical hypotheses to be tested in this study are presented as follows:

hypothesis 1

Ho: There is no direct influence of peer group communication (X_1) on students' morals (X4)

Ha: There is a direct influence of peer group communication (X_1) on student morals (X4)

Ho: $\rho41 = 0$

Ha: $\rho41 > 0$

Test criteria: reject Ho if t count > t table at Statistical (0.05)

hypothesis 2.

Ho: There is no influence of peer group communication (X_1) on the use of social media (X3)   Ha: There is a direct influence of peer group communication (X_1) on the use of social media (X3)

Ho: $\rho31 = 0$

Ha: $\rho31 > 0$

Test criteria: reject Ho if t count > t table at $\alpha = 0.05$.

III. Results and Discussion

A. The Statistical Description

Table 1 presents statistical analysis results on the morals of State Junior High School (SMP) students in the Pancur Batu District, Indonesia.

Table 1. The results of the statistical analysis

Varia-ble	N	SMI min	X_{Min}	SMI max	X_{Max}	MI	Mean
Morals of students	30 0	25	25	100	88	62.5	54.85

a. Source: statistics from the survey's findings (2022)

Description:

N   : The Number of Respondent
SMI : Ideal Maximum Score
X   : Score Obtained
MI   : Mean Ideal

Based on table 1, it is known that the morals of State Junior High School students in Pancur Batu District are in the medium category. Additionally, using statistical analysis through the calculation of the absolute norm, table 1 also suggests the lowest and highest scores of the empirical data are 25 and 88, respectively, with a *mean* score of 54.85. Meanwhile, the ideal minimum, maximum, and average scores are 25, 100, and 62.5, respectively. Thus, the average empirical score of 54.85 is lower than the ideal average score of 62.5, signifying that the morals of State Junior High School students in Pancur Batu District assessed using the student morals instrument were not good because they were still below the set average.

Furthermore, based on the ideal average (62.5), the morals of junior high school students in Pancur Batu District are classified into three categories, as listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Classification of students' morals based on the ideal score

Category	Percentage
Good	20.6%
Enough	50.33%
Poor	29%

b. Source: statistics from the survey's findings (2022)

The data in table 2 shows that although the morals of State Junior High School students in Pancur Batu District are generally considered unfavorable, 50.33% of students present sufficiently good morals, 20.6% are categorized as good, and 29% are poor. Even so, the number of students with good categories is lower than students with sufficiently good morals. This finding indicates that, generally, the morals of state junior high school students in Pancur Batu District still need to be improved. Several influencing factors in the low morale of state junior high school students in Pancur Batu District include the uncontrollable use of internet technology, a lack of parental attention to children, and a lack of communication between peers in the group. This study's results align with the research of Talaue et al. (2019), reporting that the internet has a positive and negative influence on students. To reduce the negative impact caused by this information technology, robust control from the family and moral character development from the teacher are required. This research is also in line with the study of (Ernilah et al., 2022; Sari & Fauziyah, 2022) that family, peers, and living environment carry significantly effects students' morals.

Our findings are crucial and can be used as a reference by policymakers, in this case, the Deli Serdang Regency Education Office and the Deli Serdang Ministry of Religion or other relevant agencies. Students' high or excellent morals, achievement of educational goals, and contributions to Islam will be easily achieved with sufficient support from the policymaker.

B. Effects of Peer Group Communication on the Morals of State Junior High School students in Pancur Batu District

Islam has a strong preference for the virtue of morality (*akhlak*). Even in the hadith, it is said that the one who is most loved and whose seat is closest to the Prophet Muhammad is the person who has the best morals. Even so, many people still struggle to construct a noble character. One of the contributing factors to that difficulty is peer group communication.

Our calculation using path analysis directly on the model shows a 0.179 influence of peer group communication on students' morals, with a t-count of 3.283, more significant than the table for $0.05_{;297} = 1.97$ as well as the t-table for $0.01_{;297} = 2.59$. This finding indicates that peer group communication variables influence students' morals. Positive peer group communication fosters good morals, while

negative peer group communication induces poor or low morals as well.

In addition, our research data also undoubtedly showed that the students' peer groups influence their morals, as illustrated by the data obtained from 300 State Junior High School students in Pancur Batu District, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra. The test results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Classification of peer group communication influence on student morals

Category	Number of Students	Percentage
Good	200	66.67%
Enough	100	33.33%
Poor	0	29%

The findings of this study support the study carried out by Feigenberg et al. (2008), demonstrating that peer groups carry an impact on students' learning outcomes, desire for learning, attitudes, and conduct toward parents, instructors, and peers. Feigenberg et al. (2008) also reported that students value their pals more than their professors and parents. Accordingly, peer group communication bears considerable effects on the way students think, act, and behave.

Theoretically, the effect of peer group communication on students' morals has also been reported by (Geber & Hefner, 2019). According to our findings, peer communication serves as a vehicle for the spread of social norms. In conclusion, a significant relationship between peer communication with alcohol behavior and intentions is observed. Besides, peer group communication also influences a person's behavior in making choices in personal matters. The linear finding is also reported by Geber & Hefner (2019), indicating that peer communication is vital in social norm development.

Both online and offline peer group communication also influence a person's means of making a decision. Wang et al. (2011), using 292 respondents, explained that participants' peer communication and social media usage present a positive influence on their communication outcomes.

Furthermore, our data also signified that the *groupthink theory* significantly contributes to the respondent's behavior. These findings can be the reference for the Education Office in Pancur Batu District as well as those related to the world of education, such as teachers and parents, to pay more attention to students' communication with their peer groups. This is because peer group communication affects student behavior or morals in general.

1) Effects of Social Media Usage on State Junior High School Students' Morale in Pancur Batu District

Social media is an internet or online platform that allows people to engage, contribute, or exchange information easily (Ansari et al., 2019). In this platform, interaction occurs when someone posts details about videos,

images, or events they have witnessed in the hopes of eliciting feedback from peers and others (Shafawi & Hassan, 2018).

The rapid development of social media is induced by its ease of access which only requires an internet connection. Besides, in social media, people are free to improve, reduce, add, or modify their writing, videos, photos, images, and other content models according to their wishes without going through the filtering process as in mass media.

Empirically, our research data showed that the variable of social media use has a positive relationship with students' morals. We obtained a correlation value between the use of social media and student morals of 0.338, with the obtained t-count of 6.200 and 1.97 t-$_{table}$ at a significance level of 0.05, indicating a greater t$_{count}$ than t$_{table}$ (6,200 > 1.97). Thus, the correlation between the use of social media and students' morals is significant. Accordingly, the higher use of social media results in more significant effects on students' morals.

Our analysis on the direct effect of social media usage on student morals showed 0.213 scores, with a t-$_{count}$ of 3.405, indicating a greater t$_{count}$ than the t$_{table}$ for a $_{(0.05:297)}$ = 1.97 and $_{(0.01:297)}$ = 2.59. Thus, the direct influence of the use of social media on students' morals is stated to be significant, with a contribution of $(0.213)^2$ x100% = 4.54%.

In short, the use of social media has an influence on students' morals. If students use social media for positive activities, they will also attain positive morals. In contrast, if they use social media for negative activities, they will grow disgraceful and less anticipated morals.

Theoretically, our findings on the influence of social media on the state junior high school students' morals are in accordance with research conducted by Kaya and Bicen (2016). In their study, they used 362 respondents from 9th to 12th-grade middle school students and reported several findings. First, students use *Facebook* for entertainment, communication, and sharing news, pictures, and songs. *Besides, the* use of *Facebook* reflects students' moods on social media, creating opportunities for consultation. *Third,* positive comments on *Facebook* increase students' self-confidence. *Fourth,* students who use *Facebook* know how to control their privacy. *Fifth, the* use of *Facebook* shows an indication of narcissism. Those findings reported by Kaya and Bicen (2016) explain the effects of the use of *Facebook* or social media on student behavior.

Students' use of social media should be accompanied by a time limit from their parents, as their prolonged usage of social media ultimately affects their grades and achievement. School students and even college students cannot manage their study time when dealing with social media. In their research, Wang et al. (2011), involving 35% of undergraduates and 65% of graduate students of Johnson & Wales University who had a full-time job (31%), part-time job (30%), and no job (39%), reported their excessive use

of social media. In detail, their results showed that 45% of the sample admitted that they spent 6–8 hours per day checking social media sites, while 23, 20, and 12% of them spent more than 8 hours, 2-4 hours, and less than 2 hours on this task.

However, our findings do not imply that utilizing social media should be forbidden. With more responsible usage, social media carries no negative effects on users. As Bou-Hamad (2020) reported that the number of time students spend on social media in a week, and their academic performance is not directly related. That study accentuates that effective time management helps preserve academic achievement.

In general, the results of our data analysis showed that social media use and peer group communication significantly affect respondents' behavior. These findings indicate that social media use greatly impacts students' morals or behavior. Furthermore, the effects increase following the more frequent use of social media. Consequently, due to Indonesia's fast-growing social media market, educators, including parents and teachers, must mentor and watch over the students to prevent inappropriate usage of social media, which carries a negative impact on the students' morals."

IV. Conclusion

Peer group communication has a direct impact on the morals of State Junior High School students in the Pancur Batu District, Indonesia, as illustrated by the attained score of 0.179 with a t-count of 3.283, higher than the $_{table}$ $0.05)$ = 1.97 and $(_{0.01)}$ = 2.59). Accordingly, students' higher interaction with their peer groups increases the peer group's impact on their morality. Additionally, social media use also directly affects students' morale, as shown by the 0.213 scores with a t_{count} of 3.405, higher than t_{table} $0.05)$ = 1.97 and $(_{0.01)}$ = 2.59. As a result, higher social media usage enhances the social media's influences on students' morality at State Junior High School in Pancur Batu District. Evidently, students appear more self-assured, capable of effective communication and teamwork, and driven to study because of learning with peers and using social media. These findings are at odds with teaching that prioritizes the lecture mode of teaching. With the lecture technique, the teacher has more control over the learning process, making the students more passive. We recommended educators, school administration, and other stakeholders consider these findings in developing policies and deciding further steps to build students' moral character. However, due to time limitations, this study was unable to observe the response of each participant while filling out the questionnaire carefully. As a result, the respondent's lack of sincerity, honesty, and correctness might impact the results. Consequently, further research is required on peer group communication and social media effects on students' morals.

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