

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN EQUIPPING THE DIGITAL GENERATION TO ADDRESS TOXIC BEHAVIOR ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstrak

Media sosial berkembang pesat, menciptakan peluang sekaligus tantangan bagi generasi digital. Perilaku toksik seperti perundungan siber, ujaran kebencian, dan budaya cancel menjadi perhatian serius karena berdampak pada kesehatan mental dan hubungan sosial. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana pendidikan Kristen dapat membimbing generasi digital dalam menghadapi perilaku toksik dengan mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai kasih, empati, pengampunan, dan pengendalian diri. Dengan pendekatan tinjauan pustaka kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis perspektif teoretis dan studi kasus yang menyoroti peran ajaran Kristen dalam mendorong perilaku etis di dunia maya dan mempromosikan tanggung jawab digital. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan Kristen menyediakan kerangka transformatif untuk membekali generasi muda dengan alat moral dan spiritual yang diperlukan dalam menghadapi kompleksitas media sosial. Kerangka transformatif ini memberdayakan generasi digital untuk secara kritis menilai dan merespons tantangan daring, membangun ketahanan, pengambilan keputusan yang etis, serta komitmen terhadap keterlibatan positif di ruang digital.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Kristen, generasi digital, media sosial, perilaku toksik, interaksi etis di dunia maya.

Abstract

The rapid growth of social media has created both opportunities and challenges for the digital generation. Toxic behaviors such as cyberbullying, hate speech, and cancel culture have become serious concerns due to their impact on mental health and social relationships. This study examines

how Christian education can guide the digital generation in addressing toxic behaviors by integrating values such as love, empathy, forgiveness, and self-control. Using a qualitative literature review approach, this research analyzes theoretical perspectives and case studies that highlight the role of Christian teachings in promoting ethical online behavior and fostering digital responsibility. The findings reveal that Christian education provides a transformative framework to equip young people with the moral and spiritual tools needed to navigate the complexities of social media. This transformative framework empowers the digital generation to critically assess and respond to online challenges, build resilience, make ethical decisions, and commit to positive engagement in digital spaces.

Keywords: *Christian education, digital generation, social media, toxic behavior, ethical online interaction.*

Introduction

The pervasive influence of social media on the digital generation has fundamentally reshaped how young individuals interact, communicate, and construct their identities. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter serve as primary spaces for self-expression and community building, yet they also facilitate various harmful behaviors. Cyberbullying, hate speech, toxic positivity, and cancel culture have become increasingly prevalent, leading to significant mental health challenges, social alienation, and the deterioration of constructive dialogue.¹ These issues extend beyond individual experiences, carrying broader societal implications and underscoring the urgent need for ethical and moral guidance in digital interactions. This behavior is collectively referred to as toxic.

Christian education offers a meaningful framework for addressing these challenges by emphasizing moral principles and spiritual values that foster ethical online behavior. Rooted in teachings of love, empathy, forgiveness, and self-control, Christian teachings encourages students to cultivate a sense of responsibility in their digital engagements. Research indicates that moral and spiritual education plays a crucial role in character development, helping young people discern right from wrong and establish constructive habits in both online and offline interactions.² Therefore, integrating Christian teachings into digital literacy programs can significantly enhance ethical standards and promote a healthier online environment.

Integrating Christian principles with practical digital literacy skills presents a promising approach to guiding the digital generation in responding to the toxicity of social media. By instilling values that promote positive engagement, critical thinking,

¹ Joseph Leonard A. Jusay et al., "We Are Cancelled: Exploring Victims' Experiences of Cancel Culture on Social Media in the Philippines," *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 14, no. 4 (2022): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.21659/ruptkatha.v14n4.04>; Samuel Hans Kristanto, Selviawati Selviawati, and Tju Lie Lie, "Pendidikan Karakter Kristen Di Sekolah Dalam Membangun Etika Kebebasan Berpendapat Generasi Z Bermedia Sosial," *Davar: Jurnal Teologi* 5, no. 2 (2024): 81–93, <https://doi.org/10.55807/davar.v5i2.184>.

² Sakunthala Yatigammana Ekanayake Kelum A.A. Gamage, Shyama C.P.K. Dehideniya, "The Role of Personal Values in Learning Approaches and Student Achievements," *Behavioral Sciences* 11, no. 7 (2021): 19, <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs11070102>.

and self-awareness, Christian education work together to counteract the negative influences of the digital age by fostering ethical reasoning, encouraging responsible behavior, and promoting moral integrity. Its role in this context is to equip youth with the ethical foundation needed to navigate the complexities of the digital landscape while fostering a commitment to constructive dialogue and responsible online behavior.

This study examines how Christian teachings can address the rise of toxic behaviors in social media spaces. Employing a qualitative literature review methodology, it explores the potential for integrating theological principles with digital literacy training to encourage positive online interactions. The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on moral education and its relevance in the digital era, providing a foundation for developing practical strategies that empower young people to become ethical digital citizens.

The rapid development of social media has created a digital environment that profoundly influences the behavior, relationships, and mental health of younger generations. However, the absence of adequate guidance on responsible digital engagement has contributed to the normalization of toxic behaviors, including cyberbullying, hate speech, and cancel culture, which inflict harm on both individuals and society. Studies indicate that these behaviors significantly impact mental well-being, leading to increased anxiety, depression, and social isolation.³ The widespread acceptance of such patterns highlights the critical need for effective educational approaches that address the ethical and relational challenges of social media use, equipping young people with the necessary tools to navigate these platforms responsibly.

Christian education provides a strong moral foundation by emphasizing love, forgiveness, empathy, and self-control to face the challenges of social media. By integrating these principles into digital literacy programs, Christian values can serve as an ethical guide for the digital generation, fostering toxic behavior and encouraging positive online interactions.⁴ This study explores the potential of Christian values in mitigating toxic behaviors on social media by combining theological insights with practical skills for navigating the digital world. This study aims to develop practical strategies for educators and parents to enable young people to use social media constructively and responsibly.

In shaping the moral and ethical foundations of the digital generation, Christian education plays a vital role in addressing the challenges posed by social media and

³ Ziggi Ivan Santini et al., "Social Disconnectedness, Perceived Isolation, and Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety Among Older Americans (NSHAP): A Longitudinal Mediation Analysis," *The Lancet Public Health* 5, no. 1 (2020): 68, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(19\)30230-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(19)30230-0).

⁴ Imelda Butarbutar, "Peran Guru Pendidikan Agama Kristen dalam Dekadensi Moral Siswa Menghadapi Era Digital," *Jurnal Suluh Pendidikan* 10, no. 2 (2022): 71. <https://doi.org/10.36655/jsp.v10i2.784>.

toxic behavior.⁵ This study offers a new approach by integrating biblical principles and modern digital ethics in guiding the digital generation in facing the challenges of social media. The central research question investigates how Christian values can effectively equip the digital generation with the spiritual and ethical resilience needed to navigate social media while countering harmful behaviors such as cyberbullying, hate speech, and digital addiction. The purpose of this research is to develop an educational approach that not only strengthens digital literacy but also fosters Christ-centered character formation, encouraging empathy, self-regulation, and a commitment to positive engagement in virtual spaces. By bridging theological insights with practical strategies, this study seeks to empower educators, parents, and faith communities to nurture a generation that reflects Christian values in the digital realm.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative literature review approach to explore the role of Christian education in addressing toxic behavior on social media among the digital generation. Adopting a descriptive and exploratory framework, this research facilitates an in-depth understanding of how Christian values can shape digital behavior. The descriptive exploratory method provides diverse perspectives and rich qualitative insights into the challenges and opportunities of integrating Christian principles into digital education. This approach aligns with the recommendations of Bahadır K. Akcam, Senem Guney, and Anthony M. Cresswell for qualitative designs aimed at uncovering complex social phenomena through flexible and adaptive methods, enabling researchers to capture the dynamics and nuances of social interactions in depth.⁶ Consequently, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on digital ethics and faith-based education.

The collected data is analyzed using thematic analysis, which systematically identifies recurring patterns, themes, and values that emerge across different data sources. This analysis highlights strategies and practices that effectively address toxic behaviors such as cyberbullying, hate speech, and cancel culture while fostering empathy, respect, and self-control. Through this methodology, the study uncovers actionable insights into how Christian education can cultivate a generation equipped with the moral and ethical tools needed to navigate the digital age responsibly.

⁵ Harun Yermia Natonis, "Implementasi Pendidikan Agama Kristen Bagi Penguatan Keluarga Kristen Pada Era Industri 4.0 Berdasarkan Matius 28:7, 10 di Jemaat GMIT Pniel Oebobo Kota Kupang," *Apostolos: Journal of Theology and Christian Education* 3, no. 1 (2023): 77. <https://doi.org/10.52960/a.v3i1.204>

⁶ Bahadır K. Akcam, Senem Guney, and Anthony M. Cresswell, "Research Design and Major Issues in Developing Dynamic Theories by Secondary Analysis of Qualitative Data," *Systems* 7, no. 3 (2019): 40, <https://doi.org/10.3390/systems7030040>.

Results and Discussion

Theological Perspectives on Christian Values and Morality

Theological perspectives on Christian values emphasize their role as a moral compass, guiding individuals in their interactions and decisions, including in the digital realm. Central to Christian ethics are values such as love, forgiveness, empathy, and self-control. These principles, rooted in Scripture, encourage believers to embody Christlike behavior in all areas of life. In the digital age, where online anonymity often fosters hostility and insensitivity,⁷ the call to demonstrate love and respect for others serves as a countercultural force. A countercultural force in today's digital age refers to individuals or movements that challenge mainstream norms, resist dominant ideologies, and promote alternative perspectives through digital platforms, often advocating for critical thinking, authenticity, and ethical engagement in a hyper-connected world. As the Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, love is patient and kind, forming the foundation for ethical interactions that prioritize the well-being of others.

Forgiveness, another cornerstone of Christian morality, is vital in a world rife with conflict and misunderstandings. Online platforms can amplify human disagreements,⁸ making forgiveness a crucial antidote to bitterness and resentment. As modeled by Christ's forgiveness of humanity (Luke 23:34), Christians are urged to practice reconciliation and peace, even in the often-contentious digital landscape. This perspective challenges individuals to avoid retaliatory behavior and instead respond with grace, fostering healthier communication and mutual respect.

Empathy, deeply embedded in the teachings of Christ, is a call to understand and share in the feelings of others. In an era of digital detachment, where relationships can often be superficial, empathy bridges the gap between virtual and real-world connections. The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) exemplifies this value, encouraging believers to actively care for others, regardless of differences. By integrating empathy into online engagements, individuals can combat harmful practices such as cyberbullying and exclusion, promoting a culture of compassion.

Self-control is another critical Christian value, especially relevant in the face of the temptations posed by digital technology. From excessive screen time to exposure to harmful content, self-control helps believers maintain balance and resist negative influences. As noted in Galatians 5:22-23, self-control is a fruit of the Spirit, enabling Christians to make choices that honor God and protect their moral integrity.

⁷ Aulia Putri, Murmi Anjani, Siska Ananda, Juli Yani, & Asri Yulianda. "An Analysis of Linguistic Politeness in the Comment Sections of TikTok Social Media," *INTERACTION: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa*, 11, no. 2 (2024), 662, <https://doi.org/10.36232/interactionjournal.v11i2.548>.

⁸ Hanifah Nur Erma, Dede Santika, Iffah Nurhasanah, and Inda Lestari. "Dampak Media Sosial Terhadap Konflik di Masyarakat." *Edusoshum: Journal of Islamic Education and Social Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2022): 155-156. <https://doi.org/10.52366/edusoshum.v2i1.33>.

Practicing self-control also extends to avoiding impulsive or harmful comments in online discussions, reflecting a commitment to humility and thoughtful engagement.

Studies on the Psychological Effects of Toxic Behavior in Digital Spaces

Toxic behaviors in digital spaces, including cyberbullying, hate speech, and cancel culture, have been shown to significantly impact mental health, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Research has consistently linked exposure to such behaviors with heightened risks of anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal.⁹ These negative interactions contribute to a disrupted sense of self and a diminished ability to form healthy social connections. Furthermore, continuous exposure to online toxicity can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and isolation. This highlights the importance of resilience-building strategies and peer support systems to mitigate these detrimental effects. Christian education offers a compassionate approach, fostering empathy and emotional healing, which equips students to navigate the psychological challenges posed by toxic digital interactions. By integrating moral and spiritual values into digital literacy programs, Christian values can provide a nurturing environment that supports students' well-being in the face of online adversity.

Digital literacy education is increasingly recognized as an essential component of preparing students to engage responsibly in online spaces.¹⁰ In Christian teachings contexts, these programs are enriched by the integration of theological principles that emphasize ethical decision-making and the pursuit of truth. Best practices include scripture-based discussions, role-playing activities, and case studies that challenge students to apply Christian values in real-world digital scenarios. Such programs not only enhance technical skills but also foster a deeper understanding of how faith can shape online behavior. Additionally, incorporating collaborative projects—such as creating positive digital campaigns—empowers students to actively promote a culture of kindness and respect online.

Interdisciplinary research into digital behavior combines insights from technology, psychology, and theology to create a holistic understanding of how individuals interact in online spaces. Technology provides the framework for analyzing digital platforms, user interfaces, and algorithms that influence online engagement, while psychology delves into the cognitive, emotional, and social drivers behind user actions.¹¹ Theology adds a moral and ethical dimension, offering

⁹ Deena M. Walker et al., "Long-Term Behavioral Effects of Post-Weaning Social Isolation in Males and Females," *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience* 13, no. 66 (2019): 13, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnbeh.2019.00066>.

¹⁰ Cosmas Maphosa, "Digital Literacy: A Must for Open Distance and e-Learning (odel) Students," *European Journal of Education Studies* 5, no. 10 (2019): 192

¹¹ Risman Nugraha, "Navigating the Digital Consumer Mind: Understanding the Psychological Aspects of E-Commerce Success." *Observasi: Jurnal Publikasi Ilmu Psikologi* 2, no. 1 (2024): 212-213. <https://doi.org/10.61132/observasi.v2i1.211>.

perspectives on human dignity, empathy, and community. Together, these disciplines examine the root causes of toxic digital behaviors, such as cyberbullying and online hate speech, and explore strategies to foster healthier digital environments. For instance, integrating psychological theories—such as social identity and group dynamics—with theological principles of compassion could inspire digital tools that encourage constructive dialogue and reduce polarization.

This interdisciplinary approach also aids in designing intervention programs that are not only technologically effective but also psychologically and ethically sound. Research has shown that when digital literacy programs incorporate psychological education about empathy and moral reasoning, users are less likely to engage in harmful online behaviors.¹² Furthermore, theological insights encourage the application of principles like forgiveness and accountability in moderating online communities, creating more inclusive and respectful digital interactions. By bridging these fields, scholars and practitioners can better address the complexities of digital behavior, promoting both individual well-being and collective harmony in the increasingly interconnected online world.¹³ This holistic strategy underscores the importance of integrating faith-based values with digital education to foster a more compassionate and ethical virtual environment.

Christian digital literacy education presents unique challenges as it seeks to integrate technical proficiency with moral and spiritual guidance. Resistance from educators often stems from a lack of confidence in their own digital skills or skepticism about the compatibility of faith-based education with technology. Limited resources, especially in underfunded communities, further complicate efforts to provide equitable access to digital tools and training. Additionally, disparities in technological access can marginalize students from rural or economically disadvantaged backgrounds, creating a digital divide that undermines the inclusivity of such programs. These obstacles necessitate innovative approaches to curriculum development, including partnerships with faith-based organizations and tech companies to provide affordable resources and tailored training for educators.¹⁴ Overcoming these challenges is essential to ensure that all students benefit from a holistic digital education that nurtures both technical competence and ethical responsibility.

¹² G. Harrison, T., Polizzi, “(In)Civility and Adolescents’ Moral Decision Making Online: Drawing on Moral Theory to Advance Digital Citizenship Education,” *Educ Inf Technol* 27 (2022): 3291, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10710-0>.

¹³ Mohammed A. Fadhel et al., “Navigating the Metaverse: Unraveling the Impact of Artificial Intelligence—A Comprehensive Review and Gap Analysis,” *Artificial Intelligence Review* 57, no. 9 (2024): 283, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10462-024-10881-5>.

¹⁴ R. Sivarethinamohan, Surjit Singha, and Ranjit Singha, “Key Challenges in Developing and Executing Higher Education Learners’ Learning Outcomes,” in *Design and Implementation of Higher Education Learners’ Learning Outcomes (HELLO)*, 2023, 206, <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-9472-1.ch013>.

Despite these challenges, Christian digital literacy education offers significant opportunities to foster a holistic approach to digital engagement. By combining technical skills with ethical and theological insights, these programs can prepare students to navigate digital spaces responsibly and purposefully. For instance, incorporating Christian principles—such as stewardship, integrity, and community care—into digital literacy training can encourage positive online behaviors and critical thinking about the ethical implications of technology use. Furthermore, leveraging emerging technologies—such as virtual reality for immersive Bible studies or online platforms for global faith-based collaboration—can enrich learning experiences. These opportunities demonstrate the potential for Christian digital literacy education to not only bridge the digital divide but also nurture individuals who embody Christ-centered values in an increasingly digital world.¹⁵ Crucially, such education equips students to become ethical digital citizens who reflect their faith in all aspects of their online presence.

The Future of Christian Education in the Digital Era

The future of Christian education in the digital era requires a dynamic approach that integrates faith-based values with cutting-edge technological advancements. As digital platforms such as virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI) continue to reshape learning environments, Christian teachings must prepare students to engage with these tools responsibly and ethically. For instance, VR offers opportunities for immersive Bible studies and virtual mission trips, enabling learners to experience biblical contexts in transformative ways. Similarly, AI-driven tools can personalize faith-based learning, fostering deeper spiritual growth. However, these technologies also pose challenges, including ethical concerns surrounding data privacy and potential misuse. Christian educators must proactively address these issues by instilling principles of stewardship, accountability, and discernment in digital interactions.¹⁶ Embracing this dynamic approach ensures that Christian education remains relevant, impactful, and faithful to its mission in an ever-evolving digital landscape.

Moreover, Christian teachings must emphasize the cultivation of digital citizenship rooted in theological and moral frameworks to counteract the ethical ambiguity prevalent in online spaces. Future programs should focus on equipping learners with critical thinking skills to navigate complex ethical dilemmas—such as misinformation and digital addiction—from a Christ-centered perspective. Collaboration between theologians, technologists, and educators will be key to designing curricula that integrate biblical values with technical expertise. For

¹⁵ Andrei Bogdan, "The Church's Mission in the Digital Age: Challenges and Opportunities," *Orizonturi Teologice*, no. 1 (2024): 128-129.

¹⁶ V. Basil Hans, "Exploring Christian Ethics Through the Lens of the Bible," *SSRN Electronic Journal* 2, no. 1 (2023): 131, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4828904>.

example, integrating discussions on the theology of creation with environmental concerns in digital sustainability could inspire learners to use technology for the common good. By embracing these innovations while maintaining a strong commitment to Christian values, the future of Christian values can play a pivotal role in shaping ethical leaders for a rapidly evolving digital society.¹⁷ Fundamentally, this holistic approach ensures that Christian values not only adapts to digital advancements but also serves as a beacon of moral clarity in the digital age.

The Role of Christian Ethics in Shaping Online Behavior

Christian ethics play a crucial role in shaping online behavior by offering a moral compass grounded in biblical principles such as love, empathy, forgiveness, and self-control.¹⁸ In an era where digital interactions often lack accountability and civility, these values provide a framework for fostering respectful and constructive engagement. For instance, the command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31) encourages individuals to consider the impact of their words and actions in online spaces. Empathy, rooted in the understanding of human dignity, helps counteract the dehumanization often seen in cyberbullying and toxic comment threads. Similarly, forgiveness and self-control serve as guiding principles for diffusing conflicts, promoting reconciliation, and resisting impulsive or harmful responses online.

Moreover, integrating Christian ethics into digital literacy education and content moderation strategies can transform how online communities operate. Faith-based perspectives on stewardship and accountability encourage users to view technology as a tool for building community and serving others rather than perpetuating division or harm. For example, theological discussions on humility can inspire influencers and content creators to prioritize authenticity and kindness. Institutions that incorporate these ethical frameworks into their policies can foster more inclusive and supportive digital environments. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, the application of Christian ethics provides a pathway for shaping a culture of integrity and compassion, promoting not just technical competence but also moral excellence in online interactions.¹⁹ This integration ensures that digital spaces reflect values of respect, empathy, and justice, rooted in the teachings of Christ.

¹⁷ Emmanuel Chukwu et al., “Navigating Ethical Supply Chains: The Intersection of Diplomatic Management and Theological Ethics,” *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Sciences and Arts* 2, no. 1 (2023): 136-137, <https://doi.org/10.47709/ijmdsa.v2i1.2874>.

¹⁸ David Fowler, and Jon Musgrave. “Embracing Christian Values: Positive Relationships and Academic Achievement in Higher Education.” *Diligentia: Journal of Theology and Christian Education* 6, no. 3 (2024): 88. <https://doi.org/10.19166/dil.v6i3.8717>.

¹⁹ J. Fowler, D., & Musgrave, “Embracing Christian Values: Positive Relationships and Academic Achievement in Higher Education,” *Journal of Theology and Christian Education* 6, no. 3 (2024): 86, <https://doi.org/10.19166/dil.v6i3.8717>.

The Impact of Social Media on Mental Health and Relationships

The pervasive influence of social media has reshaped the social landscape of the 21st century, dramatically affecting individuals' mental health and interpersonal relationships. While it offers numerous benefits, such as global connectivity and the ability to find support communities, social media also introduces a host of challenges that can exacerbate emotional distress, distort relationships, and undermine individual well-being. To truly understand the complex effects of social media, we must explore both its positive and negative impacts, particularly how these issues can be addressed from a Christian educational perspective.

One of the primary benefits of social media is its ability to connect individuals across vast geographical distances. Through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, individuals can maintain relationships, share life experiences, and even find new communities during times of need. For people facing isolation—whether due to physical distance, health issues, or social challenges—these platforms serve as vital spaces for fostering a sense of belonging and emotional support.²⁰ Research has shown that online interactions, when used thoughtfully, can provide psychological comfort, especially for those who feel disconnected in their offline lives. These digital communities can serve as a lifeline, offering encouragement, advice, and companionship during challenging periods.

However, the darker side of social media becomes evident when we consider its tendency to present idealized versions of reality. The constant exposure to carefully curated content—where users often showcase their best moments—can lead to detrimental comparisons. Studies indicate that individuals, particularly teenagers and young adults, are increasingly vulnerable to the pressures of social comparison, which in turn contributes to feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and depression. The desire to conform to these digital ideals often leads to the creation of a “digital persona” that bears little resemblance to a person's true self, exacerbating feelings of identity confusion and self-doubt.

Moreover, the addictive nature of social media platforms compounds these issues. The need for validation through likes, comments, and shares can foster an unhealthy reliance on external approval.²¹ This validation-seeking behavior not only contributes to low self-esteem but also increases susceptibility to mental health disorders. For adolescents, the social pressures of living up to these digital standards can be overwhelming, affecting their emotional stability and long-term psychological health.

²⁰ Shan Liu et al., “Social Support, Belongingness, and Value Co-Creation Behaviors in Online Health Communities,” *Telematics and Informatics* 50 (2020): 101398, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2020.101398>.

²¹ Ferdi Fathurohman, Marzuki Marzuki, and Ridwan Baharta, “The Influence of Social Media Use on the Self-Perception and Social Relations of Teenagers in the Digital Era,” *Jurnal Kajian Pendidikan Dan Psikologi* 1, no. 2 (2023): 112, <https://doi.org/10.61397/jkpp.v1i2.89>.

In addition to its impact on individual well-being, social media has transformed the nature of human communication. These platforms have enabled real-time, instant communication, which can bridge gaps in time and space. However, while this convenience is beneficial, it also comes with significant drawbacks. Social media interactions often lack the nonverbal cues—such as tone of voice, body language, and facial expressions—that are essential for understanding true emotional context in face-to-face communication. This absence of cues can lead to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and conflicts.

Furthermore, relationships that exist primarily in the digital realm may not carry the same depth as those formed through in-person interactions. When online relationships dominate, individuals may prioritize virtual connections over more meaningful, face-to-face engagements, ultimately leading to a sense of relational dissatisfaction. Studies have shown that excessive social media use correlates with a decline in relationship satisfaction, as time spent online often replaces opportunities for deeper, more authentic interpersonal experiences.²² Therefore, fostering a balanced approach to digital and offline relationships is essential for cultivating genuine and fulfilling human connections.

Another critical issue raised by social media is the prevalence of toxic behaviors, including cyberbullying, hate speech, and cancel culture. These behaviors can have particularly severe effects on youth, as they may face constant scrutiny, harassment, or public shaming in online spaces. Cyberbullying, in particular, can lead to feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression, as victims struggle to escape digital harassment.²³ This form of bullying can be more damaging than traditional bullying because it follows individuals into their personal spaces, where they often feel powerless to escape.

Hate speech on social media further exacerbates these issues by fostering division and intolerance. The anonymity of online platforms allows individuals to express hostile or discriminatory opinions without facing immediate consequences, creating a breeding ground for negativity and hostility.²⁴ Similarly, cancel culture, which is driven by the desire for accountability, often leads to public shaming and ostracism, undermining the social and emotional well-being of individuals—especially young people. The psychological toll of these behaviors can result in feelings of shame, anxiety, and a loss of self-worth.

²² Brandon T. McDaniel, Michelle Drouin, and Jaclyn D. Cravens, “Do You Have Anything to Hide? Infidelity-Related Behaviors on Social Media Sites and Marital Satisfaction,” *Computers in Human Behavior* 66 (2017): 88–95, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.09.031>.

²³ Nikolay V. Dvoryanchikov et al., “Deviant Online Behavior in Adolescent and Youth Circles: In Search of A Risk Assessment Model,” *International Journal of Cognitive Research in Science, Engineering and Education* 8, no. 2 (2020): 114, <https://doi.org/10.5937/IJCRSEE2002105D>.

²⁴ Kristanto, Selviawati, and Lie, “Pendidikan Karakter Kristen Di Sekolah Dalam Membangun Etika Kebebasan Berpendapat Generasi Z Bermedia Sosial.”

The psychological consequences of these behaviors are profound. Exposure to toxic content can alter cognitive and emotional development, leading to issues such as social withdrawal, stress, and diminished academic or professional performance. Adolescents, in particular, may struggle to cope with the barrage of negativity they encounter online, which can manifest in lower self-esteem and increased mental health issues. The constant bombardment of idealized images on social media can deepen feelings of dissatisfaction and contribute to depression, especially when individuals compare their lives to the unrealistic portrayals they encounter.

Given the complex relationship between social media, mental health, and relationships, addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach. One promising solution is promoting digital literacy, which equips individuals with the skills to navigate social media responsibly. Digital literacy encompasses not only understanding the technical aspects of online platforms but also developing the critical thinking skills necessary to evaluate the content consumed and create a healthy relationship with digital spaces.

Christian values offers a unique opportunity to counteract the negative effects of social media by integrating ethical and moral principles into digital literacy curricula. By emphasizing the intrinsic value of each individual beyond the metrics of likes and shares, Christian educators can help young people cultivate self-worth grounded in faith rather than social approval. Additionally, Christian values can encourage empathy, forgiveness, and self-control—values that are essential for healthy digital interactions. These teachings can empower students to combat toxic behaviors, foster resilience, and promote healthier relationships both online and offline.

Christian educators can also guide young people in developing a balanced view of identity. In a world where social media often shapes how individuals perceive themselves, Christian education provides a framework for understanding identity as something rooted in God's love, not external validation. This shift in perspective can help students navigate the pressures of social media and develop a sense of peace and security in who they are.

While social media has the potential to connect individuals and provide valuable support, its impact on mental health and relationships cannot be ignored. The constant pressures of comparison, validation-seeking, and exposure to toxic behaviors can lead to significant emotional distress, particularly for adolescents and young adults. To mitigate these negative effects, it is essential to foster digital literacy and promote responsible social media use. Christian education offers a powerful tool in this effort, providing young people with the values, skills, and sense of identity needed to navigate the digital world with wisdom, compassion, and resilience. By grounding social media use in ethical and moral principles, we can

ensure that these platforms enhance, rather than hinder, mental health and interpersonal well-being.

Educational Interventions to Promote Positive Engagement on Digital Platforms

Educational interventions play a critical role in promoting ethical and constructive engagement on digital platforms by addressing challenges such as misinformation, online harassment, and digital addiction. Programs that integrate digital literacy with moral education help students develop not only technical skills but also the ethical reasoning needed to navigate complex online environments. For example, teaching students to critically evaluate sources and recognize manipulative content empowers them to combat misinformation. Incorporating discussions on empathy and respect in digital communication fosters a culture of inclusivity, reducing instances of online harassment and toxic interactions. Research highlights that interventions combining these components result in more thoughtful and responsible digital behaviors among learners.²⁵ Essentially, such educational efforts are essential for shaping a digital generation that values integrity, respect, and accountability in their online presence.

Beyond individual skill development, educational interventions can positively influence broader digital ecosystems by shaping community norms. Curricula that emphasize the responsible use of technology, guided by principles such as accountability and stewardship, encourage students to become active participants in creating safer online spaces. Programs that address digital addiction by promoting mindful technology use have also shown promise in mitigating the negative effects of excessive screen time on mental health and relationships. Collaboration among educators, policymakers, and tech developers is essential to designing and implementing these interventions effectively. By fostering critical thinking, ethical engagement, and self-regulation, educational initiatives prepare learners to contribute constructively to the digital world, ultimately promoting a healthier and more equitable online society.²⁶ This holistic approach underscores the transformative potential of education in cultivating digital citizens who are both technically proficient and morally grounded.

²⁵ Bastian Kordyaka et al., "The Cycle of Toxicity: Exploring Relationships between Personality and Player Roles in Toxic Behavior in Multiplayer Online Battle Arena Games," in *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, vol. 7, 2023, 419-422, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3611043>.

²⁶ Rebecchi Kevin, Lubart Todd, and Hagège Hélène, "Teaching Responsible Creativity: A Path to Ethical Innovation," *Discover Education* 3, no. 1 (2024): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44217-024-00164-0>.

Christian Ethics as a Response to Cancel Culture and Hate Speech

Christian ethics provide a profound and countercultural response to cancel culture and hate speech, emphasizing principles such as grace, humility, and restorative justice. In the face of cancel culture, which often seeks to punish and exclude individuals for their mistakes, Christian ethics call for a posture of forgiveness and redemption. The biblical principle of grace underscores the importance of extending understanding and mercy to others, recognizing human fallibility while encouraging personal growth. Similarly, humility challenges the self-righteousness often inherent in online condemnation, inviting individuals to engage with others from a place of empathy rather than superiority. These values promote reconciliation and healing, fostering a culture where individuals can learn from their errors without being permanently ostracized.²⁷ Most importantly, integrating Christian ethics into digital discourse offers a pathway to more compassionate, just, and redemptive online communities. For example, the story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) illustrates this ethical response. While others sought to condemn and punish her, Jesus extended grace by stating, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." This narrative highlights the importance of mercy over judgment, encouraging restorative rather than punitive actions. Additionally, modern Christian organizations promoting reconciliation and forgiveness in the face of public shaming demonstrate how these ethics can be practically applied in contemporary contexts, challenging the harshness of cancel culture with compassion and redemption.

Hate speech, another toxic online behavior, is addressed by Christian ethics through a commitment to the inherent dignity and worth of every person. Grounded in the belief that all individuals are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), Christian teachings advocate for respectful and uplifting communication, even in contentious situations. Restorative justice, a key component of Christian ethics, offers a framework for addressing the harm caused by hate speech, focusing on dialogue, accountability, and reconciliation rather than mere punishment. Educational programs rooted in these principles can equip individuals to respond constructively to hate speech, encouraging transformative conversations instead of perpetuating cycles of hostility. By embodying these ethical responses, Christian ethics can contribute to a more compassionate and inclusive digital culture.²⁸ Thus, integrating these values into digital education fosters environments where mutual respect, healing, and understanding are prioritized.

²⁷ D. Simpson, D. B., Peters, J., & Dixon, "Cancel Culture and the Impact on Restorative Approaches in BIPOC Communities," in *Restorative Justice and Practice in US Education* (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024), 113–33.

²⁸ Chukwu et al., "Navigating Ethical Supply Chains: The Intersection of Diplomatic Management and Theological Ethics, 135."

The Role of Community in Shaping Digital Behavior

Community plays a vital role in shaping digital behavior by providing relational networks that model and reinforce positive online engagement. Christian education, in particular, emphasizes the influence of churches, schools, and families in cultivating ethical and constructive digital habits. Within these communities, mentorship and accountability help individuals navigate the challenges of the digital world. For example, church youth groups and family discussions about responsible technology use can encourage mindful digital interactions rooted in Christian principles such as respect, empathy, and integrity. Studies show that when individuals are surrounded by supportive communities that prioritize positive online behavior, they are more likely to emulate these values in their digital lives.²⁹ At its core, these faith-based communities serve as essential pillars in fostering a digital culture that reflects Christian virtues and ethical responsibility.

These relational networks also serve as a buffer against harmful digital behaviors, such as cyberbullying, misinformation, and digital addiction. By fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose, communities can counteract the isolating effects of excessive screen time and negative online experiences. Schools and churches can implement programs that not only teach technical skills but also highlight the ethical implications of digital engagement. For instance, initiatives incorporating collaborative digital projects or service-oriented online activities promote the idea of using technology to build and uplift others. By anchoring digital behavior in communal values, these efforts contribute to healthier online ecosystems while reinforcing the role of community as a cornerstone of ethical digital engagement.³⁰ In essence, such community-driven approaches ensure that digital spaces reflect values of care, accountability, and mutual respect, grounded in Christian teachings.

Christian Values as a Framework for Digital Conduct

Christian values such as love and empathy serve as powerful antidotes to the pervasive issues of cyberbullying and hate speech in digital spaces. Love fosters a caring and understanding, encouraging individuals to treat others with kindness and respect, even in online interactions. Empathy allows users to step into the shoes of others, reducing the likelihood of engaging in harmful behaviors such as offensive comments or malicious posts. These values help create safer and more inclusive environments where digital relationships are guided by compassion rather than

²⁹ Endang Wulandari, Winarno Winarno, and Triyanto Triyanto, "Digital Citizenship Education: Shaping Digital Ethics in Society 5.0," *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 9, no. 5 (2021): 948–956, <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2021.090507>.

³⁰ Atta Addo, "Orchestrating a Digital Platform Ecosystem to Address Societal Challenges: A Robust Action Perspective," *Journal of Information Technology* 37, no. 4 (2022): 374, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02683962221088333>.

hostility.³¹ At its core, integrating these Christian values into digital interactions can transform online spaces into communities of care, respect, and mutual understanding.

Forgiveness, another cornerstone of Christian teaching, provides a balanced response to cancel culture. While cancel culture is often driven by public accountability, it frequently leads to disproportionate shaming and exclusion, leaving individuals vulnerable to long-term emotional damage. By embracing forgiveness, individuals can extend grace and redemption to those who have made mistakes, promoting healing and reconciliation. Christian teachings highlight the importance of offering second chances and understanding the transformative potential of forgiveness, even in digital contexts where reputations can be easily tarnished.³² Embracing forgiveness in digital spaces fosters a culture of restoration and growth, where mistakes become opportunities for learning and redemption rather than perpetual condemnation.

Self-control and wisdom are crucial for managing digital interactions and content consumption. In a digital age where content is constantly available, Christian values emphasize the importance of mindful engagement. Self-control helps users avoid impulsive or harmful actions in the digital world, while wisdom guides them in ethically selecting the information they share and consume. By fostering these virtues, Christian values empowers individuals to navigate digital platforms thoughtfully and responsibly, maintaining their integrity in all aspects of their online presence.

These Christian values provide a comprehensive framework for guiding digital conduct. They address the root causes of toxic behavior and promote a balanced, ethical approach to online interactions. Through the integration of love, empathy, forgiveness, and self-control, individuals are equipped with the moral guidance necessary to cultivate respectful and meaningful relationships in the digital world.

Conclusion

The integration of Christian values into digital literacy has proven effective in mitigating toxic behavior in social media usage. Christian principles such as love, empathy, forgiveness, and self-control are effective solutions to cyberbullying, hate speech, and cancel culture. Christian education promotes values that encourage respectful and ethical online interactions, fostering a healthier digital environment for young people.

³¹ Tarsem Singh Cooner & Liz Beddoe Harry Ferguson, Tom Disney, Lisa Warwick, Jadwiga Leigh, "Hostile Relationships in Social Work Practice: Anxiety, Hate and Conflict in Long-Term Work with Involuntary Service Users," *Journal of Social Work Practice* 35, no. 1 (2021): 19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2020.1834371>.

³² Samuel Okere, "Framing ' Loss and Restoration ' in Christian Communication : Perspective of an Involved Inspirational Speaker" 3 (2018): 1–17.

In addition to reducing negative behaviors, Christian education also has great potential for shaping the character of the digital generation. Through intentional integration of theological perspectives and moral teachings, students are not only guided in understanding the technical aspects of digital literacy but also in navigating these spaces with a strong moral compass. This holistic approach prepares adolescents to make thoughtful, ethical decisions online and to contribute positively to digital communities. To maximize the impact of Christian teachings in addressing social media challenges, it is recommended that schools, churches, and families collaborate in designing comprehensive programs. These programs should integrate theological insights with practical skills to create well-rounded digital citizens. Long-term research is needed to assess the extent to which these programs can consistently shape ethical behavior in the digital world.

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