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Digital ethics education for responsible social media use among junior high school students at MTs Al Furqan: A participatory community service program

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Abstract

Digital ethics education is increasingly needed as adolescents use social media for communication, entertainment, and learning while also facing risks related to hoaxes, cyberbullying, privacy leakage, and impolite online interaction. This article reports a participatory community service program at MTs Al Furqan aimed at strengthening students' knowledge and awareness of responsible social media use. The program involved 87 seventh- and eighth-grade students in 2025. The activities consisted of partner needs identification, an interactive seminar, guided discussion, roleplay simulation, and pretest–posttest evaluation. The pretest showed an average score of 42.3%, indicating limited initial understanding, especially in preventive actions against social media risks (13.7%). After the program, the average posttest score increased to 83.7%, with the highest achievements in hoax response (100%), recognizing shareable information (90.8%), and understanding social media risks (89.6%). These findings indicate that participatory digital ethics education can strengthen students' digital literacy, online safety awareness, and practical readiness to respond to hoaxes, cyberbullying, and privacy risks.

Keywords: Digital Ethics, Social Media Literacy, Digital Citizenship, Junior High School Students, Community Service Program.

Abstrak

Pendidikan etika digital semakin diperlukan karena remaja menggunakan media sosial untuk komunikasi, hiburan, dan pembelajaran, tetapi pada saat yang sama menghadapi risiko hoaks, perundungan siber, kebocoran privasi, dan interaksi daring yang kurang santun. Artikel ini melaporkan program pengabdian kepada masyarakat berbasis partisipatif di MTs Al Furqan yang bertujuan memperkuat pengetahuan dan kesadaran siswa mengenai penggunaan media sosial yang bertanggung jawab. Kegiatan ini melibatkan 87 siswa kelas VII dan VIII pada tahun 2025. Tahapan kegiatan meliputi identifikasi kebutuhan mitra, seminar interaktif, diskusi terarah, simulasi/roleplay, serta evaluasi pretest–posttest. Hasil pretest menunjukkan skor rata-rata 42,3%, yang mengindikasikan pemahaman awal siswa masih terbatas, terutama pada aspek tindakan pencegahan risiko media sosial (13,7%). Setelah kegiatan, skor rata-rata posttest meningkat menjadi 83,7%, dengan capaian tertinggi pada kemampuan menghadapi hoaks (100%), mengenali informasi yang layak dibagikan (90,8%), dan memahami risiko media sosial (89,6%). Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan etika digital berbasis partisipatif dapat memperkuat literasi digital, kesadaran keamanan daring, dan kesiapan praktis siswa dalam menghadapi hoaks, perundungan siber, serta risiko privasi.

Kata Kunci: Etika Digital, Literasi Media Sosial, Kewargaan Digital, Siswa SMP/MTs, Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat.

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1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital connectivity has made social media a routine part of adolescents' everyday lives. In Indonesia, internet adoption continues to grow at a national scale: APJII reported 221.56 million internet users in 2024, while DataReportal recorded 212 million internet users and 143 million social media user identities at the beginning of 2025 (APJII, 2024; DataReportal, 2025). Indonesian adolescent research also shows that online participation produces both benefits and risks, including learning, creative participation, social relations, entertainment, content risk, contact risk, and conduct risk (Luthfia et al., 2019). This context shows that students are growing up in an environment where learning, entertainment, friendship, and identity expression are increasingly mediated through digital platforms. Therefore, digital literacy education at school age can no longer be limited to technical ability to operate devices; it must also include ethical judgment, information evaluation, privacy awareness, and respectful participation in online spaces (Livingstone & Helsper, 2010).

For early adolescents, social media provides opportunities to access information, express creativity, and maintain peer relationships. At the same time, it exposes students to misinformation, cyberbullying, excessive screen use, personal data disclosure, and harmful forms of online communication. Privacy is especially sensitive at this age because students begin to negotiate peer recognition, self-expression, and personal boundaries in digital spaces (Santer et al., 2023). Cyberbullying studies further show that weak self-control, poor parent-child communication, low netiquette awareness, and weak digital citizenship behavior are associated with harmful online interaction among adolescents (Malihah & Alfiasari, 2018; Park et al., 2014; Yuniawati et al., 2024). Studies on children's internet use emphasize that online opportunities and online risks should be understood together, because protection-oriented approaches alone may ignore children's need to develop agency and participation in digital environments (Livingstone et al., 2018; Livingstone & Third, 2017; Staksrud & Livingstone, 2009). In this sense, students need guided learning experiences that help them recognize risks without discouraging productive and creative uses of social media.

Digital ethics education is closely related to digital literacy and digital citizenship. Digital citizenship has been conceptualized not only as safe technology use but also as ethical participation, critical awareness, political and civic engagement, and responsible interaction in networked environments (Choi, 2016; Choi et al., 2017; Kim & Choi, 2018). The UNESCO digital literacy framework places information and data literacy, communication, collaboration, safety, and problem-solving as important dimensions of citizens' participation in a digital society (Law et al., 2018). Hobbs (2010) similarly argues that digital and media literacy should help learners access, analyze, create, reflect, and act. Meanwhile, youth digital citizenship research shows that online respect and civic engagement are related to lower online harassment and more helpful bystander behavior (Jones & Mitchell, 2016). These perspectives provide a relevant foundation for community service programs that do not merely deliver information but also train students to make responsible decisions in real situations.

Misinformation and hoaxes are also important reasons for strengthening digital ethics education in schools. Research on misinformation indicates that students' ability to evaluate claims is influenced by media literacy learning, reasoning, corroboration, and attention to accuracy before sharing content (Guess et al., 2020; Kahne & Bowyer, 2017; Nygren & Guath, 2022; Pennycook & Rand, 2019; Pennycook et al., 2021). For this reason, a responsible social media program should include practical exercises that train students to pause, verify sources, compare information, and avoid forwarding doubtful content only because it is viral or emotionally appealing.

MTs Al Furqan, as the partner institution in this community service program, serves junior high school students who are in the early adolescent stage. Initial communication with the school and observation during the opening discussion indicated that students were familiar with social media and frequently encountered issues related to online games, viral content, negative comments, and the difficulty of distinguishing accurate information from hoaxes. The preliminary pretest also confirmed this need: before the program, the average score was only 42.3%, and the lowest indicators were students' understanding of preventive actions against social media risks (13.7%) and understanding of social media dangers (18.3%). These data show that students did not simply need general advice to "use social media wisely"; they needed practical and contextual digital ethics education.

Previous community service activities on social media ethics have often focused on socialization or one-way awareness raising. However, school-based digital ethics programs for early adolescents require a more participatory design that allows students to discuss real experiences, practice responding to risky online situations, and reflect on the consequences of their digital behavior. In the Indonesian community service context, Maulani et al. (2022) showed that digital training becomes more operational when explanation, discussion, and practice are combined, while Maulani et al. (2023) emphasized digital literacy as a foundation for productive digital participation. Research on digitalization among Generation Z also indicates that digital competence should be directed not only toward access and usage but also toward insight, creativity, and responsible opportunity development (Soni et al., 2024). Therefore, the gap addressed by this program lies in the integration of digital ethics content, participatory learning, roleplay-based practice, and pretest-posttest evaluation in one community service model.

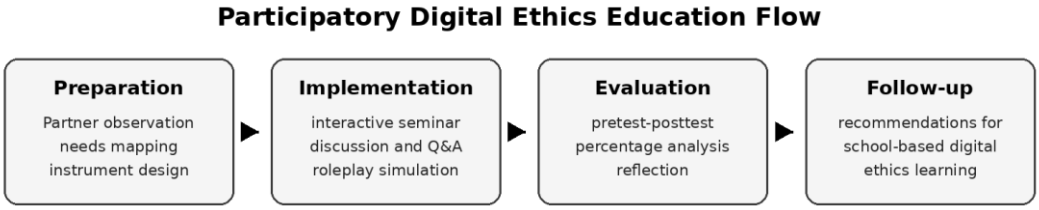
Based on this background, this community service program aimed to strengthen junior high school students' knowledge and awareness of responsible social media use through participatory digital ethics education. More specifically, the program sought to improve students' understanding of social media benefits and risks, privacy protection, appropriate sharing behavior, and practical strategies for responding to hoaxes and harmful online interactions.

2. Method

This community service program used a participatory and interactive approach. The approach was selected because digital ethics is not only a matter of knowledge transfer,

but also a matter of practice, reflection, and decision-making in social situations. The design was aligned with digital and media literacy education, which encourages learners to analyze media messages, reflect on their own media use, and act responsibly in digital environments (Hobbs, 2010; Law et al., 2018). Roleplay and simulation were also used to support experiential learning, in which students learn through concrete experience, reflection, and application (Kolb, 1984).

The activity was conducted at MTs Al Furqan in 2025. The participants were 87 students from grades VII and VIII, representing early adolescents, generally aged around 12–14 years. The participants were selected as the target group because they were active users or potential active users of social media and were at an age where peer interaction, identity formation, and online communication begin to intensify. The activity was implemented in one face-to-face community service session with four main stages: preparation, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up.



Source: Community service design, 2025

Figure 1. Flow of the participatory digital ethics education program

1. Preparation stage. The preparation stage included coordination with the partner school, identification of students' learning needs, preparation of presentation materials, development of short videos and infographics, and preparation of the pretest–posttest instrument. The materials focused on five topics: positive use of social media, hoaxes and misinformation, cyberbullying, privacy and personal data protection, and polite online communication.
2. Implementation stage. The implementation stage consisted of three learning activities. First, an interactive seminar introduced the benefits and risks of social media through examples that were familiar to students. Second, a guided discussion and Q&A session allowed students to share experiences related to online games, viral videos, negative comments, and confusing information. Third, roleplay simulations were conducted in small groups so students could practice responding to hoaxes, protecting account privacy, and using respectful language in online interaction.
3. Evaluation stage. Evaluation was conducted using a pretest before the learning session and a posttest after the session. The same six indicator-based items were used in both tests to measure students' understanding of responsible social media use. The indicators covered: answering all questions correctly, understanding the benefits of social media, understanding social media risks, understanding preventive actions, recognizing information that may be shared, and knowing how to deal with hoaxes. To maintain content validity and readability, the items were mapped to the activity objectives and reviewed for clarity by the implementation

team together with the partner representative before being used with students. The instrument was intended as a practical evaluation tool for community service, not as a standardized psychometric scale.

4. Data analysis. The pretest and posttest data were analyzed descriptively using frequency, percentage, average score, and percentage-point increase. The analysis focused on short-term changes in knowledge and awareness after the intervention. Because this was a community service program rather than an experimental study, the results are interpreted as evidence of immediate learning outcomes and program usefulness, not as causal proof of long-term behavioral change.

3. Results

Implementation of The Activity

The activity was implemented according to the planned stages and received active participation from students. During the seminar session, students were introduced to the constructive use of social media for learning, communication, creativity, and self-development. The session also discussed risks that are commonly encountered by adolescents, including hoaxes, cyberbullying, privacy leakage, excessive use, and negative comments. The use of concrete examples made the discussion easier for students to connect with their daily digital experiences.

Figure 2. Interactive Seminar and Student Engagement in Digital Ethics Education
Source: Community service documentation, 2025

The discussion and Q&A session showed that students were not passive recipients of information. They raised questions related to online gaming habits, viral content, negative comments, account privacy, and ways to distinguish valid information from fake news. This discussion helped the team identify that students' problems were not only technical but also ethical and social: they needed to understand what should be shared, how to respond to harmful content, and how to communicate respectfully in digital spaces.

In the simulation stage, students practiced specific responses to online situations. The activities included identifying suspicious information, discussing whether certain

content should be shared, choosing appropriate responses to negative comments, and reviewing simple privacy protection steps. The roleplay format encouraged students to move from knowing the rule to practicing a response. This practical orientation was important because responsible social media use requires judgment in context, not only memorization of digital safety advice.

Pretest and Posttest Results

The pretest and posttest results show a clear increase in students' understanding after the participatory digital ethics education program. The average score increased from 42.3% in the pretest to 83.7% in the posttest, representing a 41.4 percentage-point improvement. The detailed results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of pretest and posttest analysis

No	Indicator	Pretest (%)	Posttest (%)	Increase
1	Students who answered all questions correctly	5 students (5.7%)	58 students (66.7%)	+61.0
2	Students who understood the benefits of social media	20 students (22.9%)	63 students (72.4%)	+49.5
3	Students who understood the risks of social media	16 students (18.3%)	78 students (89.6%)	+71.3
4	Students who understood preventive actions against social media risks	12 students (13.7%)	72 students (82.75%)	+69.05
5	Students who knew what information can be shared on social media	26 students (29.8%)	79 students (90.8%)	+61.0
6	Students who knew how to deal with hoaxes	31 students (35.7%)	87 students (100%)	+64.3
	Average score	42.3%	83.7%	+41.4

Source: Community service results, 2025

The largest increase appeared in students' understanding of social media risks, which rose from 18.3% to 89.6% (+71.3 percentage points), followed by preventive actions against social media risks, which increased from 13.7% to 82.75% (+69.05 percentage points). These two indicators were important because the pretest showed that students were least prepared to recognize and prevent harmful online situations. After the intervention, most students were able to identify risks and explain simple preventive actions, such as not sharing personal data carelessly, checking information before forwarding it, and responding to harmful interactions appropriately.

The posttest also showed a strong increase in students' knowledge of how to deal with hoaxes, from 35.7% to 100%. This result suggests that concrete examples and scenario-based discussion helped students understand practical steps such as checking the source, comparing information with trusted references, avoiding emotional reposting, and asking teachers or parents when information is doubtful. The indicator on information that may be shared also improved from 29.8% to 90.8%, indicating that students became more aware that not all content is appropriate for public circulation.

Although the overall increase was substantial, the indicator on understanding the benefits of social media reached 72.4%, lower than several other posttest indicators. This result indicates that future programs should not focus only on avoiding risks but should also strengthen students' ability to use social media productively for learning, creativity, collaboration, and positive self-expression.

Changes In Awareness and Practical Readiness

Beyond the numerical increase, the activity produced observable changes in students' responses during discussion and simulation. Before the main session, students tended to mention social media mainly as a place for entertainment, games, and watching viral content. After the seminar, discussion, and roleplay, students were able to mention more specific ethical considerations, including the need to avoid hate speech, protect personal information, verify information before sharing, and use polite language in online interaction. These changes show that the program strengthened not only knowledge but also awareness of responsible digital behavior.

Figure 3. Student Participation in Roleplay and Evaluation Activities
Source: Community service documentation, 2025

The partner school benefited from the activity through the availability of a simple model for digital ethics education that can be repeated in class guidance, student orientation, or school literacy activities. The main supporting factor was students' familiarity with the topic, which made them willing to share experiences. The main challenge was the limited duration of the activity; therefore, the follow-up recommendation is to integrate digital ethics topics into recurring school-based literacy and character education programs.

Effectiveness of Participatory Digital Ethics Education

The findings indicate that participatory digital ethics education can produce immediate improvement in students' understanding of responsible social media use. The increase from 42.3% to 83.7% suggests that students' limited initial understanding was not caused by lack of interest, but by the absence of structured and contextual learning opportunities. This is consistent with digital literacy frameworks that define literacy as a combination of knowledge, critical evaluation, communication, safety, and problem-

solving skills rather than mere access to technology (Hobbs, 2010; Law et al., 2018). The result also supports the digital citizenship perspective, which views students as active digital participants who need ethical reasoning, communicative responsibility, and civic awareness, not only technical competence (Choi, 2016; Choi et al., 2017; Kim & Choi, 2018).

The strongest improvements were found in understanding online risks, preventive actions, and hoax response. This pattern is important because adolescents often encounter information in fast-moving social media environments where emotional reactions and peer influence can shape sharing behavior. Research on media literacy and misinformation shows that educational exposure can improve people's discernment between reliable and false information, and that media literacy learning opportunities can support more accurate evaluation of online claims (Guess et al., 2020; Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). The posttest achievement of 100% in hoax response is also consistent with studies showing that accuracy orientation, cognitive reflection, and corroboration activities can reduce vulnerability to false or misleading information (Nygren & Guath, 2022; Pennycook & Rand, 2019; Pennycook et al., 2021). In this program, hoax-related content was not taught as abstract theory; it was practiced through scenarios that asked students what they would do before sharing or believing information.

The roleplay and discussion components also support the interpretation that digital ethics education should be experiential. Students were invited to analyze situations, negotiate responses with peers, and reflect on the consequences of online behavior. This aligns with experiential learning, where understanding develops through concrete experience and reflection (Kolb, 1984). It also corresponds with youth digital citizenship research, which highlights online respect and helpful bystander behavior as important indicators of responsible participation in digital spaces (Jones & Mitchell, 2016). The increase in preventive-action understanding from 13.7% to 82.75% suggests that students benefited from practicing netiquette and safety decisions, a finding that is consistent with studies linking netiquette and digital citizenship behavior to lower cyberbullying tendencies (Park et al., 2014; Yuniawati et al., 2024).

The program's results also support the argument that protection and empowerment should be balanced. A risk-only approach can make students afraid of digital technology, whereas a purely opportunity-based approach may ignore real harms. The findings show that students need both: awareness of risks such as hoaxes, cyberbullying, and privacy leakage, and guidance to use social media for learning, creativity, and positive communication. This balanced orientation is in line with studies of children's internet use that emphasize the relationship between online opportunities, risks, rights, and youth agency (Livingstone & Helsper, 2010; Livingstone et al., 2018; Livingstone & Third, 2017; Staksrud & Livingstone, 2009). It is also consistent with Indonesian evidence showing that adolescent online experiences involve both educational opportunities and online risks (Luthfia et al., 2019). In this sense, digital ethics education should not only prevent harm but also help students transform social media into a productive, creative, and responsible learning space, as suggested by

local studies on digital literacy and digitalization among youth (Maulani et al., 2023; Soni et al., 2024).

The improvement in students' ability to recognize what information can be shared, from 29.8% to 90.8%, is particularly important because privacy decisions among early adolescents are rarely simple. They often involve a trade-off between belonging to peer groups and protecting personal boundaries (Santer et al., 2023). Therefore, digital ethics education should teach students to identify sensitive data, understand the consequences of screenshots and reposting, and build self-control before responding to provocative content. This emphasis is relevant to Indonesian adolescent cyberbullying findings, which underline the role of self-control, communication, and awareness in reducing harmful online behavior (Malihah & Alfiasari, 2018; Yuniawati et al., 2024).

From a community service perspective, the contribution of this program lies in its partner-based and participatory design. The activity was developed from the students' real problems at MTs Al Furqan, strengthened by pretest evidence, and implemented through methods that allowed students to speak, ask, practice, and reflect. This makes the program more context-sensitive than a one-way socialization model. The design is also consistent with community service practices that combine explanation, discussion, and practice so participants can immediately apply digital knowledge in their own context (Maulani et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the results should be interpreted with caution. The evaluation measured immediate pretest-posttest changes in one school and did not include a control group or delayed posttest. Therefore, future community service or applied research should examine whether students' responsible digital behavior is sustained over time and whether similar programs are effective in different school contexts.

4. Conclusion

This participatory community service program at MTs Al Furqan improved students' knowledge and awareness of responsible social media use. The average score increased from 42.3% in the pretest to 83.7% in the posttest, with strong gains in understanding social media risks, preventive actions, shareable information, and hoax response. These findings indicate that interactive seminars, guided discussion, and roleplay simulations can make digital ethics education more practical and meaningful for junior high school students. For students, the program strengthened awareness of privacy, respectful communication, and information verification. For educators and schools, the program provides a simple model that can be integrated into recurring digital literacy, guidance, and character education activities. Future programs should include longer mentoring, delayed evaluation, and behavioral indicators to determine whether students' responsible social media practices are sustained beyond the activity.

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