

How are Juvenile Crime and Nighttime Street Crime Affected by the Spread of Negative Trends on Social Media in Indonesia?

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of negative social media trends on juvenile and street crime in Indonesia, focusing on the behaviors and motivations of adolescents influenced by online content. Using qualitative analysis, data were collected through interviews with five informants, including social media analysts, law enforcement officials, community leaders, and adolescents. The findings reveal that social media trends often glorify risky and criminal behaviors, which are further amplified by peer pressure and group dynamics. Nighttime settings, coupled with a lack of recreational alternatives, exacerbate the issue by creating opportunities for crime. Additionally, the lack of digital literacy among youth contributes to their susceptibility to harmful content. This study highlights the urgent need for digital literacy education, community engagement, and policy interventions to mitigate the influence of negative trends on social media and reduce juvenile crime in Indonesia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media platforms has revolutionized communication and interaction, reshaping how individuals, particularly youth, perceive and engage with their surroundings. While these platforms offer opportunities for self-expression, learning, and connection, they also serve as a conduit for spreading negative trends and harmful behaviors. In Indonesia, the rapid adoption of social media has coincided with an increase in concerning behaviors among juveniles, including the perpetuation of street crimes during nighttime. This phenomenon

warrants critical examination to understand the interplay between digital influences and real-world actions. The rise of social media in Indonesia has significantly influenced youth behavior, offering both opportunities and challenges. These platforms facilitate enhanced communication and global connectivity, fostering a sense of community and belonging among youth [1]. They also provide access to educational resources and diverse perspectives, empowering young individuals with knowledge and encouraging activism [1], while simultaneously offering a vital space for self-expression and identity

formation crucial to adolescent development [2]. However, the negative consequences cannot be overlooked. The ease of accessing harmful content can shape youth behavior negatively, raising moral and ethical concerns [3], while excessive social media usage is associated with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and feelings of inadequacy driven by unrealistic online standards [1]. Moreover, social media can facilitate deviance and crime through mechanisms like social learning theory, where youth imitate negative behaviors seen online [4]. From the lens of routine activity theory, the significant time spent online may reduce parental supervision and increase opportunities for delinquent acts [4], further illustrating how social media can normalize or even glamorize criminal behaviors, thereby influencing offline conduct [4]. Given these contrasting effects, it is crucial to delve deeper into the multifaceted influence of social media on youth behavior in Indonesia.

Negative trends on social media, such as challenges promoting risky or illegal activities, the glorification of violence, and the normalization of deviant behavior, have emerged as significant factors influencing youth behavior, particularly among adolescents who are impressionable and often seek validation. In Indonesia, where social media penetration is high and regulatory frameworks lag behind rapid digital developments, these trends present growing societal concerns, reflected in the increasing cases of juvenile crime and night-time street offenses that disrupt public safety and burden law enforcement. Platforms like YouTube and Instagram serve as conduits through which adolescents engage in and disseminate risky behaviors, such as dangerous challenges that become normalized within peer groups [5], [6]. Excessive use of these platforms is also linked to declining academic performance and worsening mental health issues, including anxiety and depression, which can further exacerbate tendencies toward deviant behavior [7]. The mental health implications are profound, with cyberbullying and exposure to inappropriate content

contributing to psychosocial deviations among adolescents [8], and notable gender differences indicating that females are more susceptible to mental health issues while males tend to dominate in usage patterns [8]. Indonesia's struggle to update its regulatory frameworks to match the pace of digital transformation complicates mitigation efforts [2], and the challenge is further intensified by the urgent need for coordinated parental, educational, and policy-level interventions to ensure that adolescents develop healthy and responsible social media habits [7].

This study aims to explore the link between the spread of negative social media trends and their impact on juvenile crime and street crime at night in Indonesia. By employing a qualitative approach, the research seeks to delve into the underlying motivations, perceptions, and influences that drive young individuals toward such behaviors. Interviews with five informants, including law enforcement personnel, social media experts, and youth behavior analysts, provide a multifaceted understanding of this complex issue.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Social Media as a Catalyst for Behavioral Influence*

Social media platforms have become integral to communication and cultural exchange, significantly shaping behavior, particularly among adolescents. In Indonesia, where youth constitute a large segment of social media users, these platforms wield both positive and negative influences. On the one hand, social media fosters creativity and participation by providing a space for self-expression and engagement in diverse activities [8], while also allowing adolescents to connect with others, build supportive social networks, and enhance their sense of self and identity

[9]. On the other hand, the pressure to conform to online trends often compels adolescents to engage in risky behaviors, imitating actions perceived as socially desirable [8], [10]. Excessive use of these platforms may lead to addiction, privacy breaches, and increased vulnerability to cyberbullying, all of which can negatively affect mental health and emotional stability [9]. Moreover, the anonymity and immersive nature of social media can facilitate the rapid dissemination of misinformation and disinformation, undermining democratic values and ethical conduct [11]. Within the Indonesian cultural context, adolescents are particularly influenced by the emphasis on peer validation and online visibility, making them more susceptible to the pressures of digital conformity [10]. The virality and immediacy of online trends contribute to their integration into youth culture, often without adequate reflection on the potential consequences [10].

2.2 Negative Trends and Their Impact on Youth Behavior

The negative trends of online challenges, glorification of illegal activities, and cyberbullying have serious adverse effects on adolescents, normalizing risk-taking behaviors and delinquency. These issues are exacerbated by weak content regulation on social media, which allows harmful trends to spread freely. Adolescents, driven by peer approval and social recognition, often engage in dangerous acts that heighten their vulnerability to negative

outcomes. Cyberbullying remains pervasive, leading to anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, social isolation, and academic decline, with girls more frequently reporting exposure to explicit content [12]. Its persistent nature causes lasting emotional harm beyond physical boundaries [12]. Exposure to violent content further increases the likelihood of bullying behaviors both online and offline, worsened by poor digital literacy and impulsivity among youth [13]. Family dynamics and social media jointly influence adolescent mental health and behavior [13]. Meanwhile, online challenges involving self-harm or substance use pose serious health risks, fueled by peer pressure and the desire for attention [14]. Addressing these challenges requires urgent intervention from parents, teachers, and healthcare professionals [14].

2.3 Existing Interventions and Gaps in the Literature

Efforts to reduce the negative influence of social media on youth behavior in Indonesia focus on digital literacy, community engagement, and regulation. Programs like the Kominfo Cybercreation initiative aim to enhance digital skills, ethics, and safety among Generation Z (Pambudi & Prihantoro, 2023). However, their effectiveness is limited by insufficient reach and weak integration with broader support systems [15]. Community involvement, especially from families and schools, is essential in reinforcing digital literacy and fostering safer online behavior [9], [15].

On the regulatory side, current laws tend to penalize users rather than holding platform providers accountable, highlighting the need for stronger policy measures [15]. Effective regulation should involve all stakeholders—government, educators, and tech companies—to address root causes of harmful trends [16]. Despite increasing research, there remains a lack of understanding about local cultural factors and personal experiences that shape how Indonesian youth engage with social media, underscoring the need for more targeted, context-aware interventions.

3. METHODS

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study to enable an in-depth exploration of subjective experiences and perspectives regarding the impact of social media on youth behavior. The research design focuses on uncovering the nuances of digital trends, the motivations behind juvenile involvement in crime, and the broader contextual influences shaping these behaviors. The interpretive nature of the study supports a detailed understanding of both individual experiences and systemic factors. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, allowing flexibility in exploring key themes while enabling participants to express their insights freely. Interviews were conducted either in person or online, depending on participants' availability, each lasting approximately 45–60 minutes and recorded with consent.

Five purposively selected informants provided diverse and relevant perspectives: a law enforcement officer specializing in juvenile crime prevention, a social media analyst, a youth counselor, a community leader involved in urban crime reduction, and a young adult with direct experience of social

media's influence on peer behavior. These participants were chosen based on their professional roles and firsthand knowledge related to the study's aims. Their insights contributed to a holistic view of the relationship between social media and youth crime. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This method enabled the identification of recurring patterns and the development of meaningful themes that aligned with the study's objectives and the broader literature.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Social Media Trends as a Catalyst for Juvenile Crime

Social media was consistently identified by informants as a major factor influencing the rise of risky and criminal behaviors among juveniles. Viral trends were noted to often glorify actions such as vandalism, theft, and street racing, presenting them as exciting or admirable, which in turn encourages adolescents to imitate these behaviors in pursuit of social validation. Informant A, a social media analyst, explained, "Many social media trends romanticize risky actions, such as graffiti competitions or dangerous stunts, making them appealing to impressionable youth who want to gain attention and followers." This highlights how digital platforms can normalize deviance by framing such acts as forms of entertainment or personal achievement.

Supporting this observation, Informant E, a young adult with firsthand experience, shared, "I've seen my peers attempt dangerous challenges from TikTok or Instagram just to go viral, without considering the consequences." His account emphasizes the social pressure and visibility-driven motivation that often underlie youth participation in harmful trends. Together, these testimonies reflect a concerning pattern:

adolescents are increasingly exposed to—and influenced by—online content that glamorizes illegal or dangerous behaviors, with limited awareness of the real-world consequences.

4.2 Peer Pressure and Group Dynamics

Peer influence emerged as a significant contributor to juvenile crime, with informants emphasizing how group dynamics can intensify risky behavior. When adolescents are in groups, they often experience a heightened sense of unity and reduced personal inhibition, which can lead to actions they might otherwise avoid. Informant D, a community leader, noted, "Teenagers often act more boldly in groups. They feel encouraged to do things they wouldn't consider when alone, including engaging in illegal activities like street brawls or theft." This suggests that group settings can create an environment where deviant behavior is normalized or even celebrated.

Supporting this view, Informant E, a young adult, shared his personal experience by stating, "Being with friends at night sometimes feels like there's an unspoken rule to prove yourself. If you don't join in, you risk being left out or mocked." His account reveals the social pressure adolescents face to conform and participate in group actions, even when those actions involve delinquency. Together, these insights underline the powerful role of peer influence in shaping youth decisions, especially in urban contexts where unsupervised nighttime gatherings are common.

4.3 Nighttime as a Conducive Environment for Crime

Nighttime was identified as a critical context that fosters anonymity and a heightened sense of adventure, often exploited by adolescents engaging in criminal behavior. Informants emphasized that the reduced visibility and quiet streets at night lower the perceived risk of being caught, making it an attractive time for delinquent acts. Informant B, a law enforcement officer,

explained, "The cover of night allows youth to engage in criminal activities with less fear of being caught, and social media often portrays nighttime escapades as exciting and rebellious." This portrayal adds a layer of glamorization, encouraging youth to seek validation through risky nighttime behavior.

In addition to the environmental factors, social limitations also play a role. Informant D, a community leader, highlighted the scarcity of structured, safe, and affordable nighttime activities for youth, stating, "The lack of safe, affordable nighttime activities for youth often leaves them with no option but to roam the streets, which increases the likelihood of them engaging in crime." Without alternative outlets for recreation and expression, adolescents are more vulnerable to negative peer influence and the lure of nighttime deviance. These insights suggest the need for community-based solutions that provide engaging, supervised nighttime alternatives for youth.

4.4 Lack of Digital Literacy

A lack of critical thinking skills and digital literacy was identified as a fundamental factor behind adolescents' vulnerability to negative social media trends. Informants highlighted that many youth are unable to critically assess the content they encounter online, making them more likely to engage in harmful behaviors promoted through viral trends. Informant C, a youth counselor, observed, "Many teenagers lack the ability to evaluate the content they consume. They're more likely to emulate viral trends without understanding their potential consequences." This gap in evaluative ability leaves adolescents exposed to misleading or dangerous digital influences.

In addition, Informant A, a social media analyst, stressed the urgency of targeted educational efforts to address this issue, stating, "Educational initiatives on digital literacy and critical content evaluation are urgently needed to mitigate the risks posed by harmful social media trends." Such initiatives would not only help youth recognize and resist manipulative or

hazardous content but also empower them to navigate digital spaces more responsibly. Together, these insights underscore the pressing need for integrated digital literacy programs as a preventive measure in reducing the negative impact of social media on youth behavior.

Discussion

The findings of this study align closely with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which asserts that behavior is learned through observation, especially when certain actions are glamorized or rewarded. In the Indonesian context, the pervasive use of social media has amplified this effect, fostering a cultural shift where harmful behaviors—such as vandalism, risky stunts, and street crime—are normalized and even celebrated online. This environment enables adolescents to model and adopt these behaviors in pursuit of social validation and recognition, reinforcing the cycle of digital influence and real-world delinquency.

In line with the theory of peer contagion, the study also reveals how group dynamics intensify deviant behavior. Adolescents often seek approval and inclusion within peer groups, which can lead to collective involvement in criminal acts. Social media platforms play a critical role in enabling and accelerating this phenomenon by facilitating the spread of group-based challenges and viral events. These shared digital experiences foster a sense of belonging while simultaneously encouraging conformity to harmful norms, especially in settings where adult supervision or positive peer alternatives are lacking.

Beyond behavioral theories, the study underscores structural factors contributing to youth delinquency, such as inadequate recreational facilities, social disorganization, and limited law enforcement presence. These findings are supported by Santoso et al. (2018), who emphasize how environmental neglect directly influences juvenile crime. Environmental deficiencies—like poor neighborhood conditions, high rates of single-parent families, and lack of community

support—are linked to increased delinquency [17], [18]. Additionally, family instability, weak parental attachment, and school-related challenges such as bullying or academic failure also heighten the risk of youth engaging in criminal behavior [19]. Addressing these issues through comprehensive social interventions—such as character education and structured community programs—has proven effective in promoting resilience and reducing juvenile crime [7].

Addressing the Digital Literacy Gap

The lack of digital literacy among youth exacerbates their vulnerability to harmful social media content. Addressing this gap requires systemic intervention, including:

- 1) Incorporating digital literacy education into school curricula.
- 2) Engaging parents and communities in discussions about responsible social media use.
- 3) Promoting campaigns that counter harmful trends with positive, constructive narratives.

Policy and Community Implications

The findings suggest that mitigating the impact of negative social media trends on juvenile crime requires a multi-pronged approach:

- 1) Programs that foster critical thinking and digital literacy can empower youth to discern and avoid harmful content.
- 2) Community leaders and organizations must offer structured, appealing alternatives to nighttime street activities.
- 3) Policymakers should collaborate with social media platforms to restrict and monitor the spread of harmful content.

5. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical influence of social media in shaping juvenile

behavior, often contributing to increased involvement in criminal activities. Negative online trends, peer pressure, the allure of nighttime anonymity, and limited adult supervision collectively create conditions that foster juvenile and street crime in Indonesia. The situation is exacerbated by the widespread lack of digital literacy among adolescents, which heightens their susceptibility to harmful content and risky behaviors promoted on social media platforms.

To address these challenges, a comprehensive and multi-faceted strategy is required. This includes integrating digital literacy education into school curricula, promoting community-based recreational

programs, and strengthening regulations to curb the spread of harmful content online. Effective collaboration between policymakers, educators, and community leaders is essential to create safer environments for Indonesian youth, ensuring that social media serves as a platform for growth and empowerment rather than delinquency. Future research should prioritize longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impact of social media on youth crime and to evaluate the effectiveness of various intervention strategies. Such insights will be vital in crafting sustainable policies that protect adolescents and encourage a healthier digital culture.

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