

# Parental Mediation of Social Media Use and Its Implications for Adolescents' Social Behavior: A Qualitative Study

Khoirul Umam<sup>1</sup>, Hamdan Tri Atmaja<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Master Program of Social Studies Education, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences. Universitas Negeri Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: Khoirul Umam

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20260150>

## ABSTRACT

The growing presence of social media has reshaped the ways adolescents interact and develop social behavior, particularly among junior high school students. Social media is no longer used only for communication and entertainment; it has become an important part of students' learning processes, self-expression, and everyday social engagement. Within this context, parental involvement plays a key role in shaping how adolescents experience and respond to digital media. This study explores how parents mediate their children's use of social media and examines the implications of these practices for students' social behavior. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis involving students, parents, and teachers who were purposively selected to reflect diverse family backgrounds and levels of parental education. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which involves processes of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that students actively use social media platforms particularly WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube for communication, entertainment, and learning support. Parental mediation takes various

forms, ranging from minimal supervision and restrictive control to more dialogic and collaborative guidance. Parents with higher levels of digital literacy tend to engage more actively with their children through open communication and value-based discussions, helping adolescents use social media in more constructive ways. This form of parental involvement is associated with the development of positive social behaviors, such as stronger communication skills, adaptability, and empathy. In contrast, limited parental involvement is often linked to less positive social outcomes, including reduced face-to-face interaction and uncritical imitation of online trends. Overall, the study highlights the crucial role of parents as mediators in shaping the social impacts of social media and emphasizes the importance of strengthening parental digital literacy and collaboration between families and schools to support healthy social media use among adolescents.

**Keywords:** parental mediation; social media use; adolescents; social behavior; qualitative study.

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has reshaped adolescents' social lives in profound ways, particularly through the growing role of social media in

everyday activities. For junior high school students, platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube are no longer used only for communication and entertainment. They have become part of students' daily routines, serving as spaces for learning, self-expression, and social interaction. While social media offers opportunities for accessing information, developing creativity, and maintaining social connections, it also brings potential challenges, including excessive screen time, exposure to inappropriate content, reduced face-to-face interaction, and the emergence of negative social behaviors (1) (2).

Recent research shows that the social impacts of social media use among adolescents vary widely and are strongly shaped by contextual factors, especially the family environment. Adolescents who receive consistent guidance and supervision from parents are more likely to experience positive outcomes, whereas those who engage with social media with little parental involvement are more vulnerable to social withdrawal, anxiety, and uncritical imitation of online trends (3)(4). These findings suggest that social media use should be viewed not simply as an individual behavior, but as a social practice embedded within family relationships.

In this context, parents play a central role as mediators of their children's digital experiences. Parental mediation theory highlights how parents shape children's engagement with digital media through a range of strategies, from restrictive rules to active discussion and shared media use. Empirical studies consistently show that dialogic and active mediation strategies are more effective in promoting responsible digital behavior and positive social development than approaches that rely solely on restriction (5)(6). Moreover, parents' levels of digital literacy influence the quality of mediation, determining whether social media becomes a meaningful resource for development or a potential source of risk (7)(8).

From a sociological perspective, differences in parental mediation practices can be understood through Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, which emphasizes how family-based values, dispositions, and everyday practices are internalized and reproduced over time. In the digital era, family habitus shapes how parents perceive technology and how adolescents develop patterns of social media use that influence their social behavior (9)(6). However, qualitative studies that connect parental mediation, the use of multiple social media platforms, and adolescents' social behavior within specific local contexts particularly in semi-urban settings remain limited.

Responding to this gap, the present study examines parental mediation of social media use and its implications for the social behavior of junior high school students at SMP Negeri 3 Mranggen Demak. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research seeks to provide contextual insights into how parental mediation practices operate across diverse family backgrounds and how these practices shape adolescents' social behavior in the digital era.

## **MATERIALS & METHODS**

### **Study Design**

This study adopted a qualitative approach with a case study design to develop a deep and contextual understanding of how parents mediate adolescents' use of social media and how these practices influence students' social behavior. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allows researchers to explore meanings, experiences, and social processes that are difficult to capture through quantitative methods alone (10)(11). By using a case study design, the research was able to examine the phenomenon holistically within its real-life educational and social setting.

### **Study Site and Participants**

The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 3 Mranggen Demak, Central Java, Indonesia. This junior high school is located in a semi

urban area and is characterized by diverse family backgrounds and varying levels of parental digital literacy. The site was chosen because social media use is widespread among students, while parental involvement in children's digital activities differs considerably across families.

Participants included junior high school students, their parents, and teachers who served as supporting informants. Informants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that participants were relevant to the research objectives. The selection criteria included students who actively used social media platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube, parents who were directly involved in supervising or guiding their children's media use, and teachers who had direct knowledge of students' social behavior in the school context. This approach ensured the inclusion of information-rich cases (12).

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected between October and December 2025 using multiple methods to enhance the depth and credibility of the findings. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with students, parents, and teachers to explore their experiences, perceptions, and practices related to social media use and parental mediation. This interview format provided flexibility while maintaining focus on the main research themes. In addition, non-participant observations were carried out to capture students' social behavior in the school environment, including patterns of interaction, communication, cooperation, and adherence to social norms. Relevant documents, such as school regulations, digital literacy programs, and selected records of parental communication, were also analyzed following established qualitative document analysis procedures (13).

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model proposed by Miles,

Huberman, and Saldaña, which involves ongoing and iterative processes of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (14). Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were systematically coded and organized into thematic categories, including parental mediation strategies, patterns of social media use, and students' social behavior. To strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation of data sources and methods was applied, and key interpretations were confirmed with selected informants through member checking (15).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided their informed consent prior to data collection. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by using pseudonyms and restricting access to raw data, in line with ethical guidelines for qualitative research (16).

## **RESULT & DISCUSSION**

### **Patterns of Social Media Use among Adolescents**

The findings indicate that social media has become an integral part of junior high school students' everyday lives. All participants reported actively using platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube, although each platform served a different purpose. WhatsApp was mainly used for communication and coordination related to school activities and peer interaction. YouTube functioned as both a source of entertainment and a learning aid, with students frequently accessing videos to support their understanding of school subjects. Meanwhile, TikTok was predominantly used as a space for entertainment and self-expression, where students followed trends and explored creative content.

**Table 1. Patterns of Social Media Use among Adolescents**

Platform	Main Functions	Observed Implications for Students
WhatsApp	Communication, school coordination	Strengthens peer interaction and collaboration
YouTube	Entertainment and learning support	Enhances independent learning, risk of passive consumption
TikTok	Entertainment, self-expression, trends	Encourages creativity, risk o

Table 1 illustrates that each social media platform contributes differently to students' social and learning experiences. WhatsApp is mainly used to maintain peer relationships and to support communication related to school activities, making it an important tool for daily interaction among students. YouTube plays a dual role, serving not only as a source of entertainment but also as a learning resource that helps students deepen their understanding of classroom materials. In contrast, TikTok is largely used for entertainment and self-expression, providing students with space to explore creativity and follow current trends. However, when used excessively, TikTok also poses a higher risk of distraction, which may interfere with students' academic focus.

This pattern reflects the way adolescents selectively use social media platforms according to the specific functions they offer, such as maintaining peer relationships, exploring identity, and accessing information (17)(18). At the same time, the intensive use of entertainment-oriented platforms like TikTok also raises concerns. Without adequate guidance, such use may lead to distraction from academic responsibilities and increased exposure to content that is not always age-appropriate (1)(19). These findings highlight the complex nature of adolescents' social media engagement, which involves both opportunities and risks depending on how and in what context the platforms are used.

### **Forms of Parental Mediation in Social Media Use**

Analysis of the data revealed three main patterns of parental mediation: minimal supervision, restrictive mediation, and dialogic or active mediation. Minimal supervision was typically limited to setting time boundaries, with little discussion about

online content or behavior. Restrictive mediation focused on rules regarding access and duration of social media use, but often lacked ongoing communication. In contrast, dialogic mediation involved open conversations, shared reflection on online experiences, and guided engagement with digital content.

Parents who demonstrated higher levels of digital literacy were more likely to adopt dialogic mediation practices. This finding supports previous research showing that active and communicative mediation is more effective in promoting healthy media use among adolescents than approaches based solely on restriction (20). Through dialogue and discussion, adolescents are better able to develop critical thinking skills and a more reflective attitude toward social media content (21).

### **Implications for Adolescents' Social Behavior**

Differences in parental mediation practices were clearly reflected in students' social behavior. Adolescents who experienced dialogic parental mediation tended to display more positive social behaviors, including effective communication, cooperation with peers, adaptability, and empathy in both online and offline interactions. These patterns are consistent with studies indicating that responsive parental involvement strengthens adolescents' social competence and reduces the likelihood of maladaptive behavior(22).

In contrast, students who received minimal parental involvement were more likely to exhibit less positive social behaviors, such as reduced face-to-face interaction, reliance on online validation, and uncritical imitation of social media trends. Similar findings have been reported in research linking low levels of parental supervision to increased

social anxiety and problematic digital habits among adolescents (23). These results reinforce the idea that social media itself is not inherently harmful; rather, its impact depends largely on the social and familial context in which it is used.

In line with the present study, previous research suggests that adolescents' use of social media goes beyond functional purposes and can also shape behaviors that deviate from normative social expectations, underscoring the complex and multifaceted influence of social media on youth behavior(24). Previous research on parents' perceptions of media content highlights the important role of parental involvement in shaping children's behavioral responses to media exposure. This perspective closely aligns with our findings, which emphasize the value of active parental mediation in guiding adolescents' social media use (25). Related findings published on students' mobile phone use further show how deeply digital engagement is embedded in adolescents' daily lives and how it is linked to behavioral outcomes, reinforcing the need for structured parental mediation to support healthy social behavior(26).

### **Interpretation within a Sociological Perspective**

From a sociological perspective, these findings can be understood through the concept of family habitus, which emphasizes how family values, dispositions, and everyday practices shape adolescents' digital engagement and social behavior (9). Families with higher levels of cultural and digital capital tend to foster more reflective and dialogic mediation practices, which in turn support healthier patterns of social behavior among adolescents. This perspective highlights that parental mediation is not merely about controlling access to technology, but about co-constructing meaning and values with adolescents in digital spaces.

Overall, the results underline parental mediation as a key mechanism linking social media use and adolescents' social

behavior. Active parental engagement and open dialogue can help social media function as a supportive space for learning and social development, while limited mediation may increase adolescents' vulnerability to negative outcomes. These findings point to the importance of strengthening parental digital literacy and encouraging collaboration between schools and families to promote balanced and healthy social media use among adolescents.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study shows that social media has become an important part of adolescents' everyday lives and plays a meaningful role in shaping their social behavior, particularly among junior high school students. Platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube are widely used not only for communication and entertainment, but also for self-expression and learning. However, the influence of social media on adolescents' social behavior does not occur in isolation; it is closely shaped by how parents guide and supervise their children's media use.

The findings indicate that adolescents benefit most when parents apply dialogic and active mediation strategies, which involve open communication, guidance, and shared reflection on online experiences. This approach is associated with more positive social behaviors, including better communication skills, adaptability, cooperation, and empathy. Conversely, limited parental involvement or overly restrictive control is more often linked to less positive outcomes, such as reduced face-to-face interaction and a tendency to imitate online trends without critical reflection. These results suggest that social media itself is not inherently harmful; rather, its impact depends on the social environment and the quality of parental engagement.

Overall, this study highlights the central role of parents as mediators in adolescents' digital lives and underscores the importance of strengthening parental digital literacy.

Greater collaboration between families and schools is therefore essential to help adolescents develop healthy, balanced, and responsible patterns of social media use in the digital era.

### **Declaration by Authors**

**Acknowledgement:** None

**Source of Funding:** None

**Conflict of Interest:** No conflicts of interest declared.

### **REFERENCES**

1. Odgers CL, Jensen MR. Annual Research Review: Adolescent mental health in the digital age: facts, fears, and future directions. *J Child Psychol Psychiatry Allied Discip.* 2020;61(3):336–48.
2. Beyens I, Keijsers L, Coyne SM. social media, parenting, and well-being. *Curr Opin Psychol* [Internet]. 2022; 47:101350. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101350>
3. Taylor. Disrupting Harm in. 2022; Available from: [https://www.jamii.go.tz/uploads/publication/s/sw1656307907-DH\\_Tanzania\\_ONLINE\\_final\\_revise020322\(1\)\(1\).pdf](https://www.jamii.go.tz/uploads/publication/s/sw1656307907-DH_Tanzania_ONLINE_final_revise020322(1)(1).pdf)
4. Widiyanto A, Acob JRU, Cavite FAM, Yuniarti T, Atmojo JT. The Impact of Time Spent on Social Media on the Occurrence of Anxiety in Youth: A Cross-Sectional Study in Surakarta, Indonesia. *J Nurs Pract.* 2025;8(4):904–11.
5. Liu J, Wu L, Sun X, Bai X, Duan C. Active Parental Mediation and Adolescent Problematic Internet Use: The Mediating Role of Parent–Child Relationships and Hiding Online Behavior. *Behav Sci (Basel).* 2023;13(8).
6. Tan CY, Xu N, Liang M, Li L. Meta-analysis of associations between digital parenting and children's digital wellbeing. *Educ Res Rev.* 2025;48(May).
7. Okela AH, Olatokun WM, Anumudu CE, Ziani A, Nser KK, Ben Lagha F. Parental social media literacy antecedents and children's digital media addiction: observations from two African countries. *Compet Rev.* 2025;
8. Erhamwilda, Afrianti N, Fitroh Hayati, Awit Marwati Sakinah, Salma Hanifa, Hirza. Exploring the Impact of Parental Knowledge and Attitudes on Mediation Practices in Digital Parenting for Early Childhood. *J Pendidik Anak Usia Dini Undiksha.* 2025;13(1):17–29.
9. Schirato T, Roberts M. The logic of practice. *Bourdieu.* 2020;208–39.
10. Creswell JW, Cuevas S, Greene K, Santoyo D, Robinson J. Qualitative inquiry and research design; Choosing Among Five Approaches. 2006.
11. Yin RK. Case study research and applications: Design and methods. Vol. 53, *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research.* 2018. 277–278 p.
12. Palinkas LA, Horwitz SM, Green CA, Wisdom JP, Duan N, Hoagwood K. Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research. *Adm Policy Ment Heal Ment Heal Serv Res* [Internet]. 2015;42(5):533–44. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>
13. Bowen G. Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method Glenn. West Carolina Univ [Internet]. 2011;28(4):78–81. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.11.016> <http://www.ijonte.org> <http://blog.powerrdata.es/el-valor-de-la-gestion-de-datos/bid/405060/Qu-significa-la-integracion-de-datos>
14. Wolf brend 2024\_Collecting and Analyzing Qualitative Data\_Field Epi Manual\_CDC.
15. Lincoln YGE. *Naturalistic Inquiry* - Yvonna S. 1985.
16. Tracy 2020\_Qualitative Research Methods - Google Books.
17. Faviero M, Sidoti O. Teens, social media and Technology 2024 | Pew Research Center [Internet]. 2024. p. 1–23. Available from: <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2024/12/12/teens-social-media-and-technology-2024/>
18. Ningsih G, Utami SR, Nugrahani RA. Pengaruh Lamanya Waktu Ekstraksi Remaserasi Kulit Buah Durian Terhadap Rendemen Saponin Dan Aplikasinya Sebagai Zat Aktif Anti Jamur. *Konversi.* 2015;4(1):8–16.
19. Wang Z, Abdullah Z, Hu W. A Systematic Review of the Impact of Social Media on

- Project-Based Learning. *Sustain.* 2025;17(8):1–27.
20. Livingstone S, Ólafsson K, Helsper EJ, Lupiáñez-Villanueva F, Veltri GA, Folkvord F. Maximizing Opportunities and Minimizing Risks for Children Online: The Role of Digital Skills in Emerging Strategies of Parental Mediation. *J Commun.* 2017;67(1):82–105.
21. Sevilla-Fernández D, Díaz-López A, Caba-Machado V, Machimbarrena JM, Ortega-Barón J, González-Cabrera J. Parental mediation and the use of social networks: A systematic review. *PLoS One.* 2025;20(2 February):1–24.
22. Stieger S, Wunderl S. Associations between social media use and cognitive abilities: Results from a large-scale study of adolescents. *Comput Human Behav [Internet].* 2022;135(December 2021):107358. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2022.107358>
23. Megan M, Rajitha K, Shari S, Jennifer W. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking.* US Mary Ann Liebert, Inc. 2013;16(7):504–11.
24. Ramadiyani EW. Determination of Academic Fraud by Using Communication Media as a Mediation Variable. *International Journal of Research and Review.* 2021; 8(November):259–71.
25. Rajput K, Jain MR. Mother's Perception about Influence of Cartoons on Child's Behaviour and Parenting Style. *International Journal of Research and Review.* 2017;4(June):103–13.
26. Salsabila NF, Handoyo E, Atmaja HT. The Impact of Mobile Phone Use on Students Learning Independence in Elementary Schools. *International Journal of Research and Review.* 2024;11(November):354–64.

How to cite this article: Khoirul Umam, Hamdan Tri Atmaja. Parental mediation of social media use and its implications for adolescents' social behavior: a qualitative study. *International Journal of Research and Review.* 2026; 13(1): 525-531. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20260150>

\*\*\*\*\*