Original Article

THE MORAL CRISIS OF INFLUENCERS AND VIRAL CONTENT THAT IS NOT EDUCATIONAL

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ABSTRACT

Background. In Indonesia, the rapid growth of internet access and social media, with around 77% of the population online by 2022, has coincided with a decline in human values. A 2021 report documented over 1,000 instances of negative content on social media, revealing issues of discrimination and violence amidst technological progress. This evolution in communication has fostered influencer marketing, significantly shaping public opinion and behavior.

Research Purpose. To analyze the moral crisis of influencers and viral contents that is not education-based on Pancasila, the second principle.

Research Method. This study utilizes a qualitative-systematic literature review to evaluate the influence of social media influencers on public opinion in Indonesia. It involves a systematic search of databases like Google Scholar and Science Direct for literature from 2019 to 2024, ensuring relevance in the rapidly changing social media landscape. The research incorporates keywords such as "Indonesian social media influencers," "digital public opinion formation," and "social media influence." Additionally, it includes qualitative interviews with 10 respondents, applying descriptive and thematic analysis.

Findings. 90% of participants have experienced hate speech, only 10% indicating they have not. Key contributing factors include internal influences like psychological conditions and personal biases, along with external influences such as primordialism, ethnocentrism, and inadequate understanding of Pancasila.

Conclusion. The moral crisis among Indonesia's youth is influenced by social media and viral content. Influencers significantly shape adolescent behavior and public opinion, with irresponsible content. The issue is worsened by inadequate digital literacy and ethics, facilitating the widespread acceptance of harmful content.

Keywords: Moral Crisis, Social Media, Pancasila, Second Principle, Viral.

BACKGROUND

In today's digital age, the crisis of human values underpinning the second principle is increasingly being ignored by Indonesian society. According to a 2022 survey by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), around 77% of Indonesians are connected to the internet, and more than 60% use social media as their main source of information. Although access to information has become easier, the proliferation of fake news, hatred, and intolerant behavior in the virtual world shows that human values are slowly being eroded. Based on data from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, there were more than 1,000 cases of negative content reported on social media in 2021, including topics such as discrimination, violence, and fraud. This crisis reflects the contradiction between technological advances and the strengthening of human values, which should be the foundation of interaction in the digital world [1].

Technological developments are accelerating, especially in Indonesia, as revealed by data from We Are Social in 2023, which shows that in January 2023, there were 212.9 million internet users in Indonesia, with internet penetration reaching 77.0 percent. More specifically, based on the number of social media users, there are currently 167.0 million social media users, which is equivalent to 60.4 percent of Indonesia's total population, and there are also 353.8 million active mobile connections, equivalent to 128 percent of the total population[2].

The development of technology and information in the digital era has had a major impact on the way we communicate and interact. These changes have led to shifts in the way individuals obtain information, interact, and make decisions, including in terms of consumption. Social media, which was originally used only as a means of entertainment or communication, has now developed into a marketing medium that is not only effective but also strategic in reaching a wide and diverse audience. This phenomenon has given rise to a growing trend in digital marketing, namely influencer marketing, which involves popular figures on social media who have the capacity to influence public opinion and shape the behavior of their followers[3].

An influencer is someone who generally has many followers and is trusted by them. The content that influencers produce can shape opinions and influence preferences, thereby encouraging purchasing decisions among their followers[4]. Influencers provide personal reviews of products and share them through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. This more familiar and informal communication style makes influencers more trusted by their followers compared to conventional advertising[5].

The moral condition of the current young adult generation shows increasingly alarming symptoms. Teenagers, as the future generation of the nation, face various complex social challenges, ranging from identity crises, promiscuity, misuse of technology, to the erosion of noble values that form the foundation of national life. This phenomenon indicates a real and urgent moral crisis that cannot be left unaddressed without serious and systematic handling. The moral crisis experienced by Indonesia's younger generation is a reflection of the failure of the education system to shape people of character[6]. This statement emphasizes that education plays a vital role in shaping the morality of young people, and therefore needs to be given primary attention in the solutions offered.

In a fast-paced and competitive modern society, teenagers are often caught up in the tide of pragmatism and materialism. They tend to prioritize instant gratification and ignore the moral values that should guide their lives. Phenomena such as bullying, hedonism, promiscuity, drug abuse, and the proliferation of negative content on social media indicate a worsening moral degradation. The moral development of teenagers is greatly influenced by their environment, especially their family, school, and peers[7]. If these three elements fail to provide positive examples and guidance, teenagers will grow up without strong moral values. This research contributes to the academic knowledge base on the relationship between digital content (influencers, viral content) and national morality. It provides a framework for moral analysis, for example, through Pancasila as the national ideology, strengthening research on digital character and ethics. This research aimed to analyze the moral crisis of influencers and viral contents that is not education-based on Pancasila, the second principle.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a systematic literature review approach to analyze and synthesize previous studies on the role of social media influencers in shaping public opinion in

Indonesia. A systematic literature review was chosen because it allows researchers to identify, evaluate, and interpret all relevant research related to a specific research question, topic area, or phenomenon of interest[8]. The data collection process was carried out through a systematic search of academic databases, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Science Direct, and Portal Garuda, with a publication period spanning from 2019 to 2024. This time period was selected based on considerations to obtain the most up-to-date literature, given the very rapid dynamics of social media development. Keywords used in the search included "Indonesian social media influencers," "digital public opinion formation," "social media influence," and "digital opinion leaders".

A qualitative approach was used to interpret the phenomenon as a deviation from the second principle by using interviews with 10 respondents. The research method combines literature review and qualitative analysis. Utilizes academic searches through Google Scholar using keywords such as "Pancasila," "hate speech," and "humanity." Qualitative analysis was conducted to examine the definition of the concept of hate speech, its forms, and its relevance to humanitarian values. Interview data came from students who had taken the Pancasila and Citizenship course.

FINDINGS

In the digital era, education has become part of social media-based social action. Pancasila, particularly the values of the right to life and humanity, serves as the basis for analysis. Social media usage in Indonesia has increased sharply (191 million users in 2022), and platforms such as TikTok, Twitter, and Facebook Messenger are also used for social learning. However, this increase has been accompanied by a rise in hate speech concerning issues of race, gender, and ethnicity. Research shows that 90% of respondents have received or been involved in hate speech, while 10% have not. Internal factors such as psychological conditions and individual biases, as well as external factors such as primordialism, ethnocentrism, and low Pancasila literacy, are the main causes. The study uses literature review, quantitative methods, and qualitative analysis to understand the phenomenon of hate speech as a deviation from the second principle of Pancasila.

Hate speech is seen as a violation of the value of "Just and Civilized Humanity." The research results are based on interviews with 10 respondents: a. Experiences receiving/perpetrating hate speech, b. Feelings when receiving/perpetrating, c. Frequency of involvement, d. Suggested solutions. As many as 90% of informants had been involved in or received hate speech, primarily through TikTok, Twitter, and Instagram, although a small portion occurred in real life. The feelings that arose included sadness, hurt, irritation, anxiety, and fear. Perpetrators generally did not feel guilty. The informants recommended self-reflection and a non-provoked attitude to avoid escalating the conflict. This phenomenon demonstrates the weak internalization of the second principle of Pancasila, as empathy and civility are not upheld. Low Pancasila literacy, misinterpretation of freedom of expression, and a permissive social environment reinforce this phenomenon.

Factors causing hate speech: a) Internal factors: individual psychological conditions, self-dissatisfaction, bias, low empathy, and information confusion; b) External factors: primordialism, ethnocentrism, low literacy in Pancasila and citizenship, misconceptions about freedom of expression, the impact of science and technology not balanced by literacy, and weak social control from the surrounding environment. All of these factors reflect a deviation from the values of humanity, justice, and civilization within Pancasila.The virality of content on social media has a strong influence on the lives of teenagers, particularly in shaping their behavior, way of thinking, and social norms. The rapid spread of content

through social media algorithms makes teenagers more susceptible to popular trends. Teens who actively use platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube often imitate the styles, expressions, and actions displayed in viral content as a form of self-adjustment and an effort to gain social acceptance.

The impact of virality is not only in the form of lifestyle changes, but also in the emergence of new norms that sometimes replace traditional values. For example, the use of slang, clothing styles, and behavioral habits are now more influenced by viral content than by the social rules that usually apply in families or neighborhoods. Teenagers often feel they must follow trends so they are not considered outdated or different from their peers. This condition reinforces the phenomenon of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), which makes teenagers increasingly dependent on the flow of digital information.

In addition to creating positive changes such as increased creativity or the emergence of new communities, viral content can also have negative impacts. Research shows that some viral trends encourage teenagers to engage in risky behavior, such as dangerous challenges or impulsive actions without regard for safety[8]. Social pressure, cyberbullying, and the feeling of having to meet certain standards further exacerbate the mental health of some teenagers. In a broader social context, the virality of content shapes new patterns of interaction where digital popularity becomes a measure of acceptance. Teenagers who follow trends are considered more acceptable, while those who are not involved in viral culture often feel left out. This shows that viral content plays a major role in shifting social norms, even creating unwritten rules about what is considered "normal" or "standard" behavior among teenagers.

At the same time, social media algorithms reinforce this impact by continuously displaying similar content, exposing teenagers to the same trends repeatedly. This pattern makes behavioral and normative changes increasingly rapid and difficult to control. Therefore, research emphasizes the importance of digital literacy to help teenagers understand, sort, and critically evaluate content before accepting or imitating it. Overall, the virality of content has a multifaceted impact that encompasses behavioral, social, and emotional aspects. Without guidance from family and their environment, teenagers are potentially susceptible to trends that are not in line with positive values. Therefore, parents, educators, and policies that support healthier and more responsible use of social media are needed.

The digital era has brought about major changes to human life in terms of interaction, communication, information seeking, and learning. The rapid development of technology certainly has a positive impact, but it also has the potential to be negative if not used properly. The rapid advancement of technology poses a major challenge to moral values, especially among the younger generation, most of whom are social media users. In early 2025, internet users in Indonesia reached 221 million, equivalent to 79.5 percent of the total population. A survey by the National Center on Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) ranked Indonesia fourth globally and second in ASEAN in cases of child pornography in the digital space. This data is very concerning and requires a serious response from the government and parents.

Globalization is a general trend of integrating domestic/local communities into the global community in various fields. The era of globalization has influenced all aspects of life, including education, economy, society, science and technology, and even the morals of teenagers. The issue that is of great concern to all countries is the economy. However, in Indonesia, it is not only that; the moral crisis among teenagers is also very alarming. The morals and behavior of teenagers in Indonesia have changed due to the influence of foreign

countries that has been brought to Indonesia. All of this has been absorbed without thinking or choosing the behavior that should be adopted by teenagers in Indonesia. In the past, the morals of Indonesian children were commendable. This can be seen from their manners, politeness, and good language. However, now the morals and behavior of Indonesian teenagers are very concerning. The progress or regression of a nation in the future also lies on the shoulders of the younger generation. On the threshold of adulthood, awaiting the tasks they must fulfill, certain provisions are very necessary to prepare for them.

It is a fact in the history of human development that in order to survive, we must always surrender and entrust our lives to the younger generation[9]. The character of a nation is also an important aspect of the quality of its human resources, because the quality of a nation's character determines its progress. Quality character needs to be formed and nurtured from an early age. Early childhood is a critical phase for the formation of a person's character. Failure to instill a good personality at an early age will shape a problematic personality in adulthood[10]. There are many deviant behaviors that are increasingly prevalent in Indonesia. Most of these deviations are committed or experienced by teenagers.

These deviant behaviors usually include free sex, drugs, and other activities. Meanwhile, national policy emphasizes that national character building is a fundamental requirement for nationhood and statehood. Since its independence, the Indonesian people have been determined to make national character building an important part of national development[10]. Furthermore, it should be remembered that character education is explicitly mandated by Law No. 23 of 2003 on the National Education System, Article 3, which emphasizes that National Education serves to develop abilities and shape the character and civilization of a dignified nation in order to educate the nation, aiming to develop the potential of students to become people who believe in and fear God Almighty, have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, skilled, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens.

DISCUSSIONS

Social Media Influencers and Public Opinion Formation: The Concept of Social Media Influencers Social media influencers are a contemporary phenomenon that has emerged as a consequence of the democratization of digital media. Influencers as individuals who have the ability to influence the decisions and views of others through the content they share on social media platforms. The primary characteristic of influencers lies in their ability to build credibility and trust within specific digital communities [11]. In the Indonesian context, the development of social media influencers has unique characteristics influenced by the socio-cultural conditions of society. Indonesian influencers tend to adopt a more personal and relationship-based approach compared to influencers in Western countries. This is reflected in the high levels of engagement and two-way interaction between influencers and their followers[12].

Mechanisms of Public Opinion Formation in the Digital Era: The transformation of public opinion formation mechanisms in the digital era has undergone significant changes compared to the era of conventional media. The process of forming public opinion on social media is more dynamic and multilateral, where every individual has the potential to contribute to public discourse[13]. A study stated that social media algorithms play a crucial role in determining the visibility and reach of messages disseminated by influencers[14]. This creates what is known as an "algorithmic public sphere," where public opinion formation is influenced not only by content but also by the social media platform's algorithmic system.

Credibility and Trust in Digital Communication: Credibility is a crucial factor in influencers' effectiveness in influencing public opinion. Three main components that build influencer credibility: expertise, trustworthiness, and authenticity. These three components interact dynamically to shape followers' perceptions of influencers. Longitudinal research shows that followers' levels of trust in influencers tend to fluctuate and are influenced by message consistency and transparency in disclosing commercial affiliations[15]. This finding is reinforced by a study which found a positive correlation between influencer transparency and followers' trust levels[10].

Social Impact and Polarization: The influence of influencers in shaping public opinion is inseparable from the phenomenon of social polarization. Influencers often inadvertently contribute to the strengthening of echo chambers on social media, where followers tend to be exposed to views that align with their pre-existing beliefs. A digital ethnographic study in Indonesia revealed that polarization amplified by influencers occurs not only on political issues but also extends to social and cultural spheres[16]. This phenomenon is further complicated by the intersection of digital identity and cultural identity.

Ethics and Regulation: The ethical aspects of social media influencer practices are of particular concern in digital communication studies. Underscore the importance of a comprehensive ethical framework to regulate influencer activities, particularly regarding transparency and accountability in shaping public opinion. In Indonesia, regulations related to influencer activities are still under development. The absence of clear ethical standards has the potential to create a gray area in the practice of shaping public opinion by influencers[14].

Future Trends and Developments: Technological advancements and changes in social media user behavior continue to shape the evolution of the influencer role. Artificial intelligence and virtual reality will bring new dimensions to how influencers interact with their audiences. Research indicates the emergence of a micro-influencer trend in Indonesia, which has a smaller follower base but higher engagement rates[17]. This phenomenon demonstrates a paradigm shift from reach-based influence to engagement-based influence.

Causes of Viral, Uneducational Content, as follows:

1. Social Media Algorithms: Platform algorithms (such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube) tend to promote content that attracts attention and provokes emotions to keep users engaged and engaged. Sensational, provocative, or controversial content tends to go viral more easily[18].

2. Limited Digital Literacy: Many users (including children and adolescents) lack sufficient media literacy skills to evaluate what is genuinely good and what is manipulative or a hoax. The Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kominfo) cites digital literacy as a key factor in addressing negative content.

3. User Emotions That Trigger Sharing: Content that generates strong emotional reactions (such as anger or shock) is more likely to be shared. Research shows that emotions like anger accelerate the spread of fake news or sensational content.

4. Normalization and Social Impact: Viral negative content can become "normal" in the eyes of society. According to analysis, the normalization of "excessive" pranks or harassing content can shift moral boundaries because it is considered trendy. Influencers play a crucial role: when influencers spread viral content (even if it's not educational), their followers can imitate it and reinforce unhealthy new norms.

5. Lack of Strong Moderation or Weak Policies: Not all platforms have effective content moderation systems to filter out "uneducational" or harmful content. If content policies are unclear or not enforced, creators have more freedom to create controversial content for the sake of going viral.

This study has several limitations inherent in its qualitative design and literature review approach. First, the analysis relies on existing academic literature, media reports, and digital culture studies, which may not fully capture the rapidly evolving nature of influencer behavior and viral content across social media platforms. As a result, some recent trends or emerging platforms may be underrepresented. Second, the qualitative and interpretive nature of moral and ethical analysis involves a degree of subjectivity, particularly in defining what constitutes "non-educational" or morally problematic content, despite the use of established ethical and educational frameworks.

Additionally, the absence of primary quantitative data—such as audience engagement metrics, algorithmic reach, or large-scale surveys—limits the ability to generalize findings or establish causal relationships between influencer content and moral or educational impacts on audiences. The study also does not account for cross-cultural differences in moral values and digital norms, which may influence interpretations of influencer behavior. Therefore, future research is encouraged to employ mixed-methods designs, longitudinal digital ethnography, or platform-specific data analysis to enhance empirical depth and generalizability.

CONCLUSION

The moral crisis affecting Indonesia's youth due to the influence of influencers and viral content on social media, and how this can be analyzed based on the values of Pancasila. This moral crisis is characterized by the erosion of humanitarian values, the emergence of deviant behavior such as cyberbullying, hedonism, and the displacement of normative norms by less educational viral trends. Social media influencers play a significant role in shaping public opinion and adolescent behavior, where irresponsible content can reinforce negative social norms and exacerbate the moral crisis. This is exacerbated by a lack of digital literacy and good ethics among social media users, allowing negative content to easily spread and become accepted as normal.

Pancasila, as the foundation of the state and a system of social ethics, possesses relevant values to address this issue. Each principle of Pancasila, from Belief in One Almighty God, Just and Civilized Humanity, the Unity of Indonesia, Democracy Guided by the Wisdom of Wisdom, to Social Justice for All Indonesians, provides a foundation for improving the nation's morals and character. A comprehensive improvement strategy, including Pancasila-based character education, strict regulation of social media content, and strengthening digital literacy, is key to overcoming the moral crisis in this digital era.

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