

# Parental Contribution to Developing Moral Character in Adolescent Social Media Users

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The rapid development of social media has significantly influenced adolescent behavior and moral development, raising concerns about their character formation in the digital era. **Objective:** This study aims to determine the contribution of parents in fostering moral character in adolescents who use social media. **Method:** A qualitative approach with a phenomenological method was used. The research was conducted in Pagar Dewa Village, Selebar District, Bengkulu City, in 2023. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model. **Result:** The findings reveal that parents play a significant role in shaping their children's moral character by providing education, modeling ethical behavior, and offering guidance and advice. **Conclusion:** Parents have a major influence on the moral development of adolescents, particularly in teaching values and setting examples in the context of social media use. **Contribution:** This study provides valuable insights into parental involvement in fostering moral character in adolescents, contributing to the body of knowledge on character education in the digital age.

## KEYWORDS

Parental contribution; Developing moral character; Adolescent; Social media

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the current era, the development of communication and information technology is increasingly rapid. One of these developments is marked by the presence of social media which is very easy to use by all groups of society, including adolescents (Rahardaya, 2021). So that moral changes in its users cannot be avoided. Guidance for adolescents is highly expected from parents so that adolescents can be controlled in today's life (Mannan, 2017). Parents are required to play a role in fostering the morals of adolescents who use social media in their daily lives. Parents must be able to provide education, direction, advice, exemplary, habituation, and supervision in the use of adolescent social media (Reksamunandar & Hadirman, 2022).

The influence of social media will always have positive and negative impacts, and the impact of social media itself depends on its users and each of us (Kasetyaningsih & Hartono, 2017). The use of social media is not good they tend to utilize social media for negative things. The use of social media by adolescents today has a huge impact on the morals or character of adolescents, because of the nature of social media that makes its users addicted, and social media that does not have patent rules, in terms of the language used or words that are inappropriate to say or inappropriate to expose on social media (Safitri, et al., 2021). The negative impact of social media has made today's adolescents less ethical both to fellow friends and even less ethical to parents (Rahayu, 2019).

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The development of student morals is something that everyone desires in the education process (Nugraha, 2022). Because morals have the function of making human behavior more civilized and able to identify various life problems, good or bad according to applicable norms. Therefore, attention to morals is one of the main focuses of education in Indonesia. Through moral education, a person will be able to know what is right and then considered good, and what is bad (Harimulyo et al., 2021). This life will not be able to escape the dynamics of personal and social change. Along with the development of the Age and technology, moral education has a strategic position in controlling human behavior. Good morals will be formed from an early age, including the adolescent phase, which is very important for the future of the teenager himself (Fatmawati, 2016).

Parents play an important and very influential role in the education of their children (Sunarya, 2021). Since a child is born, it is his mother who is always beside him. Therefore, he imitates his mother's behavior. Apart from the important role of mothers in the family, the key to peace and tranquility is in the family, character building, parenting, instilling faith and habits will grow from the family, so that character building can be started from the family (Utomo et al., 2022).

Parents are required to provide moral guidance both directly and indirectly (Komariah et al., 2021). Direct moral development can be done by example, suggestion, and practice (Alhadad et al., 2021). Indirect moral development can be done by prohibition, punishment, reward, and supervision (Hawa et al., 2021). Parents have an important role in fostering the morals of their adolescents, as previously explained (Ningsih & Bela, 2021). Parents provide moral guidance to adolescents who use social media by setting an example, providing guidance, teaching about akhlakul kharimah, implementing habituation in the family, and supervising the daily morals of adolescents (Zuhdi et al., 2022).

Pre-research studies that have been conducted by researchers in Pagar Dewa Village, Selebar District, Bengkulu City reveal findings that there are facts about the existence of several adolescents sitting on the porch of the house when the maghrib prayer time arrives, when asked the teenager is accessing social media and if asked to stop playing the cellphone and hurry up to pray by his parents, the child will get angry and speak impolite words, such as saying "ah, just disturbing!" or issuing words with high intonation and it turns out that it happens often, adolescent use social media excessively.

The author also conducts a search of social media accounts owned by adolescents, the results of the search show that the posts shared on their social media accounts are related to the feelings they experience such as confessions about sadness, anger and talking about other people who have problems with them (gossiping or gossiping) even without mentioning the name of the party concerned, which is despicable morals. From the results of observations through preresearch studies, the findings show that parents have provided moral guidance, but there are still some parents who have not maximized their role due to obstacles in the implementation of moral guidance, such as the lack of time parents have to interact as an approach in providing moral guidance, and lack of understanding of information technology which causes not optimal supervision of the use of social media in adolescents. The author argues that the role of parents in moral development is very important to deal with the phenomenon of the widespread use of social media among adolescents which can have an impact on morals.

Previous studies on moral development in adolescents have largely focused on formal educational settings, peer influences, or the general impact of digital media on youth behavior. While some research has explored the negative effects of social media on adolescent morality, such as exposure to cyberbullying, online harassment, or unethical digital behavior, few have thoroughly investigated the proactive role of parents in mitigating these risks and shaping moral character. Furthermore, existing literature often emphasizes the psychological or sociological effects of social media without providing a focused examination of how parental guidance operates in day-to-day interactions, especially within specific local and cultural contexts. There is a lack of empirical data that explores how parents perceive and enact their role in moral education in response to their children's social media use, particularly in rural or semi-urban communities such as those found in Bengkulu City, Indonesia.

This study offers a novel contribution by addressing the specific role of parents as moral agents in the digital era, with a localized focus on Pagar Dewa Village, Bengkulu City. By employing a phenomenological qualitative method, the research captures the lived experiences and strategies of parents in fostering moral character among adolescent social media users, an area that has received limited scholarly attention. The findings illuminate how parents engage in moral education not only through verbal instruction but also through behavioral modeling and value-based guidance tailored to the challenges of digital life. This localized, context-rich approach enhances our understanding of parental influence in non-Western settings and adds depth to the global discourse on character education. The study's insights can inform both academic theory and practical interventions aimed at strengthening family-based moral development in the age of social media.

This study aims to determine the contribution of parents in fostering characterful morals in adolescents who use social media in Pagar Dewa Village, Selebar District, Bengkulu City. The focus of the research discusses (1) The morals of adolescents who use social media; (2) The role of parents in fostering morals in adolescents who use social media; (3) Supporting factors and inhibiting factors in the role of parents in fostering morals in the adolescent who use social media.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1 Research Design

This research uses a qualitative approach, where the qualitative approach emphasizes its analysis of the deductive and inductive inference process and the analysis of the dynamics of relationships and phenomena observed, using scientific logic. This research belongs to the type of phenomenology, phenomenological qualitative research is research that intends to understand the phenomena of what they are experienced by research subjects using descriptive methods.

### 2.2 Research Subject

This research was conducted in Pagar Dewa Village, Selebar Subdistrict, Bengkulu City in 2023. The subjects of this research were adolescents and parents in Pagar Dewa Village, Selebar District.

### 2.3 Data Sources

The research data sources consisted of two types, namely primary and secondary data sources. Primary data are adolescents, and parents in Telaga Dewa Village, Pagar Dewa Village, Selebar Sub-district, Bengkulu City. The secondary sources in this study are books, archives, or documents related to the research to be carried out, namely regarding the role of parents, moral guidance, the use of social media, and adolescents.

### 2.4 Data Collection

The data collection process used three instruments, namely (1) observation; (2) interview; and (3) documentation. The three instruments were used by researchers during the data collection process.

### 2.5 Data Validity Checking

The data validity test in this study uses (1) credibility, which is an internal validity test; (2) transferability, which is external validity; (3) dependability, which is an audit by an independent auditor, or supervisor; (4) conformability, which is the intersubjectivity of researchers in disclosing to the public.

### 2.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this study uses the Milles and Huberman analysis model consisting of (1) data reduction; (2) data display; and (3) conclusion drawing.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Result

#### 3.1.1. Morals of Adolescent Social Media Users

The use of social media for adolescents has a huge impact on morals, because the nature of social media can make users forget time, ignore their daily lives, and be busy in cyberspace, and because social media provides freedom for users to make any post on social media. So such conditions are utilized by adolescents in expressing whatever they think is appropriate.

Based on the results of interviews and observations of social media account posts owned by adolescents, it can be seen that adolescents use social media for various purposes, some adolescents use social media wisely, such as to interact with friends or family who are far away, to find and share information about school assignments and vice versa, there are also some adolescent who use social media wisely.

There are also some adolescent who use social media for other things, such as using social media to search for viral content on YouTube, where the Youtuber uses negative connotations words, there are also those who make Facebook social media a place to pour out their hearts, sadness, anger, and gossip on social media.

### 3.1.2. *The Role of Parents in Developing Morals in Adolescent Social Media Users*

Based on the results of interviews and observations, all parent informants stated that they as parents have provided religious education to adolescents. By instilling the values of Islamic teachings, such as honesty, respect, and worship with the hope that good values sourced from religion will be able to make them positive individuals, able to distinguish between good and bad things in their lives. Parents also make themselves as parents as role models are important because children will easily imitate figures who are always around them, namely parents. All behaviors and actions shown by parents will be an example for the child.

In addition, parents have an important role in the education of their children in shaping behavior. Mothers and fathers are the main growers of moral foundations for their adolescents, including in terms of providing discipline and habituation in everyday life. Parents supervise adolescents' use of social media in various ways, including by providing direct assistance when adolescents access social media and by participating in using the same social media as their adolescent to control or supervise adolescents' activities in cyberspace.

### 3.1.3. *Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of Parents' Role in Moral Development for Adolescent Social Media Users*

Results revealed that there are two supporting and inhibiting factors for parents in fostering the morals of adolescents who use social media. The supporting factors include (1) the school environment; (2) the community environment; (3) parents' understanding of the impact of social media; and (4) parents' understanding of information technology literacy. Adequate understanding by parents of the impact caused by social media can be a supporting factor in implementing moral guidance carried out by parents. Parents will immediately act and protect as early as possible.

Inhibiting factors include (1) there is a wrong view of social media users; (2) lack of time owned by parents; and (3) peer association. The findings reveal that social media not only brings positive impacts, but also negative impacts that cause adolescents to forget about time, be disrespectful, and speak harshly with parents because they are busy with social media when told not to obey, or social media itself is used as a place to pour out feelings, even berate others and make social media a medium to access negative things. Of course, parents do not want these negative impacts experienced by their adolescents.

## 3.2. *Discussion*

The presence of social media hurts its users, such as forgetting about time, neglecting worship, being disrespectful and rude to parents, and the emergence of other despicable morals in adolescents. Responding to these negative impacts requires moral development carried out from the family sphere, namely parents. Parents play a role in moral development, by providing religious education to supervising the use of social media in adolescents. In the implementation of moral development, of course, there are obstacles and supporting factors in the process of creating noble adolescents.

### 3.2.1 *Morals of Adolescent Social Media Users*

The use of social media by adolescents today has a huge impact on the morals or character of adolescents, because of the nature of social media that makes its users addicted, and social media that does not have patent rules, in terms of the language used or words that are inappropriate to say or inappropriate to expose on social media. Adolescents today lack good ethics to fellow friends and even lack ethics to parents.

The morals of some adolescents in Telaga Dewa Village have been affected by the use of social media. The negative use of social media also hurts the morals of some adolescents in the village. Adolescents who like to access viral content on YouTube, show morals and like to speak harshly and disrespectfully because they imitate the words spoken by YouTubers or news presenters on YouTube social media, these adolescents use negative words when interacting with their friends in the neighborhood. In addition, adolescents who make statuses or posts on Facebook, show despicable morals in the form of gossiping behavior (talking bad about others) in the comments column.

Social media in its use has benefits for individuals, including (Utomo & Prayogi, 2021). Social media helps users interact with anyone and anytime through an internet connection, as a means of learning and self-development, as a medium of entertainment, and open employment opportunities (Zubaedi et al., 2021). Some adolescent's use social media to forget time and neglect worship, and some adolescents refuse to help parents when parents ask for help because the teenager is busy accessing social media. In addition, there are also adolescents who, although social media users, do not show despicable morals, both in their daily lives and their second lives as seen from their social media activities. These adolescents use social media well and wisely and are not easily influenced by the information

on social media because the purpose of using social media for them is for positive things and using social media only as much as possible.

One of the methods of indirect moral development is supervision. One of the supervision carried out by parents is related to the supervision of the use of social media. Techno-parenting is interpreted as a strategy to educate and develop children's potential intelligently by positioning parents to be more active, creative, and "literate" in technological developments. Techno Parenting is a series of activities carried out by parents, starting from the smallest to the biggest things in interacting with children communicatively, intensively, and full of openness within the framework of the use and utilization of existing information technology by making technological advances a positive educational tool (Jeffery, 2021).

### 3.2.2 *The Role of Parents in Fostering Morals in Adolescent Social Media Users*

In the family, parents act as the main educators for their children. Ideally, parents are expected to guide, educate, train, and teach children on issues related to personality formation and children's learning activities. Education in the family is a coaching effort made by parents towards children so that they can grow and develop properly. The entire potential of the child can develop, namely the body, mind, and spirit. These three aspects are the targets of education in the family that every parent should pay attention to.

So far, the role of parents has been maximized in carrying out their role in terms of providing advice and exemplary. Adolescent's age is the age of searching for a figure to emulate, so parents try to make themselves a figure worthy of being emulated by their teenage children by always paying attention to their morals as parents. So that parents as much as possible provide examples that are correct in speaking, correct in behavior, and ways of thinking which are shown by being polite, polite, not rude, mutual respect between family members, and mutual assistance.

Parents have provided habituation and discipline to adolescents, giving direction on when to do the tasks given by teachers at school (homework), when to help parents, and when to access social media. The attitude of adolescents using social media needs parental guidance and direction to be able to use it wisely and responsibly without forgetting their obligations as children and as students. However, parents must set limits without acting arrogantly with their adolescents. The role of parents in guarding a child from falling into bad things can be done with parenting known as smart techno parenting, which is a smart parent educating children with wise, positive, effective, constructive, and transformative parenting. Efforts can be made by collaborating technological advances with children's education, technological information literacy, limiting digital usage time, optimizing positive activities, selectively choosing media for children, and monitoring the environment both in cyberspace and in the vicinity.

In addition, the importance of parental supervision of adolescents' use of social media is needed both by assisting when adolescents use social media and by directly engaging with their adolescent in cyberspace will get much better results (Geurts et al., 2022).

In the context of adolescence, parenting patterns are in the interdependent part (adolescent stage). Social media takes on a bigger role because of the online environment that teens can explore (Kneer et al., 2019). If parents have not set the necessary boundaries before using social media, then teens can learn about the online world and mimic the behaviors they see without understanding the potential impact and long-term consequences of these behaviors. In many ways, typical family interactions during this stage (negotiating boundaries and new roles) are the same as in the past when parents were trying to understand new technologies. However, in family interactions (monitoring teen behavior online and offline), the magnitude of the impact of these online decisions and actions can be multiplied by the use of digital media (George & Odgers, 2015).

### 3.2.3 *Supporting Factors and Inhibiting Factors in the Role of Parents in Fostering Morals in Adolescent Social Media Users*

Many social media are spread in today's digital era which makes it easier for humans to access anything. Social media is one of the media that allows users to create their world (Loanas & Stoica, 2014). In this era, social media has become a primary need for most people (Zivkovic et al., 2014). The presence of social media does not look at anyone, children, adolescents, and adults are required to follow the advancement of social media. Various kinds of social media are used as an anchorage for all the complaints of the community.

Supporting factors for the role of parents in fostering morals in adolescents who use social media include (1) support from school institutions to cooperate in providing moral guidance to adolescents; (2) support from the community environment that wants adolescents to be more active and productive by involving them in community activities, such as joint sports; (3) parents' adequate understanding of the impact of the presence of social media, so



that parents do early protection by providing moral guidance to adolescents; (4) parents' understanding of information technology literacy makes it easy for parents to monitor adolescents' activities on social media.

While the inhibiting factors of the role of parents in fostering morals in adolescents who use social media include (1) there is still a view of parents who say that social media is intended for young people. This view causes a lack of maximum supervision of adolescents' activities on social media; (2) parents' lack of time to pay attention and interact with adolescents which causes a lack of supervision of their adolescents' daily morals and supervision when adolescents access social media because some parents are busy working. The jobs that parents have cause the intensity of time to supervise is still not optimal. Some parents who work as farmers or fishermen have little time at home so adolescents do not get full supervision from parents when at home; (3) the association of peers who are very literate with updates on social media, so that adolescents will join in accessing social media.

Inevitably, some parents are not responsive to technology, because they perceive that the presence of social media today is not intended by parents who do not interact much with technological advances like their adolescent. For example, parents who feel that they are stuttering in technology and feel embarrassed if they are seen as parents who are too slang and familiar with social media. This assumption triggers a lack of parental knowledge of social media which can lead to a lack of supervision by parents in cyberspace.

Factors that influence the implementation in fostering morals are the religion of adolescents, adolescent behavior, instincts and instincts of adolescents, passions, adolescent family customs or habits, and finally the environment around adolescents in their daily lives, which is classified into internal factors (from within the individual) and external (from outside).

## 4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

### 4.1 Research Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for parents, educators, and policymakers in addressing the moral challenges faced by adolescents in the era of social media. The significant role of parents in shaping moral character highlights the need for increased parental awareness and involvement in their children's online activities. Parents should be encouraged and equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide consistent moral guidance, serve as ethical role models, and maintain open communication with their children about the responsible use of digital platforms. Educational institutions can also collaborate with families by offering parenting programs or workshops that focus on moral education and digital literacy.

### 4.2 Research Contributions

In terms of academic contribution, this study enriches the body of knowledge in the field of character education, particularly in the context of digital media. By adopting a phenomenological approach, the research provides a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of parents in fostering moral values among adolescents. This contributes not only to theoretical discourse but also offers practical insights that can inform future research and intervention design. The study serves as a foundation for further investigations into effective strategies for moral development, encouraging scholars to explore diverse approaches and broader contexts, including the roles of schools, communities, and digital environments in shaping adolescent character.

## 5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

### 5.1 Research Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research focuses specifically on the moral development of adolescents who use social media, without exploring other dimensions such as emotional, cognitive, or spiritual aspects of adolescent development. Second, the scope of the study is limited to examining the role of parents in fostering moral character, thereby excluding the potential influence of other social agents such as peers, teachers, or religious leaders. Third, the study only identifies supporting and inhibiting factors related to parental efforts in moral education, without assessing the effectiveness or long-term impact of these efforts. These limitations suggest the need for broader and more comprehensive investigations in future studies to gain a more holistic understanding of adolescent moral development in the digital age.

### 5.2 Recommendation for Future Research Direction

Based on these limitations, it is recommended that future researchers expand the scope of their studies by incorporating various moral development strategies or interventions that can actively enhance adolescents' moral

behavior in the context of social media use. Researchers may consider designing and testing specific programs, such as moral education workshops, digital literacy training, or family-based interventions, that can be implemented and evaluated for their impact on adolescents' moral growth. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to involve a wider range of participants and settings to improve the generalizability of the findings. Such future research can provide more practical solutions and contribute more effectively to the development of character education policies and practices in the digital era.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The way teenagers interact with social media significantly influences their moral development. When utilized constructively for learning, engaging in thoughtful discussions, or forming meaningful connections, social media can strengthen ethical values, fostering responsible behavior and personal growth. However, excessive exposure to harmful content, such as cyberbullying, misinformation, and negative influences, can erode moral character, leading to unethical attitudes and behaviors. This demonstrates that social media has both positive and negative impacts, with its effects depending on how it is used. The crucial factor is whether adolescents can harness it for self-improvement or fall into its detrimental aspects. Studies emphasize the critical role of parents in shaping their children's moral values, particularly in the digital age. Parents serve as the primary guides in instilling ethical principles, setting positive examples, and offering consistent support. Their role is not merely supplementary but foundational, as they are the first and most influential educators in a child's life.

The study concludes that parents hold a central and influential role in the moral development of adolescents, especially within the context of their engagement with social media. In an era where digital interaction often shapes young people's worldviews and behaviors, the presence of consistent moral guidance from parents becomes increasingly vital. Parents serve not only as primary educators in the home but also as role models whose behaviors, attitudes, and responses to ethical dilemmas are closely observed and often imitated by their children. Through active involvement, communication, and supervision, parents can instill fundamental values such as respect, honesty, empathy, and responsibility, which are essential in navigating the challenges and moral complexities of the online world.

Moreover, the study highlights that parental contribution extends beyond verbal instruction; it encompasses the modeling of digital behavior, setting boundaries, and creating a home environment that reinforces ethical thinking and critical evaluation of online content. Adolescents who receive moral reinforcement from their parents are better equipped to reflect on their actions, make responsible decisions, and resist negative influences on social media. This emphasizes the need for parents to be digitally literate themselves and to engage proactively in their children's digital lives. Ultimately, empowering parents with knowledge, awareness, and strategies for moral education in the digital age is key to nurturing a generation of socially responsible and ethically grounded youth.

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## Author Contribution Statement

The first author contributed to data collection in the field, the second author contributed to creating the research framework. The authors fully contributed to the implementation of this research.

## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Ethical Approval Statement

The authors declares that this study was conducted in accordance with research ethics principles and has received ethical approval from the author's institution, including respect for participants' autonomy, confidentiality of data, and ensuring their safety and well-being, as outlined in the applicable research ethics guidelines.

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