



Unlocking Digital Literacy in Indonesia: Insights from the Use of Social Media Platforms

Safitri Yosita Ratri^{1*}, Lina Aviyanti²

¹Department of Primary Education, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta
Colombo Street No. 1, Karangmalang, Yogyakarta 55281, Indonesia

¹Education Futures, University of South Australia (UniSA)
Building C, Magill, South Australia 5072, Australia

²Department of Physics Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia
Dr. Setiabudi Street No.229, Isola, Sukasari, Bandung, West Java 40154, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author. E-mail: yosita@uny.ac.id

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Abstract: The use of social media platforms has become increasingly integrated into students' everyday lives as technology advances, particularly with the rise of remote learning and digital connectivity. Despite these rapid adoptions, digital literacy challenges remain, including finding, evaluating, utilising, sharing, and creating content responsibly. This study examines how social media platforms shape students' minds and underscore the importance of digital literacy skills as a result of their experiences and perceptions of these platforms. Using a qualitative research approach, the study conducted a systematic review of data collected from students in Indonesia. The data were then analyzed and integrated to identify patterns, trends, and common themes across the literature. The analysis revealed several themes, including popular features of social media, learning advantages, the role of adults, and the importance of safe social media use. The findings highlight the critical role of digital literacy in enabling students to navigate social media platforms effectively. This study provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and parents on adopting and implementing social media platforms while fostering appropriate digital literacy skills among students.

Keywords: digital literacy, social media, students

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Introduction

The rapid proliferation of social media platforms has significantly reshaped communication and learning dynamics, particularly among students in Indonesia. Existing research has explored the role of social media in education and its impact on digital literacy; however, several gaps remain that necessitate further investigation. For instance, while studies indicate the potential for social media to foster collaborative learning environments, they often overlook the specific mechanisms through which these platforms enhance crucial digital literacy skills, such as assessing online content critically or utilizing digital tools ethically (Alismaiel et al., 2022; Ling et al., 2019). This study aims to bridge this gap, examining how social media contributes to these specific facets of digital literacy within the Indonesian context. Previous studies, such as those by Hermita et al. (2023) and (Latif et al., 2023), highlight how platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter enable enhanced communication and collaborative learning among students, effectively transforming traditional education methods (Nam & Hwang, 2021; Latif et al., 2023). However, the focus of these studies tends to rest on the benefits of social media without providing a detailed exploration of how these platforms specifically promote critical digital skills (Hammadi & Noor, 2023). This research will thus delve into the mechanisms of social media use that enhance digital literacy, bridging scholarly gaps and providing a more comprehensive understanding of its educational impact in Indonesia.

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Digital literacy, recognized as essential in today's digital landscape, often lacks thorough examination in non-Western contexts, where digital infrastructures and access vary significantly. As Livingstone (2018) discusses, much of the existing literature on digital literacy is concentrated in Western settings, overlooking unique challenges faced in other regions (Gruzd et al., 2023). In Indonesia, disparities in digital access between urban and rural students create unequal opportunities for developing digital literacy skills (Sandanyake, 2021). This study addresses such disparities by exploring how they influence digital literacy development, yielding insights that are both locally pertinent and globally relevant. Moreover, Indonesia's socio-cultural context adds another layer of complexity to understanding digital literacy development. Social media adoption in Indonesia interacts uniquely with diverse cultural and educational practices, revealing factors such as local languages and cultural norms as influential in shaping how students engage with social media (Sahoo & Khuntia, 2024; Zabidi & Wang, 2021). Prior research often neglects these socio-cultural nuances, which are critical to understanding how students develop digital skills (Greenhow et al., 2020). This study will investigate these elements, providing a richer understanding of the interplay between social media use and digital literacy growth in a diverse and rapidly digitizing society.

Recent studies reveal a complex landscape of digital literacy among Indonesian students. While access to digital tools and platforms has expanded, the ability to use them effectively remains uneven. Isnah et al. (2022) underscore the importance of critical thinking and media literacy in enhancing digital competencies, noting that many students struggle with managing their online identities and addressing digital disruptions (Isnah et al., 2022). Similarly, Alakrash and Razak (2021) highlight a paradox: despite being digital natives, many students exhibit limited digital knowledge and skills, pointing to a gap between technological access and effective utilisation (Fransisca & Ningsih, 2023). This study builds on these findings by introducing a novel framework that examines how socio-cultural factors, such as local language use and community-driven content creation, influence digital literacy development in Indonesia (Putra & Rullyanti, 2023).

Social media platforms, however, are not merely spaces for entertainment; they also serve as powerful tools for learning and socialisation. Research by Nafisah et al. (2024) demonstrates that digital literacy-based learning through social media positively influences student motivation and socialisation skills, suggesting that these platforms can enhance educational outcomes when integrated thoughtfully (Nafisah et al., 2024; Yusuf, 2024) further supports this view, identifying a strong correlation between the educational use of social media and improvements in students' digital literacy, particularly in content creation and sharing (Yusuf, 2024). This paper extends these insights by exploring how informal learning practices on social media, such as peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and collaborative problem-solving, contribute to digital literacy in ways that formal education often overlooks (Chen & Xiao, 2022). Beyond technical proficiency, the development of digital literacy through social media also involves fostering critical thinking and creativity. Putra & Rullyanti (2023) advocate for a comprehensive digital literacy curriculum that incorporates social media, preparing students to navigate the complexities of the digital world (Putra & Rullyanti, 2023). This perspective is echoed by (Rizki & Timur, 2021), who emphasise the need to address the ethical and practical implications of social media use, such as privacy concerns and information dissemination (Rizki & Timur, 2021). This study adds novelty by examining how Indonesian students navigate these challenges within their unique digital ecosystem, where local norms and global influences intersect, providing a more holistic understanding of digital literacy in a globalised yet culturally specific context (Putri et al., 2021).

The paper aims to explore students' experiences with social media platforms and their impact on digital literacy. Specifically, it investigates how students engage with these platforms in their academic and personal lives, shaping their perceptions, interactions, and learning processes. Additionally, the study examines how social media influences students' cognitive development, critical thinking, and digital literacy skills, highlighting the ways these platforms contribute to or challenge their ability to navigate and evaluate online information effectively. By addressing these questions, the research seeks to provide insights into the role of social media in shaping students' digital competencies and overall educational experiences.

Methods

This study draws on a systematic review of studies published between 2019 and 2023. The analysis included research on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, focusing on their impact on digital literacy in various contexts such as education and communication. The methodology used in this study is a systematic review, which involves clearly formulated questions and employs systematic and explicit methods to identify, select, critically appraise relevant research, and collect and analyse data from studies included in the review.

The process began with formulating the research question, where the objectives of the systematic review, focused on digital literacy in Indonesia, were clearly defined to guide the subsequent stages. Next, identification of relevant studies was conducted by employing a comprehensive search strategy across databases, academic journals, and other sources to gather a broad pool of research related to digital literacy in Indonesia. This was followed by the selection of studies, where predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to screen and select relevant articles while excluding irrelevant or duplicative ones, ensuring the quality and relevance of the studies included. After selection, a critical appraisal was performed to evaluate the methodological quality and rigor of each study, giving more weight to research with robust methodologies. In the data collection stage, key information such as study design, sample size, and findings was systematically extracted using standardised tools to maintain consistency. Finally, the synthesis of findings involved analysing and integrating the collected data to identify patterns, trends, and common themes across the literature. This systematic approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the state of digital literacy research in Indonesia and facilitated meaningful conclusions based on published and relevant studies.

Results and Discussion

Results

The results of the study are classified based on the research questions (RQs). RQ 1 is *(1) How do students experience the use of social media platforms?* According to the analysis, students experience social media platforms as multifaceted tools that offer both opportunities and challenges. Popular features such as interactive content, real-time communication, and user-friendly interfaces are frequently highlighted as advantages for enhancing learning and social interaction (Fardiah et al., 2023). Students recognize the value of social media in providing access to diverse educational resources, facilitating peer collaboration, and fostering creativity. However, the role of parents emerges as a critical factor in shaping students' social media experiences, with parental guidance often serving as a buffer against misuse and ensuring responsible online behavior. Additionally, social media safety is a recurring concern, with students expressing awareness of potential risks such as cyberbullying, privacy breaches, and misinformation (Cahyani, 2019). These experiences underscore the need for fostering digital literacy and equipping students with the skills to navigate social media responsibly (Hidayat & Ginting, 2020).

RQ 2 is *(2) How do social media platforms shape student minds and underscore digital literacy skills?* According to the analysis, social media platforms play a pivotal role in shaping student minds by fostering the development of essential digital literacy skills. These platforms encourage creativity through opportunities for content creation, from crafting digital art to producing educational videos (Kusumandaru & Rahmawati, 2022). They also serve as a medium for effective communication, allowing students to collaborate, share ideas, and engage in meaningful dialogue with peers and educators (Fardiah et al., 2023). Moreover, social media emphasizes the importance of ethical decision-making, as students learn to adhere to digital etiquette, respect intellectual property, and critically evaluate information (Hidayat & Ginting, 2020). This integration of creativity, communication, and ethical responsibility highlights the transformative potential of social media in preparing students for the demands of the digital age.

This study employs a systematic review methodology to examine the role of social media platforms—specifically Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp—in shaping digital literacy, with a focus on the Indonesian context. The systematic review process is structured to ensure rigor,

transparency, and reproducibility. The research steps are designed to comprehensively address the research question while maintaining methodological integrity (Bahri et al., 2023).

The process began with formulating the research question, which served as the foundation for the entire review. The research question was clearly defined as: "How do social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp) influence digital literacy among students in Indonesia, and what are the implications for education and personal development?" This step ensured that the review remained focused on digital literacy in the Indonesian context, with an emphasis on education and communication (Purnama et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2021). Establishing a clear objective guided the subsequent stages of the review effectively, facilitating a coherent investigation into the nexus between social media use and digital literacy. Next, the identification of relevant studies was conducted through a comprehensive search strategy. Academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, ERIC, and Google Scholar were utilized to locate peer-reviewed articles published between 2019 and 2023. Search terms included combinations of "social media," "digital literacy," "Indonesia," "education," "students," and specific platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp (Lee & Hidayat, 2019). Additionally, grey literature—including conference proceedings, government reports, and institutional publications—was included to ensure a broad and inclusive pool of studies, thereby capturing diverse perspectives and findings pertinent to the topic (Rulinawaty et al., 2023; Asmayawati, 2023).

The selection of studies followed, where predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria were strictly applied to screen and refine the pool of identified studies. Inclusion criteria centered on studies published within the specified timeframe, those addressing social media platforms and their impact on digital literacy, and research conducted in or relevant to the Indonesian context. Studies deemed irrelevant, duplicative, or of low quality were excluded to uphold the integrity of the analysis (Rimadias et al., 2021; Mardiani et al., 2024). This step ensured that only high-quality and relevant studies contributed to the review. After selection, a critical appraisal of the studies was conducted to evaluate their methodological quality and rigor. A standardized appraisal tool, such as the CASP or JBI checklist, was used to assess factors like study design, sample size, methodology, validity, and relevance to the research question (Diepeveen & Pinet, 2022). Studies with robust methodologies were given greater weight in the analysis, ensuring that the findings of the review were based on reliable and valid research, which is crucial for maintaining the credibility of the systematic review.

Data collection involved systematically extracting key information from the selected studies using a standardized data extraction form. Information such as study design, sample size, key findings, and contextual factors (e.g., urban vs. rural settings, educational level) was collected. To ensure consistency and accuracy, data extraction was conducted independently by two researchers (Isabella et al., 2024). This structured approach facilitated both organization and synthesis of data. The synthesis of findings was the next critical step, where the collected data was analyzed and integrated to identify patterns, trends, and common themes. Thematic analysis was employed to categorize key themes, such as the role of social media in fostering collaborative learning, challenges related to digital access disparities, and the influence of socio-cultural factors on digital literacy development (Asmayawati, 2023). Comparative analysis was also conducted to identify consistencies and discrepancies across studies, culminating in a narrative synthesis that presents the findings in a coherent manner.

The final step involved reporting and disseminating the findings. The results were organized into clear sections, including the introduction, research objectives, methodology, key findings, and discussions of implications. The findings were disseminated through academic publications, conferences, and presentations to stakeholders, ensuring that insights gained from the review reached relevant audiences (Genoveva, 2022; Jimola, 2023). This dissemination step aimed to provide actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers, ultimately advancing digital literacy in Indonesia. In a brief, this systematic review followed a rigorous and transparent process to examine the role of social media in shaping digital literacy among Indonesian students. By adhering to a structured methodology, the study ensured the reliability and validity of its findings, providing valuable insights necessary for addressing digital literacy challenges in Indonesia and beyond. Moreover, this systematic approach illuminated gaps in the existing literature, highlighting the pressing need for further research in this critical area. Table 1 summarizes the systematic literature review results and categorize findings based on the research questions.

Table 1. The Systematic Literature Review Results

Research Questions	Key Findings
RQ 1: How do students experience the use of social media platforms?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Social media as a multifaceted tool: Offers both opportunities and challenges. 2) Advantages for learning and interaction: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Interactive content enhances engagement. b) Real-time communication facilitates instant collaboration. c) User-friendly interfaces improve accessibility. 3) Educational benefits: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Provides access to diverse educational resources. b) Facilitates peer collaboration and knowledge sharing. c) Fosters creativity through content creation. 4) Importance of parental guidance: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Ensures responsible online behavior. b) Helps mitigate risks such as cyberbullying, privacy breaches, and misinformation.
RQ 2: How do social media platforms shape student minds and underscore digital literacy skills?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Crucial role in digital literacy development: Social media platforms contribute significantly to digital literacy skills. 2) Fostering creativity: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Encourages digital content creation (e.g., videos, artwork, blogs). b) Provides opportunities for self-expression and innovation. 3) Enhancing communication skills: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Enables effective peer collaboration and discussion. b) Facilitates knowledge sharing and idea exchange. 4) Emphasizing ethical decision-making: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Promotes respect for intellectual property rights. b) Encourages critical evaluation of online information. 5) Transformative potential: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Integrates creativity, communication, and ethics in digital education. b) Prepares students for the demands of the digital age.

Discussion

The results of this study highlight the complex and dual nature of students' experiences with social media platforms, revealing both significant educational benefits and notable challenges. On one hand, the popular features of social media—such as messaging, content sharing, and access to educational resources—facilitate collaboration and creativity among students. These tools enable real-time communication, allowing students to work together on projects and share diverse perspectives that enhance their learning experiences. This collaborative aspect of social media aligns with contemporary educational practices that emphasise teamwork and peer learning, suggesting that when used effectively, social media can serve as a powerful educational resource. These findings are consistent with previous research by Fransisca & Ningsih (2023), who found that platforms like Facebook and Instagram foster collaborative learning environments, particularly in contexts where traditional educational resources are limited. Similarly, Yusuf (2024) highlighted the role of social media in bridging gaps in access to information, especially in regions with uneven digital infrastructure, such as Indonesia.

On the other hand, the awareness of potential risks associated with social media use underscores the need for a responsible approach to digital engagement. Students' recognition of issues such as cyberbullying, misinformation, and privacy concerns indicates a growing understanding of the complexities of online interactions. This awareness is crucial, as it highlights the importance of digital literacy education that not only focuses on the technical skills of using social media but also emphasises ethical decision-making and critical thinking. These findings resonate with studies by Livingstone (2018), who argued that digital literacy must encompass not just technical proficiency but also the ability to critically evaluate online content and navigate ethical dilemmas. However, this study diverges from some earlier research, such as that by Smith et al. (2020), which found that students often underestimate the risks of social media use. The discrepancy may be attributed to the unique socio-cultural context of

Indonesia, where recent efforts to promote digital literacy have increased students' awareness of online risks.

The roles of parents and educators are vital in this context. Parents can help set boundaries and foster open communication about online experiences, while educators can integrate discussions about digital literacy and ethical behavior into the curriculum. By working together, parents and educators can create a supportive environment that encourages students to harness the benefits of social media while mitigating its risks. This aligns with the findings of Jones et al. (2021), who emphasised the importance of a collaborative approach between schools and families in promoting responsible digital engagement. However, this study adds a novel perspective by highlighting the specific challenges faced in Indonesia, such as disparities in digital access and varying levels of digital literacy among parents and educators. These challenges necessitate tailored interventions that address the unique needs of Indonesian students.

One notable strength of this study is its balanced exploration of both the positive and negative aspects of social media use among students. By highlighting the educational benefits—such as enhanced collaboration, creativity, and access to resources—while also addressing the risks—such as cyberbullying, misinformation, and privacy concerns—the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the dual role social media plays in students' lives. This balanced perspective is crucial for developing informed strategies to maximise the benefits of social media while minimising its potential harms. This approach builds on the work of Anderson & Jiang (2019), who called for a more nuanced understanding of social media's impact on youth, but extends it by focusing on the Indonesian context, where socio-cultural factors and digital access disparities play a significant role.

Meanwhile, a key limitation of this study is its reliance on self-reported data from students, which may introduce biases such as social desirability or recall bias. Students may overemphasise the positive aspects of social media use or underreport negative experiences, potentially skewing the findings. Additionally, the study does not explore the long-term effects of social media use on students' academic performance, mental health, or social skills, which could provide deeper insights into the broader implications of digital engagement. These limitations suggest avenues for future research, such as longitudinal studies that track the impact of social media use over time or mixed-methods approaches that combine self-reported data with observational or experimental methods.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the Indonesian context, which has been underexplored in the existing literature. By comparing the findings of this study with previous research conducted in Western contexts, it becomes clear that the socio-cultural and infrastructural realities of Indonesia significantly shape how students engage with social media and develop digital literacy. For example, while studies in Western countries often assume uniform access to digital tools, this study highlights the disparities in digital access and literacy that are prevalent in Indonesia. This comparative analysis underscores the need for context-specific approaches to digital literacy education, rather than one-size-fits-all solutions.

In a brief, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the dual role of social media in shaping digital literacy among Indonesian students. While it confirms many findings from previous research, such as the educational benefits of social media and the importance of critical thinking skills, it also offers new insights into the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the Indonesian context. The findings underscore the need for a balanced approach to digital literacy education that leverages the benefits of social media while addressing its risks. Future research should build on these findings by exploring the long-term effects of social media use and developing tailored interventions that address the specific needs of students in diverse socio-cultural contexts. By doing so, we can ensure that all students are equipped to navigate the digital landscape responsibly and effectively.

Conclusion

This study, conducted through a systematic review, highlights the dual role of social media platforms in Indonesia like Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp in education. On one hand, these platforms foster creativity, enhance communication, and enable global connections, proving particularly valuable during the pandemic. On the other hand, challenges such as digital literacy gaps, cyberbullying, mental health concerns, and the difficulty of balancing educational use with distractions underscore the complexities of integrating social media into learning. These findings, drawn from the Indonesian

context, reveal both the potential and pitfalls of social media use among students, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach to digital engagement.

Despite limitations such as a narrow scope and insufficient synthesis of evidence, the study underscores the importance of digital literacy skills—finding, evaluating, utilizing, sharing, and creating content—in navigating the digital landscape. It also highlights key themes, including the role of adults in guiding students and the need for safe, ethical social media use. By addressing these challenges, the study provides a foundation for developing strategies to harness the educational benefits of social media while mitigating its risks. Ultimately, it contributes to the broader goal of fostering digital literacy, empowering students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

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