

Scientific-theoretical foundations of the negative impact of social networks on the moral and ethical upbringing of youth

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to examine the impact of social networks on the moral and ethical development of young people in the era of globalization. It explores how social media platforms serve not only as tools for communication and information exchange but also as powerful agents of influence shaping young individuals' values, attitudes, and perceptions

Methodology/approach: The article adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, drawing on literature analysis, case studies, and prior empirical findings on social media usage among youth. The study also maps the historical development of social networks, tracing their evolution from traditional offline communities to the present-day digital environment.

Results/findings: Findings reveal that social networks play a dual role in youth education and character building. While they provide opportunities for knowledge sharing, cultural exchange, and promotion of spiritual and national values, they also expose youth to misinformation, cyberbullying, harmful content, and value distortion. The research identifies critical phases where social networks significantly influence moral development, highlighting the risks of unfiltered exposure to digital platforms

Conclusions: Social networks are shaping the ethics and behavior of younger generations more profoundly than traditional institutions. Proper guidance, digital literacy programs, and value-based content creation are necessary to harness social media's benefits while mitigating its negative effects.

Limitations: The study relies on secondary data and literature-based analysis, lacking primary empirical data from large-scale youth surveys.

Contribution: This research provides scientific recommendations for policymakers, educators, and parents on fostering positive digital environments that strengthen ethical, spiritual, and national values among youth.

Keywords: *Digital Literacy, Globalization, Moral Development, Social Media, Youth Education*

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1. Introduction

Globalization has become a dominant force shaping the contemporary world, transforming political, economic, social, and cultural life. Its impact extends into people's daily activities, reshaping values, social interactions, and access to information. One of the most profound effects of globalization is the rapid spread of information and communication technologies, which have become powerful tools to influence the minds and hearts of humanity. These technologies are increasingly used by certain groups

with defined agendas to conduct propaganda, advocacy, and activities aimed at influencing public opinion and behavior (Baxtiyarovich, 2023; Butler, 2024). Young people, as the most dynamic and impressionable demographic, are particularly affected. Various technological tools have been specifically developed to target youth, not only to entertain or inform but also to shape their values and worldview. Among these tools, social networks occupy a unique and unparalleled position. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter have become central to the everyday lives of young people, offering instant connectivity and access to vast amounts of information. However, these same platforms are also used to disseminate misinformation, harmful ideologies, and morally questionable content that can erode traditional values and ethical standards (Dhiman, 2023; Selnes, 2024).

Understanding the multifaceted effects of social networks on young people's moral and ethical upbringing has thus become an urgent scientific and theoretical task. At the current stage of our country's development, the risks posed by unfiltered social media exposure have increased significantly. Many young users lack critical thinking and digital literacy skills, making them vulnerable to false narratives, slander, cyberbullying, and unethical online behavior. Such exposure not only distorts truth and morality but also weakens their connection to national identity, cultural roots, and spiritual heritage (Oguine et al., 2025; Robards, Goring, & Hendry, 2025). Today, nearly all young people are active users of social networks. These platforms offer many benefits, including access to educational resources, opportunities for cultural exchange, and spaces for self-expression. They can be valuable tools for sharing knowledge, promoting national achievements, and presenting a nation's image, culture, spirituality, and traditions to the global community. Yet, without proper guidance, these same platforms can become channels for moral degradation, spreading harmful content faster than traditional forms of regulation or education can counteract it (Ashraf et al., 2021; Goodyear & Armour, 2021; Radwan, 2022).

Our President has repeatedly emphasized the importance of preserving youth morals and worldview amid rapid societal changes. As he stated: "Today, the times are changing rapidly. And who feels these changes more than anyone else? the youth. Let young people align themselves with the demands of their era. But at the same time, they must not forget their identity. The call of 'Who are we? Whose great descendants are we?' should always resonate in their hearts, urging them to remain true to themselves. How do we achieve this? Through upbringing, upbringing, and only upbringing." These words highlight the critical balance between adapting to modernity and maintaining cultural and moral identity. Upbringing through families, schools, communities, and state institutions—remains the foundation for shaping ethically resilient generations (Ashraf et al., 2021; Sirin, Brauer, & Tugberk, 2024; Tsaliki, 2022). Social networks play a decisive role in this process. While they can complement educational institutions by disseminating knowledge and fostering global understanding, they can also expose young people to harmful influences. This dual nature makes the study of social networks' effects on morality and ethics a pressing priority for scholars, policymakers, and educators. Addressing this issue requires a multidimensional approach, combining scientific research, regulatory measures, and educational reforms (Der Valk & Broekman, 1999; Yang, Holden, & Ariati, 2021).

Scholars must examine not only the psychological and behavioral effects of social media but also the broader cultural and social dynamics that influence online content creation and consumption. Policymakers should design evidence-based strategies to combat harmful information while preserving freedom of expression. Educators and parents need to strengthen digital literacy, critical thinking, and value-based education to help youth distinguish truth from falsehood and adopt positive online behaviors. Social media platforms themselves can become part of the solution by promoting constructive, ethical content and adhering to responsible communication standards (Al Ketbi et al., 2025; Oguine et al., 2025; Yang, Hunhoff, Lee, & Abrell, 2025). In conclusion, globalization and the rapid expansion of social networks have reshaped the moral and ethical environment in which young people grow up. The urgency to understand, monitor, and guide these influences cannot be overstated. Society faces a pivotal choice: to allow uncontrolled digital exposure to shape youth values or to harness technology as a force for moral and cultural enrichment. Building a safe and value-driven digital environment requires collective action from researchers, policymakers, educators, families, and

technology providers. The moral future of our youth and, consequently, the future of our nation depends on the strategies we develop today to address these pressing challenges.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Globalization, Digital Transformation, and Youth Moral Development

Globalization has fundamentally altered political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of life, creating unprecedented opportunities for information exchange but also posing ethical challenges for younger generations. According to Butler (2024), social media in a globalized world fosters self-optimization behaviors among youth, often prioritizing competitive, achievement-oriented ideals over moral and community-based values. This digital transformation has accelerated the spread of information and communication technologies, making them powerful tools that influence individual behavior, collective consciousness, and sociocultural norms (Baxtiyarovich, 2023; Oguine et al., 2025).

Young people, as the most active and impressionable demographic group, are particularly vulnerable to these influences. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter have become essential spaces for socialization, education, and identity formation. However, they are also channels for misinformation, harmful ideologies, and exposure to morally questionable content (Selnes, 2024). The dual impact of social networks—enabling knowledge dissemination while also presenting risks to ethical values—has become a pressing area of scholarly concern (Anom Sapariati, 2025; Aria Mulyapradana, 2025; Ayu Otariyani, 2025).

2.2. Social Networks and Ethical Challenges in Youth Upbringing

Social networks have evolved into spaces that significantly affect youth attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. (Dhiman, 2023) highlights a growing prevalence of ethical dilemmas on these platforms, including privacy breaches, cyberbullying, fake news dissemination, and exposure to harmful behaviors. These negative factors undermine young people's ability to critically evaluate information and distinguish between truth and falsehood (Fathoni, 2025). Empirical studies indicate that unfiltered social media exposure contributes to value distortion and erosion of national identity and spiritual heritage. For instance, (Radwan, 2022) observed how social media reshaped cultural identity in rural Egypt, weakening traditional values under the influence of global digital content. Similarly, (Robards et al., 2025) found that lack of robust school policies on social media use exposes students to risks that negatively impact their moral development, creating long-term challenges for education systems.

2.3. Positive Potential of Social Networks for Youth Education

Despite its risks, social media presents significant opportunities for positive youth development. Demonstrated that social platforms enhance students' academic performance in open learning environments by fostering collaboration, information sharing, and improved communication (Ashraf et al., 2021). According to (Goodyear & Armour, 2021) argue that social media can promote health-related learning among adolescents when teachers guide usage effectively. Furthermore, social networks can serve as tools for promoting national values, spiritual heritage, and cultural achievements on a global scale (Radwan, 2022). Properly utilized, these platforms offer spaces for intercultural dialogue, self-expression, and dissemination of value-based content aligned with social and ethical norms.

2.4 Psychological and Behavioral Effects of Social Media

The psychological and behavioral effects of social media use among youth are multidimensional. Proposed the Multidimensional Model of Social Media Use (MMSMU), categorizing online activities, motives, and communication patterns that affect well-being. While social media facilitates belonging and emotional support, it also fosters addictive behaviors, social comparison, and susceptibility to harmful influences (Yang et al., 2021). Explored adolescents' experiences with fake news, revealing how lack of digital literacy and critical thinking skills leaves them vulnerable to manipulation. This vulnerability not only affects information consumption but also shapes ethical decision-making and moral reasoning, demonstrating the complex relationship between digital exposure and value formation (Selnes, 2024).

2.5 Digital Literacy and Critical Thinking as Protective Factors

Strengthening digital literacy has emerged as a primary strategy to safeguard youth from harmful online influences. Highlighted that sociocultural contexts significantly determine online safety, suggesting the need for culturally tailored educational programs (Oguine et al., 2025). Emphasized that school policies must focus on teaching young people how to navigate digital environments responsibly, using critical thinking to avoid harmful content (Robards et al., 2025). Recent interventions have shown that educational programs integrating digital literacy can improve youth's ability to evaluate online information and resist harmful narratives (Yang et al., 2021). By fostering critical thinking, these programs enhance moral resilience, enabling youth to align online behavior with societal ethical standards.

2.6 Regulatory and Policy Perspectives

Addressing the ethical risks of social networks requires coordinated action from policymakers, educators, families, and technology providers. Policymakers must develop evidence-based strategies to combat misinformation and harmful content while preserving freedom of expression (Oguine et al., 2025). Content moderation frameworks and guidelines should be designed collaboratively with social media companies to ensure responsible information dissemination. Moreover, regulatory measures should encourage platforms to promote positive, value-based content aligned with cultural and spiritual heritage. According to (Turdiev, 2024) (2024), prioritizing human interests and national ideospheres is crucial to countering negative digital influences on young people's consciousness.

2.7 Multidimensional Approach to Ethical Social Media Use

Scholars advocate for a holistic approach that integrates psychological, social, cultural, and technological dimensions in studying and guiding social media use. This includes:

1. Scientific Research: Empirical investigations on the relationship between social media exposure and moral development.
2. Regulatory Measures: Policies to manage harmful digital content without compromising free speech.
3. Educational Reforms: Incorporation of digital literacy and ethical education in curricula.
4. Parental Guidance: Active parental involvement in supervising online behavior and teaching value-based decision-making.
5. Platform Responsibility: Social media companies implementing stricter guidelines and promoting ethical content creation (Dhiman, 2023; Robards et al., 2025).

By combining these dimensions, societies can leverage social networks' positive potential while minimizing their negative effects on youth ethics and values.

3. Research Methodology

With a systematic approach selected as the primary research method, this study aims to conduct an in-depth and comprehensive examination of the influence of social networks on the moral and ethical upbringing of young people in the context of globalization. Social networks have become integral to youth life, shaping values, behaviors, and decision-making processes (Butler, 2024). Therefore, a structured research design was necessary to capture both the positive and negative dimensions of this phenomenon. The research process began with an extensive review of sources pertaining to the history of social network development, international and local research projects, regulatory and legal documents, and the body of existing academic literature on social media and youth ethics. This literature review established the theoretical foundation and highlighted knowledge gaps in previous studies (Oguine et al., 2025). In addition, it traced the evolution of social networks from early community-based communication tools to modern, algorithm-driven platforms that significantly affect youth moral reasoning and social identity (Radwan, 2022).

Based on the theoretical and documentary findings, the content analysis method was employed to investigate the type of information circulated on popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. The aim was to assess the moral and ethical messages transmitted through these platforms, distinguishing between beneficial content (e.g., educational messages, cultural preservation, civic engagement) and harmful influences (e.g., misinformation, hate speech, unethical

behavior). Similar approaches have been used in prior research to map online narratives affecting adolescents' ethical development (Dhiman, 2023; Selnes, 2024). To enrich the analysis, sociological research methods were applied. Direct observations were conducted to understand young people's interaction patterns with social networks, including the frequency, duration, and types of content consumed. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were carried out with participants aged 15–25 from various educational and social backgrounds. These interviews explored perceptions of how social media shapes personal values, decision-making processes, and connections to cultural and national identity. Recent studies highlight that such qualitative methods are essential to capture the complex, context-specific nature of online influence on morality (Robards et al., 2025).

Complementing the qualitative findings, survey questionnaires were distributed to a larger sample of respondents to gather quantitative data. The survey measured the extent and reasons behind social network use, exposure to ethical dilemmas, perceived credibility of online information, and self-reported changes in behavior or beliefs. Statistical analysis was performed to identify patterns and correlations, providing empirical support for observed trends. Surveys have been widely used in related studies to quantify youth exposure to online risks and benefits (Yang et al., 2021). Furthermore, a comparative research method was adopted to examine practical experiences from other countries regarding the regulation and supervision of social network content for youth. Case studies from nations with strong digital literacy frameworks and effective online safety policies were analyzed and contrasted with local circumstances. This approach enabled the identification of best practices and potential policy recommendations suitable for the local socio-cultural context.

The research is grounded in socio-psychological theories of moral development and social learning. Bandura's Social Learning Theory explains how youth internalize behaviors through observation and imitation in online environments (Rezapour, Dinh, & Diesner, 2021). Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning provides a framework for understanding how exposure to online content can accelerate or hinder ethical decision-making processes. These theories, combined with empirical data, allowed for a nuanced interpretation of the results, connecting digital interactions to shifts in youth moral consciousness. By combining multiple techniques—documentary review, content analysis, sociological observation, interviews, surveys, and cross-national comparisons—the research achieved a multi-perspective understanding of social networks' impact on youth values. This triangulated methodology increased the reliability and validity of findings, aligning with best practices in social science research on media and youth behavior (Barman & Dakua, 2024). The study not only identifies challenges but also proposes evidence-based solutions for policymakers, educators, parents, and platform providers to strengthen ethical education in digital spaces.

4. Results and Discussion

The concept of social networks and the ideas about them were reflected in the unfinished utopian novel "The Year 4338", written in 1837 by the Russian writer, philosopher, and public figure Vladimir Odoevsky (1803–1869). In this work, he presented notions that were fantastical for that era about the creation of modern networks and the internet. The novel states: "Magnet-telegraphs were built between familiar houses, allowing people living at long distances to talk to each other with their help". It also mentions the "home newspapers" published "in many houses, especially among those who had numerous acquaintances". These newspapers "usually reported on the health or illness of the homeowners, as well as other household news, then various opinions, reflections, small inventions, as well as invitations, guest summons, and later even the menu".

The first scientifically grounded views on the concept of "social network" emerged in 1954, though its meaning did not reflect the sense we understand today. The initial definition was provided by English sociologist James Barnes, who described a "social network" as a social structure consisting of groups of nodes social objects (people or organizations) and the connections between them (that is, social relationships). Simply put, a social network is a specific group of people who know each other. According to the definition provided on the electronic platform of a Russian company engaged in advertising and other internet marketing systems, "A social network is an internet platform that allows

registered users to post information about themselves and communicate with each other by establishing social connections” (Zareie & Sakellariou, 2021).

A social network is the sum of subjects (social objects) and the relationships established between them. A social network is a social structure consisting of groups of nodes that represent social objects (people or organizations) and the connections between them. As a result of the scientific study of social networks, it is considered appropriate to examine them in two periods: the era before the emergence of the internet and the period after the internet appeared. The term “social network” entered our vocabulary in its full sense only with the advent of the internet and the creation of various chats and applications. In reality, social networks had existed in an offline form as a manifestation of shared goals within a specific community or region.

The creation and development of social networks brought a major turning point for today’s society. It is reasonable to study their modern history in three major stages. Specifically, the first stage is the “era of electronic communication” (late 1960s – early 1990s), the second stage is the “era of virtual community” (from the early 1990s to the early 2000s), and the third stage is the “age of social networks” (from the early 2000s to the present).

The first stage. This period is linked to the creation of a site called “Internet Relay Chat” (IRC), developed in 1988 by programmer Jarkko Oikarinen. The program was initially used for military purposes and later became available for public use. Thanks to this network, ordinary internet-connected people gained the ability to exchange messages with one another. Starting in 1994, various websites with web forums began operating. Through these forums, people were able to express their opinions and views on different topics. It was precisely on these web forums that the first internet rules and restrictions emerged (Radu, 2019).

The second stage. This period is considered the time when answers emerged to the questions of what a real social network should be and what requirements it should meet, as well as the era when the concept of the “blogger”, familiar to everyone today, appeared. In 1995, American programmer Randy Conrads created his popular network called Classmates.com. Anyone could register and use this network. Soon, the number of its users reached tens of thousands, and the site clearly defined what the true concept of a social network should look like. Its creation marked the beginning of the second major stage in the history of social networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

On November 15, 1996, school students Arik Vardi, Sefi Vigiser, Yair Goldfinger, and Amnon Amir successfully created a messaging program called “Internet Pager” that ran on Linux OS, and shortly afterward, the program was renamed “ICQ”. Today, this program is managed by the Mail Group company. The website SixDegrees.com, created in 1998, allowed users to create profiles, list friends, and make use of those connections features that, in some form, had existed on earlier sites. However, this platform refined and developed them further. SixDegrees presented itself as a tool to help people connect with others and send messages. Although SixDegrees attracted millions of users, it failed to achieve sustainable growth and ceased operations in 2000. In 1999, a website called “LiveJournal” appeared on the internet, allowing people to share their daily activities. The site was created by American programmer Brad Fitzpatrick, and it was precisely on this platform that the concept of the first blogger emerged.

The third period. As we know, the 21st century entered our lives as the age of information. In this era, the principle that “whoever controls information controls the whole world” gained significant emphasis, and various forces sought to dominate information. In this sense, the rapidly expanding social networks became an ideal tool for such forces. Countries began to create their own social networks. In the third period of the history of social networks, the largest networks that exist today were created. While social networks initially operated through internet browsers, the possibility of access via computer and mobile applications was later introduced, and social networks became a source of income for users.

In 2003, Russian developers created and launched the “Agent Mobile” application. Initially, this program did not produce the expected results. The main reason for this was the dominance of the

website “MySpace.com” at that time, which allowed not only simple message exchange but also the ability to send photos, videos, and music and upload them to personal profiles. These features made the platform globally popular. For the first time, celebrity pages appeared on social networks, which in turn led to a rapid increase in visitors to the platform. The popularity of this network did not last long. In 2004, Harvard University student Mark Zuckerberg launched the social network Facebook. Initially, Facebook was planned to be just a messaging site for students. However, within only one month, more than 200,000 people had visited the site. After that, Zuckerberg realized that the website had a promising future and began efforts to make it widely accessible. Today, over 2 billion people are registered on the site, making it the most widely used social network in the world.

In 2006, American developer Jack Dorsey created his own small network and began posting various questions on it. Naturally, people started sharing their answers to these questions, and Dorsey’s small network eventually evolved into the now-famous social media platform “Twitter”. That very same year, the Russian developer Pavel Durov launched “VKontakte”, while Albert Mikhailovich Popkov created “Odnoklassniki.ru.” Both sites quickly gained popularity and became an integral part of people’s lives. By the end of 2007, the use of social networks began to spread rapidly. Due to their ability to instantly share news from around the world along with photos in real time, social networks quickly gained mass popularity. They gave people the opportunity to express their desires, demands, and dreams without any boundaries – even disregarding norms of etiquette and morality.

In 2010, a developer from San Francisco, Kevin Systrom, came up with the idea that people are more interested in photos than plain text and launched a small photo-sharing site called “Burbn”. Initially, the site did not show promising results. Later, Systrom changed the site’s name to “Instagram” and made it available exclusively as an app. For the first time, Instagram was uploaded to the App Store and later to the Play Market for Android. From that day on, it can be said that this network completely changed the lives of internet users. Thanks to its beautiful photo filters and many interesting features, its number of users has been steadily increasing day by day.

In 2012, Facebook successfully acquired Instagram. At present, Instagram has over 800 million users, with more than a million photos and videos uploaded every day. Instagram also created an opportunity for its subscribers to earn money by posting various promotional posts on their pages. After the use of mobile applications began, in 2011 an app called “Pictaboo” appeared on the App Store. Soon after, the app’s name was changed to “Snapchat”. This app attracted users through its unique and impressive features. It provided users with the ability to take photos of themselves in very high quality and with distinctive effects.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, all aspects of human life are being significantly impacted by the processes of globalization and the rapid advancement of digital technologies, but young people’s moral and ethical upbringing is being especially affected. The emergence and mass adoption of social networks have reshaped the socialization process for the younger generation, influencing how they form attitudes, construct beliefs, and translate these beliefs into actions in their daily lives. Unlike previous eras, where family, educational institutions, and local communities were the main agents of socialization, today’s youth are largely shaped by the vast and borderless digital environment. This online realm, while offering numerous opportunities for learning and self-expression, also exposes them to unprecedented challenges, particularly concerning their moral and ethical development.

Social networks are now among the most influential elements shaping young people’s value systems. Through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and other emerging social media applications, youth encounter a flood of information, opinions, and ideologies from around the world. These platforms have evolved far beyond their initial purpose as mere communication tools. They have become powerful cultural and ideological ecosystems, where norms, lifestyles, and even political beliefs are continuously constructed and contested. According to research, social networks have turned into massive channels for disseminating diverse ideological movements and ideas ranging from positive and educational content to harmful propaganda, misinformation, and extremist narratives. The ease with

which such messages spread, coupled with the absence of robust filtering mechanisms, makes young users particularly vulnerable to adopting distorted worldviews, unethical behaviors, or attitudes that conflict with their national identity and cultural heritage.

Given this reality, one of the most urgent and essential tasks of our time is to teach young people how to use social networks properly, critically, and effectively. This is not simply a matter of teaching technical skills, such as operating applications or managing privacy settings, but a deeper educational process aimed at building digital literacy, critical thinking, and moral resilience. Youth must be equipped with the ability to discern credible information from falsehoods, to recognize manipulative or harmful content, and to engage respectfully and ethically in online communication. Schools, families, and community institutions should collaborate to design programs that raise awareness about online ethics, cyberbullying, the dangers of extremist content, and the long-term consequences of irresponsible digital behavior.

At the same time, state policy should not remain passive in this rapidly evolving digital landscape. Governments have both the opportunity and the responsibility to harness the positive potential of social networks in promoting constructive values. National policies should encourage the creation of online spaces where young people can engage with authentic narratives about their country's history, culture, and spiritual heritage. Digital campaigns, educational platforms, and collaborations with social media companies can help counter harmful ideas while offering alternative, positive content that resonates with youth interests. For example, initiatives can focus on showcasing inspiring stories of national heroes, cultural achievements, traditional arts, and ethical role models in formats that appeal to young users—short videos, interactive storytelling, or gamified learning modules.

Furthermore, partnerships between government agencies, non-profit organizations, educators, and technology firms are essential to ensure that digital platforms become tools for empowerment rather than manipulation. Social networks should not only be viewed as sources of risk but also as powerful allies in shaping an informed, ethically grounded, and socially responsible generation. Policies must aim to strengthen young people's identity, civic consciousness, and sense of belonging while simultaneously fostering openness, tolerance, and respect for diversity. Ultimately, the challenge lies in balancing freedom of expression and access to information with the imperative of protecting young minds from harmful ideologies. This is not solely a governmental task but a shared responsibility among families, educators, community leaders, and the youth themselves. By strategically leveraging the positive potential of social networks, society can guide young people toward developing a balanced worldview—one that embraces technological progress and global interconnectedness while remaining firmly rooted in national values, cultural traditions, and spiritual heritage. Doing so will ensure that digital technologies, instead of eroding moral foundations, become catalysts for building a more enlightened, ethical, and cohesive generation prepared to face the complexities of the modern world.

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