

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 its political, economic, social, and cultural life. Its impact extends to 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 for influencing 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 (Baxtiyarovic, 2023; Butle, 2024). Young people, 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 them 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 and entertainment. However, these same platforms are also used to disseminate misinformation, harmful ideologies, and morally questionable content that can erode traditional values and ethical standards (Zubair, Raquib, & Qadir, 2019).

Thus, understanding the multifaceted effects of social networks on young people's moral and ethical upbringing has 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 behaviors online. Such exposure not only distorts truth and morality but also weakens the connection to national identity, cultural roots, and spiritual heritage (Marsella, 2016). Today, nearly all young people are active social network users. These platforms offer many benefits, including access to educational resources, opportunities for cultural exchange, and space 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 audience. However, 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 (Arora et al., 2023).

Our President has repeatedly emphasized the importance of preserving youth morals and worldviews amid rapid societal changes. He stated, "Today, the times are changing rapidly. 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 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 a cultural and moral identity. Upbringing through families, schools, communities, and state institutions remains the foundation for shaping ethically resilient (Wexler, 2014). Social networks play a crucial 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 content. This dual nature makes studying the effects of social networks on morality and ethics a pressing priority for scholars, policymakers and educators.

Addressing this issue requires a multidimensional approach that combines scientific research, regulatory measures, and educational reforms (Zhao, Zhao, & Shi, 2024). 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 can become part of the solution by promoting constructive and ethical content and adhering to responsible communication standards (Buhmann, Paßmann, & Fieseler, 2020).

In conclusion, globalization and the rapid expansion of social networks have reshaped the moral and ethical environment in which young people grow. The urgency of understanding, monitoring, and guiding 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 (Widiastuti, Umar, &

Hafiziandra, 2024). 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 the 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 and achievement-oriented ideals over moral and community 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 (Asyha, Astuti, Subandi, Syarifudin, & Makbuloh, 2024). 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 the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of youth. (Dhiman, 2023) highlights the 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 the erosion of national identity and spiritual heritage. For instance, Radwan ((Radwan, 2022) observed how social media reshaped cultural identity in rural Egypt, weakening traditional values under the influence of global digital content. Similarly, (Robards, Goring, & Hendry, 2025) found that a lack of robust school policies on social media use exposes students to risks that negatively impact their moral development, creating long-term challenges for educational systems.

2.3. Positive Potential of Social Networks for Youth Education

Despite these risks, social media presents significant opportunities for positive youth development. 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), social media can promote health-related learning among adolescents when teachers effectively guide usage. Furthermore, social networks can serve as tools for promoting national values, spiritual heritage, and cultural achievements on a global scale (Radwan, 2022). When 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 multi-dimensional. The Multidimensional Model of Social Media Use (MMSMU) categorizes 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, Holden, & Ariati, 2021). Explored adolescents' experiences with fake news, revealing how a 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 (Syafrizal, Wibisono, & Nurhatisyah, 2024). They highlighted that sociocultural contexts significantly determine online safety, suggesting the need for culturally tailored educational programs (Oguine et al., 2025). 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 their online behavior with societal ethical standards (Irianto et al., 2024).

2.6 Regulatory and Policy Perspectives

Addressing the ethical risks associated with 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 the freedom of expression (Oguine et al., 2025). Content moderation frameworks and guidelines should be collaboratively designed with social media companies to ensure responsible information dissemination. Moreover, regulatory measures should encourage platforms to promote positive and 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 a holistic approach that integrates the psychological, social, cultural, and technological dimensions of studying and guiding social media use. This includes:

- a) Scientific Research: Empirical investigations of the relationship between social media exposure and moral development.
- b) Regulatory Measures: Policies to manage harmful digital content without compromising free speech.
- c) Educational Reforms: Incorporation of digital literacy and ethical education into curricula.
- d) Parental Guidance: Active parental involvement in supervising online behavior and teaching value-based decision-making.
- e) Platform Responsibility: Social media companies must implement stricter guidelines and promote ethical content creation (Dhiman, 2023; Robards et al., 2025).

By combining these dimensions, societies can leverage the positive potential of social networks 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 their values, behaviors, and decision-making processes (Butler, 2024). Therefore, a structured research design is 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 existing academic literature on social media and youth ethics. This literature review established a theoretical foundation and highlighted the 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, content analysis 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, and civic engagement) and harmful influences (e.g., misinformation, hate speech, and unethical behavior). Similar approaches have been used in prior research to map online narratives that affect adolescents' ethical development (Dhiman, 2023; Selnes, 2024). Sociological research methods were applied to enrich the analysis. Direct observations were conducted to understand young people's interaction patterns with social networks, including the frequency, duration, and type of content consumed. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants aged 15–25 years 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 identities. Recent studies have highlighted that such qualitative methods are essential for capturing the complex, context-specific nature of the online influence on morality (Robards et al., 2025).

To complement the qualitative findings, survey questionnaires were distributed to a larger sample of respondents to gather quantitative data. The survey measured the extent and reasons for social network use, exposure to ethical dilemmas, perceived credibility of online information, and self-reported changes in behavior or beliefs. Statistical analyses were performed to identify patterns and correlations, providing empirical support for the 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 compared with local circumstances. This approach enabled the identification of best practices and potential policy recommendations suitable for the local sociocultural context.

This research is grounded in the 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 accelerates or hinders ethical decision-making processes. These theories, combined with empirical data, allowed for a nuanced interpretation of the results, linking 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 the impact of social networks on youth values. This triangulated methodology increased the reliability and validity of the findings, aligning with best practices in social science research on media and youth behavior (Barman & Dakua, 2024). This 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 ideas about them are 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 regarding 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, although 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). 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 their connections. 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 existed in an offline form as a manifestation of shared goals within a specific community or region. The creation and development of social networks has brought a major turning point in today’s society.

It is reasonable to study their modern history in three 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 can exchange messages with one another. Starting in 1994, various websites with web forums began to operate. Through these forums, people can 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 a popular network called Classmates.com. Anyone could register and use. Soon, the number of its users reached tens of thousands, and the site clearly defined what the true concept of a social network should be. Its creation marked the beginning of the second major stage in the history of social networking (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”. Currently, 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 connection features that had, in some form, existed on earlier sites. However, this platform refines and develops them further. SixDegrees presented itself as a tool to help people connect with others and send messages to them. 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. The 21st century has 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 itself. In this sense, rapidly expanding social networks have become an ideal tool for such forces. Countries have begun 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, the 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 have made the platform popular worldwide. For the first time, celebrity pages appeared on social networks, which led to a rapid increase in visitors to the platform. However, 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 as a messaging site for students. However, within a month, more than 200,000 people visited the site. Afterward, 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 worldwide.

In 2006, American developer Jack Dorsey created a small network and began posting various questions. 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 integral to people’s lives. By the end of 2007, social network use began to spread rapidly. Owing 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 the 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 application. For the first time, Instagram was uploaded to the App Store and later to the Play Market for Android devices. From that day on, it can be said that this network completely changed the lives of internet users. Owing to its beautiful photo filters and many interesting features, the number of users has been steadily increasing.

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 creates opportunities 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 attracts 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 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, when families, educational institutions, and local communities were the main agents of socialization, today’s youth are largely shaped by the vast and borderless digital environment. While this online realm offers numerous opportunities for learning and self-expression, it also exposes adolescents to unprecedented challenges, particularly in terms of their moral and ethical development.

Social networks are among the most influential elements shaping young people’s value systems. Through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and other emerging social media applications, the youth encounter a flood of information, opinions, and ideologies from around the world. These platforms have evolved far beyond their initial purpose as communication tools. They have become powerful cultural and ideological ecosystems in which norms, lifestyles, and even political beliefs are continuously constructed and contested. According to research, social networks have become 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, and 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 among students. Youth must be equipped with the ability to discern credible information from falsehoods, recognize manipulative or harmful content, and engage respectfully and ethically in online communication. Schools, families, and community institutions should collaborate to design programs that raise awareness of online ethics, cyberbullying, the dangers of extremist content, and the long-term consequences of irresponsible digital behavior.

Simultaneously, state policy should not remain passive in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. Governments have both the opportunity and responsibility to harness the positive potential of social networks to promote constructive values. National policies should encourage the creation of online spaces where young people can engage with authentic narratives of 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, such as 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 are used as 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, 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 ideology. This is not solely a governmental task but a shared responsibility among families, educators, community leaders, and youth themselves. By strategically leveraging the positive potential of social networks, society can guide young people toward developing a balanced worldview that embraces technological progress and global interconnectedness while remaining firmly rooted in national values, cultural traditions, and spiritual heritage. This 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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