

The Influence of Social Media on the Moral Degradation of Generation Z at the Balikpapan Islamic Religious College

Salma Hijriah¹, Iskandar Yusuf²

¹Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam (STAI), Balikpapan

²Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam (STAI), Balikpapan

Email : salmahijriah@gmail.com¹, iskandaryusuf6778@gmail.com²

ABSTRACT

Patterns of social contact have been profoundly altered by the quick development of digital technology, particularly in light of Generation Z's extensive use of social media. This study uses students at the Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Balikpapan as a case study to investigate how social media use affects moral degeneration in Generation Z. The study used a quantitative methodology with an associative causal framework. With the aid of SPSS software, data were gathered using a closed-ended questionnaire with a Likert scale, and basic linear regression was used for analysis. With a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05) and a determination coefficient (R^2) of 0.349, the results show a negative and significant link between moral degeneration and social media use. This suggests that the intensity and usage patterns of social media account for 34.9% of the variation in moral degeneration. These findings support the applicability of the theories of social learning, cultivation, and media socialization, which all contend that youth social behavior, values, and perception can be influenced by extensive exposure to digital content. To lessen social media's detrimental effects on Generation Z's moral standards, the study suggests implementing digital literacy initiatives, character education, and social media usage guidelines.

Keywords: Generation Z, moral degradation, social media

INTRODUCTION

People's lifestyles have changed significantly in recent decades due to advances in information and communication technology (ICT). Technology is now essential in many aspects of life, including social interactions, work, and education. Information disclosure makes it possible to access all types of knowledge in our digital age, regardless of time or location constraints. In addition to receiving information, they actively participate in its dissemination through various digital channels, including social media (Sofyana et al., 2023).

Social media is no longer just a means of communication, but has transformed into a digital public space where individuals express themselves, form a personal image, and influence public opinion. Social media is a site where one can create *Stuttgart* personal account and connect with everyone who is a member of the same social media to share information and communicate. (Wila & Astrina, 2025). However, behind these benefits, the excessive use of social media also has negative impacts, such as the spread of false information, digital addiction, increasing consumptive behavior and deteriorating moral values, especially among the younger generation (Aprilistya et al., 2023).

This phenomenon is most evident in Generation Z, those born between 1997 and 2012. This generation grew up in a digital environment from an early age, so they have

high skills in accessing and managing information through the internet.(Arum et al., 2023). They are used to using social media for entertainment, education, social relations, and daily decision-making. The characteristics of Generation Z who are innovative, adaptive, and love instant things also make them very dependent on technology, including in meeting their needs through digital platforms such as *E-commerce* (Aloyia Triska widhia Astuti, 2021).

In their daily activities, Generation Z spends quite a significant amount of time on social media. The average duration of use ranges from 6 to 7 hours per day, and 44% of them check social media almost every hour. Platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok are the top choices. Apart from being a means of communicating and getting information, social media is also used to build self-existence through the search for popularity, the number of *Followers* and the collection *Like* on every upload. This high intensity of use has the potential to affect the development of their social mindset, values and behaviors (Asyifa Nurul Liah et al., 2023).

In this context, there are concerns about moral degradation among Generation Z. Many of them have begun to show a decrease in social concern, a consumptive lifestyle, a tendency to postpone responsibility and a disregard for social norms. Social media content that is not always positive, such as hedonistic lifestyles, verbal violence, or unverified information, can form a fragile and ethically unstable character (Rahmawati & Kusrina, 2025).

Morality is the teaching of right and wrong human behavior that has a spiritual connection with norms derived from religion, culture, or scientific thought. Moral values are an important basis for decision-making, attitude control, and action. Meanwhile, relegation can be interpreted as a loss of rank or status. In this context, moral degradation refers to the deterioration of individual behavior due to a decline in the understanding of responsibilities and ethical values embraced in society. This decline reflects the declining standards of humanity in attitudes and actions that are seen in various aspects of social life, especially among the younger generation (Salsabila et al., 2024).

This study focused on the influence of social media (variable X) on the moral degradation of Generation Z (variable Y), taking into account various indicators related to the frequency and purpose of social media use. Variable X indicators include the intensity of social media use in a day, duration, and the purpose of its use, such as seeking educational information, following accounts that spread important content, interacting through comments, sharing personal stories, and influencing decision-making, including in product purchases and opinion formation. Meanwhile, the indicator of variable Y, namely moral degradation, includes the tendency to have difficulty controlling emotions when communicating, decreased respect for others, consumptive behavior for the sake of digital existence, following trends without consideration, ignoring rules, limitations in expressing oneself due to social pressure, habit of delaying responsibility, avoidance of consequences for mistakes, individualistic attitude, and lack of concern for social issues in the surrounding environment.

Thus, the main purpose of this study is to investigate how the use of social media (variable X) affects the decline in morale of Generation Z (variable Y), especially in the Islamic Religious College of Balikpapan. It is anticipated that this study will present an empirical picture of how much social media influences the moral standards of young people in their daily social interactions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical Studies

Social Media

Social media is an internet-based digital platform that allows users to connect, interact, and share content in various formats. In contrast to traditional media, social media is participatory and interactive, where each individual is not only a consumer of information but also a producer of content (Guntoro et al., 2022).

Moral degradation

Moral degradation is a condition of declining individual awareness of ethical values, social norms, and moral responsibility. This is reflected in deviant behaviors, such as a lack of empathy, individualistic tendencies, consumptive tendencies, to aggressive and immoral behavior. Moral degradation occurs when a person loses the ability to judge right and wrong based on the prevailing value principles. (Tranggono et al., 2023).

Generation Z

Generation Z is a group of individuals born between 1997–2012. They are known as digital natives because since childhood they have been familiar with the internet, social media, and other digital technologies (Arum et al., 2023). Their characteristics of being adaptive, boring and more expressive make this generation very active in cyberspace, but also vulnerable to the influence of the digital environment.

B. Relevant Theories

Social Learning Theory

This theory explains that individuals can learn behavior through observation of others, without having to experience it directly. In the context of social media, Generation Z can imitate the lifestyle, behavior, and even moral values of influencers or digital figures just by looking at their content (Nurul Wahyuni & Wahidah Fitriani, 2022).

Cultivation Theory

As stated by Gerbner, it states that long-term exposure to media can shape users' perceptions of social reality. Generation Z who constantly see content that normalizes consumptive lifestyles or deviant behaviors may begin to consider it part of the social norm (Communications et al., 2025).

Media Socialization Theory

Social media is acting as a new socialization agent that replaces some of the roles of families, schools, and other traditional institutions. The values and norms acquired through social media can significantly affect the character and outlook of adolescents (Communications et al., 2025).

C. Previous Research

The following table presents a summary of some of the previous studies relevant to this topic, as follows:

Table 1. Previous Research

Yes	Researchers	Research Focus	Method	Relevant Results
1	Asyifa Nurul Liah et al., (2023)	The influence of social media on the moral degradation of Gen Z	Qualitative	Gen Z tends to be affected by negative content and experience a decline in morale
2	Wila & Astrina, (2025)	The influence of technology and education on adolescent morale	Quantitative	Technology affects moral degradation, but character education can suppress its impact
3	Tranggono et al., (2023)	The influence of globalization & education on morality	Qualitative	Morality is declining due to digital influence, the role of schools and families is crucial
4	Firdaus et al., (2025)	The influence of gadgets on the morale of Gen Z in Malang	Quantitative (R ² = 0.112)	There is a significant influence of gadgets on the decline of social attitudes
5	Sofyana et al., (2023)	Moral decadence in the digital age	<i>Literature review</i>	All groups are affected by moral degradation; Religion-based solutions emphasized
6	Akhtar, (2024)	Social media & adolescent moral development	<i>Review Literature</i>	Social media has both positive and negative influences; The Importance of Literacy & Control

D. Research Gaps

Based on previous studies, the majority of research is still qualitative or limited-scale, and not many have measured the direct effect of social media use on moral degradation with a quantitative statistical approach. This research is here to fill this gap with a quantitative approach that objectively assesses the extent to which social media affects the moral degradation of Generation Z, especially in the student environment of the Balikpapan Islamic Religious College.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a quantitative method with a causal associative approach, which aims to find out the extent of the influence between independent variables (social media use) and dependent variables (moral degradation of Generation Z). Quantitative research is an investigation of social problems based on theoretical testing, which consists of variables measured in the form of numbers and analyzed using statistical procedures, to determine whether the predictive generalization of the theory is acceptable or not. (Ph.D. Ummul Aiman et al., 2022). The quantitative method was chosen because it is able to provide objective, measurable, and statistically analyzable results.

A closed questionnaire was used as a data collection method, and was given to respondents—Gen Z students at the Balikpapan Islamic Religious College. The indicators of each variable, which are then operationalized as statements and assessed using the Likert scale, serve as the basis of the research instrument. Sugiyono claims that the Likert scale is used to measure the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of people or groups regarding the social phenomena being studied (Rahman, 2022). The researcher can quantitatively measure respondents' attitudes, views, and perceptions of each statement using the Likert scale.

The statements in the questionnaire variable X (social media use) include aspects of frequency of use, daily duration, purpose of use (such as for educational, entertainment, and social interaction information), and their influence on consumptive behavior and opinion formation. Meanwhile, statements on variable Y (moral degradation) were designed to measure respondents' behaviors related to emotional control, adherence to social norms, responsibility, consumptive lifestyle, social empathy, and individualistic attitudes. With this approach, the research is expected to provide an accurate picture of the extent of use

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social media is an internet-based digital platform that facilitates social interaction through the use of web technology, which transforms one-way communication into interactive dialogue. In contrast to traditional media that rely on print and broadcast media, social media allows active participation from users by providing space for contributions, open feedback, comments, and the dissemination of information in real-time and without geographical restrictions (Guntoro et al., 2022).

On the other hand, moral degradation can be understood as a symptom of a decline in the quality of cultural values reflected in the behavior of individuals or groups, which are no longer in harmony with the norms, customs, and customs that prevail in a particular society. This deviation indicates a shift in value orientation, where actions that were previously considered inappropriate or contrary to ethics begin to become commonplace or socially accepted (Tranggono et al., 2023).

In the context of Generation Z, which is the generation that uses social media the most, there are concerns that exposure to a wide range of digital content can drive changes in values and behaviors that lead to moral degradation. This is supported by the findings of Laka (2024) which states that generation Z in Indonesia faces various

challenges and problems, and tends to be easily influenced by negative things that come from the internet and social media. Therefore, it is important to take a deeper look at how social media influences the character and behavior of this generation (Wandira et al., 2024)

One approach to understanding this phenomenon is through the theory of media socialization, which views the media as a new socialization agent. Social media, in this case, plays a role in replacing part of the functions of family and school in shaping the views and behaviors of the younger generation. In an open digital environment, the values transmitted do not always conform to local cultural norms, allowing for value distortion (Aldy & Syukur Kholil, 2025)

In addition, the theory of social learning by Albert Bandura, emphasizes that individuals learn behavior through the process of observation (*observational learning*). Bandura's experiments showed that children can mimic behavior only through observation, without direct experience. In this context, Generation Z who constantly witness deviant or non-normative behavior through social media has the potential to imitate it in real life, which can accelerate moral degradation (Nurul Wahyuni & Wahidah Fitriani, 2022).

Furthermore, cultivation theory developed by George Gerbner explains that long-term exposure to media can shape an individual's perception of social reality. When Gen Z is constantly looking at content such as consumptive lifestyles, extreme beauty standards, or aggressive behavior on social media, they may start to perceive it as something natural. As a result, traditional moral values that were previously upheld in society can be displaced by new values shaped by digital culture (Aldy & Syukur Kholil, 2025).

This study aims to determine the influence of social media use on the moral degradation of Generation Z. Based on the results of simple linear regression analysis using the help of the SPSS program, the following outputs were obtained:

This means that when there is no use of social media ($X = 0$), the moral degradation value is predicted to be 53.235. The value of a negative regression coefficient indicates that the higher the use of social media, the higher the moral degradation.

The t-test was conducted to find out whether the use of social media has a significant effect on the moral degradation of generation Z.

Based on the results of the t-test, a significance value (*Sig.*) of $0.000 < 0.05$ and a calculated t-value of -5.072, which is in absolute terms greater than the t-value of the table (2.011). Thus, H_0 is rejected and H_a is accepted, which means that the use of social media has a significant effect on the moral degradation of Generation Z.

The determination coefficient is used to find out how much an independent variable (social media use) affects a dependent variable (moral degradation).

Based on the *Model Summary* output, the R Square *value* was obtained as 0.349. This means that 34.9% of the variation in Generation Z's moral degradation can be explained by social media use variables, while the remaining 65.1% is influenced by other variables not studied in the study, such as family environment, socializing, or education.

It can be seen that the regression coefficient value of -0.751 indicates the direction of a negative relationship, which means that the higher the use of social media, the lower the moral value is, or in other words, the level of moral degradation increases. This is in line with concerns about the influence of social media in shaping the character of the younger generation.

These findings are reinforced by the Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura, which states that individuals can imitate the behavior they observe in the surrounding environment, including from the media. Negative content such as hedonistic lifestyles, verbal violence, or deviant behavior spread on social media can be easily imitated by the younger generation who are still in search of identity.

In addition, Media Socialization Theory explains that social media has become a new socialization agent that replaces some of the functions of the family and school in shaping social values and norms. Generation Z who are very active in using social media are more vulnerable to being influenced by global values that are not necessarily in accordance with local culture.

This result can also be explained through the Cultivation Theory by George Gerbner, which states that long-term exposure to the media can shape one's perception of reality. Generation Z who constantly see content that deviates from traditional moral values may start to perceive it as something natural.

Thus, it can be concluded that the use of social media has a real influence on moral degradation, and it is important to improve digital literacy and moral education for the younger generation.

The results of this study are consistent with various previous studies that show that excessive use of social media can contribute to changes in behavior and value orientation in adolescents. Generation Z who are constantly connected to the internet have extensive access to a wide range of information, but do not yet fully have the ability to filter and evaluate the content they consume. As a result, the negative values that are constantly seen and accessed through social media tend to influence the way this generation thinks and acts.

This condition shows the importance of the role of mentoring from parents, teachers, and the social environment in shaping the character and morality of adolescents. Interventions through digital-based character education, strengthening local religious and cultural values, as well as limiting the time and type of social media access can be relevant strategies in minimizing the negative impact of social media on the morale of the younger generation.

The results of this research are also material for reflection for policymakers to design policies that regulate digital content and educate the public, especially the younger generation, in the healthy and responsible use of social media.

CONCLUSION

The use of social media has a major impact on the fall of the moral values of the younger generation, according to the findings of a study conducted at the Islamic Religious College of Balikpapan on the relationship between social media use and the moral degradation of Generation Z. This study shows that the likelihood of moral

deterioration increases with the frequency and intensity of social media use. There is a statistically significant correlation between social media use and moral degradation, as shown by the results of a simple linear regression analysis, where the negative regression coefficient (-0.751) and the t-test result in a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05)

The percentage of the influence of social media use on moral degradation was 34.9% (R Square = 0.349), showing that although social media makes a considerable contribution, there are other factors such as family environment, education, and association that also affect the morale of the younger generation. Therefore, social media cannot be considered the only factor causing moral degradation, but it is one of the important elements that need to be controlled wisely.

In theory, this finding is in line with the social learning theory of Albert Bandura, which states that individuals can imitate the behavior they observe, including from social media. Widespread negative content, such as hedonistic lifestyles, verbal violence, and deviant norms, are easily imitated by the younger generation who are still in the process of finding their identity. The theory of media socialization is also relevant to explain the role of social media as a new socialization agent that slowly replaces the value education function of the family and school. Through the lens of cultivation theory by George Gerbner, it is explained that long-term exposure to distorted digital content can form erroneous social perceptions and shift traditional moral values in society.

This research also underlines the importance of the role of all parties, including parents, educational institutions, community leaders, and the government, in assisting the use of social media by the younger generation. Strategic steps are needed such as increasing digital literacy, character education based on local culture and religion, and more selective regulation of digital content so that social media can be used positively and not become a threat to the moral development of future generations.

Overall, the study confirms that while social media offers many conveniences and benefits, its uncontrolled use and lack of strong moral awareness can contribute to a decline in moral quality. Therefore, awareness of the healthy, ethical, and responsible use of social media needs to be instilled from an early age as part of the formation of the character of the young generation who are civilized and have integrity.

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