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Transiting from Social Media interaction to Character Formation: implications for Behaviour Modification and Personality Development

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Abstract

This study examined the transition from social media interaction to character formation and implications on behaviour modification and personality development among tertiary education students. The survey method was used with a sample of 309 studied. Among the objectives were to investigate the perceptions and experiences of Evangel University students regarding the impact of social media on their character formation as well as to ascertain the role of peer influence mediated through social media platforms in shaping the character formation process among the undergraduates. The result of hypothesis suggests that peer influence mediated through social media platforms plays significant role in shaping the character formation process among the students. The study concluded that social media usage patterns are intricately linked to various aspects of students' character development, including their personal values and behaviours; and that students recognize the influence of social media, exhibiting resilience and a belief in their ability to maintain positive traits. Peer influence mediated through social media therefore is a significant factor in character formation. The study recommended implementation of awareness initiatives to educate students about the dual impacts of social media on character development, emphasizing both positive and negative effects. Again, social media education should be integrated into existing character development curricula, equipping students with skills to navigate and manage their online presence responsibly.

Keywords: Social media, character formation, peer influence, behaviour modification, personality development, Nigeria

Introduction

Social media has become an indispensable component of contemporary society, fundamentally altering modes of communication, social interaction, and dissemination of information (Jalal, 2022). Researchers (Ukeje, Nnaji, Ekwunife, Iteshi, Nwosu, Chioke, Udu, Ogbulu, Nwachukwu, Onyeneho, Ojogbane, & Nwangbo, 2023) have shown strong correlation between social media usage by university students and the proliferation of information and communication technology. These students who are primary users of social media and ICTs often spend significant amounts of time engaging with various social media platforms. The burgeoning influence of social media on the character formation of students has garnered heightened significance within contemporary discourse. Evidently, social media platforms have redefined the modes through which students engage in communication, access information and cultivate interpersonal bonds, thereby exerting a discernible impact on the shaping of their values, ethical frameworks, and behavioural dispositions. Fundamentally

conceived as a conduit for interactive dialogue, social media facilitates a myriad of online engagements ranging from the dissemination of personal reflections and intellectual discourse to the establishment of global connections among users. Nonetheless, it is imperative to underscore the nuanced nature of social media's influence, as its effects can manifest both positively and negatively, necessitating a nuanced examination within the purview of student character development. Consequently, while social media platforms present unprecedented opportunities for students to actively participate in virtual communities and express their identities, they concurrently engender risks associated with information overload, cyberbullying, and the perpetuation of detrimental societal norms. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted impact of social media on student character necessitates a balanced appraisal of its potential merits and pitfalls, underscoring the imperative for educators and stakeholders to cultivate digital literacy skills and promote responsible online conduct among students (Dian, 2023).

Social media refers to a diverse array of digital platforms and tools facilitating the generation, dissemination, and interchange of content and viewpoints. These platforms, which encompass popular entities such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube, offer users avenues for self-expression, interaction, and information dissemination (Yogesh, Dwivedi, Elvira, Laurie, Jamie, Raffaele, Jenna, Varsha, Heikki, Hajer, Anjala, Jennifer, Jari, Gina, Yichuan, Vikram, Mohammad, Ramakrishnan, Philipp & Rauschnabell, 2021). The proliferation of social media has been remarkable over recent years, with an exponential increase in its adoption globally. This surge in usage is evidenced by the staggering number of individuals engaging with these platforms, including a significant contingent within the student demographic (Hasan, Rojab & Hilalah, 2023). The emergence and widespread adoption of social media have transformed communication dynamics, offering users unprecedented connectivity and accessibility to information. Individuals utilize social media not only for personal networking and entertainment but also as integral tools for professional networking, activism, and knowledge acquisition. Moreover, the multifaceted nature of social media platforms enables users to engage in various forms of expression, ranging from text-based communication to visual storytelling and multimedia sharing (Vankanavath & Deepak, 2022).

The pervasive nature of social media has engendered both opportunities and challenges within societal and educational contexts (Hasan *et al*., 2023). While it fosters connectivity and information dissemination on a global scale, it also raises concerns regarding privacy, online identity management, and the spread of misinformation (Ekwunife, Robinson, Ukeje, Ekwueme & Ojiaku, 2020), as well as significant effect on the dress patterns of youths (Ekwunife, Nwachukwu, Ume, Onyeneho, Agha, Onyeneho, & Boniface, 2023). In educational settings, social media's influence is palpable, shaping learning environments, communication patterns, and student engagement strategies. As educators and scholars grapple with the implications of social media, understanding its multifaceted impact on individuals, communities, and institutions become imperative for navigating the digital landscape effectively (Hasan *et al*., 2023)**.** On this note, this study aims to explore the influence of social media on character formation among students of Evangel University Akaeze in Ebonyi State of Nigeria.

While social media offers numerous opportunities for communication, collaboration, and access to information, it also presents significant challenges in terms of its potential to shape students' values, beliefs, and behaviours (Nitan, 2021). At Evangel University Akaeze, a private institution committed to providing quality education grounded in Christian values,

with a diverse student body representing various cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds, the university strives to foster an environment conducive to holistic development, including the cultivation of positive character traits and moral values among its students. The influence of social media on character formation among students of Evangel University Akaeze (EUA) poses a multifaceted research problem that warrants careful examination and consideration. At the heart of this issue lies the question of how social media usage shapes students' values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours, and to what extent these influences impact their academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being. Additionally, the research problem encompasses the identification of potential mechanisms and factors that mediate or moderate the relationship between social media usage and character formation among students. However, the pervasive influence of social media presents both opportunities and challenges in achieving this goal. The increasing prevalence of social media usage among students necessitates a deeper understanding of how it influences their character formation in context of their academic and social lives.

In the contemporary digital era, social media has become an indispensable aspect of the lives of millions globally, particularly among the younger demographic. Its pervasive influence extends to various facets of individuals' lives, including their values, behaviours, and the formation of their character. Recognizing the profound impact of social media on character development among students is imperative, especially within educational contexts like Evangel University Akaeze, where the cultivation of young minds for future leadership roles and societal contributions is paramount. This study endeavors to explore and scrutinize the influence of social media on character formation among students at Evangel University Akaeze, thereby enriching the existing body of scholarly knowledge in this domain and enlightening stakeholders about its implications for education and society.

Primarily, this investigation holds significance in elucidating the intricate nexus between social media usage and character development among students. As digital natives, contemporary students are deeply immersed in various social media platforms, which serve as primary conduits for communication, information dissemination, and social interaction. By delving into the ways in which social media impacts students' values, ethics, and personal identity, this study offers invaluable insights into the mechanisms through which social media shapes character formation. Understanding these dynamics is imperative for educators, parents, policymakers, and other stakeholders to formulate strategies aimed at fostering positive character development and alleviating the adverse effects of social media on student’s moral and ethical growth.

This study addresses a significant lacuna in the extant literature concerning the specific role of social media in character formation within the realm of higher education institutions such as Evangel University Akaeze. While previous scholarly endeavors have examined the broader influence of social media on youth development, relatively few studies have homed in on the university milieu and its distinctive challenges and opportunities. By narrowing the focus to Evangel University Akaeze, this inquiry furnishes contextually pertinent findings that can inform institutional policies, curriculum design, and student support services tailored to the exigencies and realities of the university community.

The examination of the influence of social media on character formation among students of Evangel University Akaeze holds considerable significance for its potential to deepen our understanding of how digital technologies shape individuals' values, behaviours, and personal development trajectories. By scrutinizing the intricate interplay between social media usage

patterns and character traits, this study furnishes invaluable insights that can inform pedagogical practices, policy formulations, and societal interventions aimed at fostering positive character development and ethical citizenship in the digital epoch.

Literature

Impact of Social Media on Student Values and Beliefs

The impact of social media on the moral compass and ideological frameworks of students represents a multifaceted phenomenon characterized by both advantageous and challenging dimensions. On one facet, these digital platforms serve as dynamic arenas for the exchange of ideas, facilitating expansive global networks and magnifying the plurality of voices. Through these channels, students are afforded the opportunity to engage in instantaneous dialogues with subject matter experts, gain access to underrepresented viewpoints, and actively contribute to advocacy movements aimed at societal transformation. Researchers (Ekwunife, Ononiwu, Akpan, Sunday, 2021) have described the impact of social media in advocacy movements and social change, citing the influence of social media in mobilizing and sustaining the endsars movement of 2020 in Nigeria which saw to the disbandment of the Special Anti-robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigeria Police Force. Moreover, the digital landscape hosts a proliferation of educational materials, thereby democratizing access to knowledge and fostering an ethos of self-directed inquiry among learners (Daimary, 2020). Concurrently, collaborative initiatives burgeon across virtual spaces, transcending geographical constraints and nurturing a climate conducive to cooperative endeavors and cross-cultural appreciation.

Nonetheless, within the fecund realm of social media, there coexist deleterious elements amidst the invaluable contributions. Echo chambers, prevalent in these virtual spaces, exacerbate confirmation bias, fostering insular environments wherein dissenting viewpoints are marginalized or altogether suppressed. The algorithmic mechanisms governing content curation further compound this issue by privileging sensationalized narratives at the expense of factual accuracy, thereby distorting users' perceptions of reality. Consequently, the rampant dissemination of misinformation proliferates unchecked, propelled by the anonymity afforded to users and the emotive resonance of narrative constructs (Ekwunife *et al*., 2020). Concurrently, the pervasive phenomena of cyberbullying and online harassment cast ominous shadows across the digital landscape, precipitating deleterious effects on individuals' self-esteem and engendering a culture of apprehension and vulnerability.

The exigency to project an idealized persona within the digital sphere perpetuates a cycle of self-perpetuating scrutiny, fostering distorted self-appraisal and exacerbating anxieties pertaining to social comparison. The perpetual inundation of notifications and updates further compounds these stressors, disrupting cognitive faculties and engendering a climate conducive to diminished focus and compromised academic performance, with concomitant implications for individuals' mental well-being (Ninan, 2021).

The influence exerted on student values by social media is a complex phenomenon characterized by multifaceted ramifications. On one hand, these digital platforms serve as conduits for the cultivation of empathy and compassion among users, facilitating exposure to a plethora of human experiences, both triumphs and tribulations, transcending geographical boundaries. Through the dissemination of diverse narratives, social media platforms have the potential to challenge entrenched stereotypes and foster an ethos of acceptance towards a

spectrum of identities and lived realities. Nevertheless, these platforms also harbor the propensity to exacerbate societal cleavages, exacerbating ideological polarization and perpetuating pernicious prejudices that undermine societal cohesion.

The incessant exposure to meticulously curated portrayals of ostensibly idyllic lifestyles on social media engenders a climate conducive to the internalization of materialistic values among impressionable users. Consequently, this phenomenon engenders a pervasive sense of dissatisfaction with one's own circumstances, fueling a relentless pursuit of unattainable ideals and eroding contentment with the authenticity of one's lived experiences. Additionally, the omnipresent specter of cyberbullying and virulent online negativity constitutes a formidable challenge, engendering a culture of cynicism and distrust that permeates individuals' perceptions of both their fellow peers and the institutions entrusted with safeguarding their well-being (Fejzullahu, 2023).

The impact of social media on student beliefs constitutes a multifaceted phenomenon characterized by intricate nuances and divergent outcomes. Within this landscape, social media platforms serve as conduits for the facilitation of communal engagement among religious adherents, providing a digital forum wherein religious communities can congregate, share doctrinal tenets, and fortify communal bonds through the dissemination of spiritual teachings and communal rituals. Moreover, these platforms harbor the potential to foster interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural understanding, thereby engendering an ethos of tolerance and mutual respect among adherents of disparate religious traditions. However, juxtaposed against these constructive endeavors is the palpable risk posed by social media platforms as incubators for the propagation of religious extremism and hate speech, wherein insular echo chambers reinforce radicalized ideologies and engender a climate of hostility towards individuals holding divergent religious beliefs (Ninan, 2021).

Compounding these challenges is the pervasive phenomenon of epistemic uncertainty engendered by the blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction within the digital realm. As misinformation proliferates unchecked across social media platforms, the veracity of traditional sources of information becomes increasingly tenuous, prompting students to adopt a posture of skepticism towards established belief systems and institutional authorities. Consequently, this erosion of trust in conventional epistemological frameworks precipitates a state of cognitive dissonance, wherein individuals grapple with the unsettling realization that the foundations upon which their beliefs are predicated may be inherently precarious and subject to manipulation (Ekwunife *et al.,* 2020).

Moreover, the exposure to a cacophony of divergent viewpoints inherent to the digital ecosystem constitutes a double-edged sword, imbuing students with the capacity for intellectual enrichment and the cultivation of critical thinking skills, while concurrently engendering a sense of cognitive disorientation and ontological insecurity. Particularly for impressionable young minds in the formative stages of identity formation, the inundation of conflicting ideologies and value systems across social media platforms precipitates a state of existential ambivalence, wherein the veracity of one's own beliefs is called into question, and the quest for existential coherence becomes an elusive pursuit fraught with uncertainty and existential angst.

In essence, the impact of social media on student beliefs epitomizes a complex dialectic between the facilitation of communal solidarity and cross-cultural understanding on one hand, and the proliferation of extremist ideologies and epistemological uncertainty on the

other. Navigating this labyrinthine terrain necessitates a nuanced approach informed by an understanding of the intricate dynamics at play, coupled with proactive interventions aimed at fostering digital literacy, fortifying critical thinking skills, and cultivating resilience in the face of epistemic uncertainty. Only through concerted efforts to mitigate the adverse effects of social media while harnessing its potential as a catalyst for constructive dialogue and intellectual enrichment can we ensure the cultivation of beliefs conducive to the holistic flourishing of individuals within the digital age.

Navigating the intricate landscape of social media's influence on student values and beliefs demands a comprehensive and multifaceted approach. Educational institutions assume a pivotal role in this endeavor by equipping students with essential critical thinking skills necessary for discerning veracity amidst the proliferation of information online. Through structured educational interventions, such as workshops and integrated curricula, students are empowered to evaluate the reliability of online sources and distinguish between fact and fiction (Ekwunife *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, fostering open discussions within educational settings about responsible online behaviour and digital citizenship serves to cultivate a culture of conscientious engagement with digital platforms, wherein students are encouraged to exercise discernment in their online interactions and uphold ethical standards of conduct.

In tandem with institutional efforts, students themselves must assume an active role in shaping their online experiences and mitigating the potential negative consequences of social media engagement. Cultivating mindful social media habits, characterized by judicious screen time management and prioritization of offline activities conducive to holistic well-being, serves as a cornerstone for resilience against manipulation and exploitation within the digital realm. Additionally, fostering supportive networks of trusted peers and family members facilitates the cultivation of a safe space wherein students can openly discuss online challenges and seek guidance and support in navigating the complexities of the digital landscape (Ninan, 2021). By actively engaging in constructive online interactions and advocating for respectful discourse, students contribute to the cultivation of a healthier online environment, wherein divergent viewpoints are met with civility and mutual respect.

The impact of social media on student values and beliefs is a dynamic and continually evolving phenomenon, fraught with both challenges and opportunities for positive change. While the pervasive influence of social media platforms presents a myriad of challenges, ranging from the propagation of misinformation to the exacerbation of societal divisions, it also harbors the potential to serve as a catalyst for constructive dialogue and transformative social change. By fostering a culture of critical inquiry and responsible digital citizenship, educational institutions can empower students to navigate the digital landscape with discernment and integrity, thereby harnessing the transformative potential of social media for the enrichment of their lives and the cultivation of values conducive to societal flourishing.

In conclusion, the multifaceted nature of social media's influence on student values and beliefs necessitates a comprehensive and coordinated approach informed by a nuanced understanding of the intricate dynamics at play. By fostering critical thinking, promoting responsible online behaviour, and empowering students to navigate the digital landscape with discernment and integrity, we can ensure that social media becomes a tool for positive transformation, enriching the lives and shaping the values of future generations, while social media platforms present unparalleled opportunities for connectivity and knowledge dissemination, they concurrently serve as incubators for pernicious phenomena that undermine the integrity of discourse and precipitate adverse psychological outcomes for

users. Addressing these multifaceted challenges necessitates a nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between technological affordances and human behaviour, coupled with proactive measures aimed at fostering digital literacy, cultivating critical thinking skills, and fortifying mechanisms for the responsible stewardship of online spaces. Only through concerted efforts to mitigate the deleterious effects of social media can we harness its transformative potential while safeguarding the well-being and integrity of its users. The impact of social media on student values represents a dialectical interplay between its potential to foster empathy and promote societal inclusivity, juxtaposed against its capacity to exacerbate divisions and perpetuate injurious stereotypes. Navigating this complex landscape necessitates a multifaceted approach informed by a nuanced understanding of the intricate dynamics at play, coupled with proactive interventions aimed at cultivating digital resilience and fortifying individuals' capacities for critical engagement with the digital milieu. Only through concerted efforts to mitigate the adverse effects of social media while harnessing its transformative potential can we ensure the cultivation of values conducive to the holistic flourishing of individuals or students within the digital age.

Exploring Social Media's Influence on Personal Development

In the present day milieu, social media exerts a formidable influence on interpersonal dynamics and the construction of personal identity. This phenomenon elicits divergent viewpoints; while certain quarters extol its capacity for fostering individual growth, others voice apprehension regarding its adverse repercussions. Advocates of social media accentuate its potential in facilitating personal advancement. Noteworthy platforms such as Instagram and YouTube serve as conduits for creative expression, affording individuals the opportunity to exhibit their aptitudes, passions, and perspectives on a global scale. Such avenues not only bolster self assurance but also engender a sense of selfhood, thereby engendering connections with kindred spirits and engendering virtual communities conducive to mutual support and a sense of belonging.

Furthermore, social media facilitates active engagement wherein users participate in discursive exchanges, interrogate their own viewpoints, and glean insights from a plethora of diverse perspectives, thereby potentially enriching their comprehension of both the global landscape and their individual selves. Employing social media as a platform for self presentation holds the potential to yield positive ramifications on self esteem, particularly among adolescents who actively seek social affiliation and validation (Valkenburg, 2017).

Social media platforms have transcended their conventional roles as mere social networking tools, evolving into multifaceted platforms with significant educational implications. This transformation underscores their capacity to serve as invaluable educational resources, facilitating unfettered access to a wealth of information and diverse learning materials. Exemplifying this educational potential are platforms such as Coursera and edX, which democratize learning by offering a plethora of free online courses curated by esteemed institutions of higher education. Concurrently, platforms like YouTube and various blogs emerge as veritable repositories of knowledge, furnishing tutorials and expert insights across an array of subjects.

These educational opportunities extend beyond passive consumption, fostering interactive learning experiences and enabling individuals to engage directly with mentors and professionals in their respective fields. By leveraging social media platforms, individuals can transcend geographical barriers and cultivate meaningful connections with mentors, thus

augmenting their career trajectories and honing their skill sets. This interactive dynamic not only facilitates the dissemination of knowledge but also cultivates a fertile environment for mentorship and collaborative learning, thereby fostering continuous personal and professional development.

Moreover, social media's educational influence extends beyond traditional academic realms, permeating into the sphere of societal awareness and civic engagement. Through the dissemination of information and the amplification of diverse voices, social media platforms serve as catalysts for raising awareness about pressing social issues. By affording individuals a platform to express their views and mobilize support, social media engenders a culture of civic participation and activism, thereby fostering personal growth through active engagement with pertinent societal concerns.

Indeed, the symbiotic relationship between social media and civic engagement is increasingly evident, with individuals utilizing these platforms as conduits for meaningful expression and advocacy. The potential for social media to catalyze societal change is underscored by its capacity to amplify marginalized voices, galvanize collective action, and effectuate tangible transformations within communities. By harnessing the power of social media, individuals can transcend passive consumerism and assume active roles in shaping the socio-political landscape, thereby effectuating positive change at both the individual and societal levels. The transformative impact of social media on educational paradigms and civic engagement is corroborated by empirical research, which elucidates the myriad ways in which these platforms shape individual behaviour and societal dynamics. The profound influence of social media on civic participation has the potential to democratize political discourse and foster inclusive forms of civic engagement (Scott, 2018). Through empirical studies and theoretical frameworks, researchers continue to unravel the complex interplay between social media usage and civic behaviour, shedding light on the mechanisms through which these platforms facilitate social change and collective action.

Furthermore, the educational and civic potential of social media is not limited to formalized structures or institutionalized mechanisms. Rather, it encompasses a spectrum of informal learning experiences and grassroots movements that leverage social media as a catalyst for change. From grassroots advocacy campaigns to online educational initiatives, social media serves as a conduit for grassroots mobilization and knowledge dissemination, thereby democratizing access to information and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities.

However, amidst the myriad opportunities afforded by social media, there also exist inherent challenges and ethical considerations that warrant careful consideration. The proliferation of misinformation and the propagation of echo chambers pose significant threats to the integrity of public discourse, potentially exacerbating societal divisions and undermining democratic principles. Moreover, issues pertaining to privacy and data security underscore the need for robust regulatory frameworks to safeguard individuals' rights in an increasingly digitized world.

Social media platforms have emerged as powerful agents of educational empowerment and civic engagement, reshaping the landscape of learning and activism in profound ways. From democratizing access to education to amplifying marginalized voices, social media platforms have revolutionized the way individuals interact with information and engage with their communities. However, the transformative potential of social media must be tempered by a critical awareness of its inherent challenges and ethical implications, ensuring that these

platforms are leveraged responsibly to foster inclusive forms of education and civic participation.

The promise inherent in social media platforms is accompanied by inherent risks, the consequences of which merit careful consideration. The selective and often embellished depictions of individuals' lives showcased on these platforms can engender a culture of social comparison and breed feelings of inadequacy, thereby exerting a deleterious influence on self-esteem and body image. Exposure to meticulously curated social media content has been correlated with heightened levels of social comparison and diminished life satisfaction, particularly among individuals predisposed to vulnerability (Ninan, 2021).

Furthermore, the algorithm driven formation of echo chambers within social media ecosystems poses a formidable challenge to the cultivation of intellectual diversity and critical thinking. By reinforcing users' pre-existing beliefs and preferences, these echo chambers engender an environment characterized by cognitive homogeneity, wherein exposure to divergent perspectives is curtailed. Consequently, the potential for intellectual growth and the cultivation of critical thinking skills are impeded, hindering individuals' capacity to engage meaningfully with complex societal issues.

Moreover, the proliferation of misinformation and the dissemination of negative content within social media spheres exacerbate these challenges, creating an environment antithetical to personal development. The unchecked spread of falsehoods and inflammatory rhetoric not only erodes trust in established institutions but also fosters a climate of fear and uncertainty, thereby impeding individuals' ability to navigate the digital landscape with discernment and equanimity (Ekwunife *et al.,* 2020).

The confluence of these factors underscores the imperative for a nuanced understanding of the risks inherent in social media usage, necessitating proactive measures to mitigate their adverse effects. Central to this endeavor is the cultivation of digital literacy skills, which empower individuals to navigate the digital terrain with discernment and resilience. By equipping individuals with the tools to critically evaluate online content and discern fact from fiction, digital literacy initiatives serve as a bulwark against the pernicious effects of misinformation and echo chambers (Dian, 2023).

Furthermore, fostering a culture of mindful consumption entails cultivating awareness of the psychological pitfalls inherent in social media usage, such as the propensity for social comparison and the amplification of negative emotions. By fostering a sense of self awareness and emotional resilience, individuals can mitigate the deleterious impact of idealized portrayals and cultivate a healthier relationship with social media platforms.

The excessive engagement with social media platforms has been associated with the emergence of problematic internet use and potentially addictive behaviours. These behaviours are characterized by compulsive checking of social media feeds, a tendency to neglect real world relationships in favour of online interactions, and the manifestation of withdrawal symptoms when access to social media is restricted (Ninan, 2021). Such patterns of behaviour can exert a detrimental impact on mental health, precipitating symptoms of anxiety, depression, and feelings of social isolation.

The sharing of personal information online renders individuals vulnerable to various forms of exploitation, including targeted advertising, manipulation, and identity theft. The erosion of control over one's personal data engenders a pervasive sense of unease and distrust,

impeding the free expression of self and hindering avenues for personal growth. Indeed, excessive reliance on social media has been linked to heightened levels of depressive symptoms and diminished overall well-being, underscoring the potential deleterious effects on mental health (Purnama & Asdlori, 2023).

The influence exerted by social media on the trajectory of personal development is a multifaceted and intricately layered phenomenon. While its capacity to empower, foster connections, and facilitate learning is incontrovertible, the attendant risks of social comparison, addictive behaviours, and privacy breaches demand thoughtful consideration. Ultimately, individuals bear the responsibility of navigating this complex terrain with circumspection and prudence. Cultivating mindful social media habits, imposing limits on screen time, and adopting a critical stance towards online content constitute essential measures in safeguarding against the potential pitfalls of excessive social media engagement.

Moreover, the cultivation of robust real-world relationships, active participation in diverse offline pursuits, and a steadfast commitment to prioritizing mental well-being are indispensable components of a balanced approach to personal development in the digital age (Candiasa *et al.*, 2021). The interplay between social media and personal development is subject to continual evolution, shaped by a myriad of factors including technological innovations, evolving societal norms, and individual choices.

Indeed, a nuanced understanding of both the potential benefits and inherent risks associated with social media usage is imperative for navigating this dynamic landscape responsibly. By advocating for responsible platform design, promoting digital literacy initiatives, and fostering a culture of mindful engagement, individuals can harness the transformative potential of social media to catalyze positive personal growth while mitigating its adverse effects on mental health and well-being.

Effect of Social Media on Moral and Ethical Development among University Students

During the formative years spent at the university, individuals undergo a significant phase of moral and ethical maturation, marking their transition into adulthood while grappling with intricate societal dynamics. This epoch coincides with the pervasive presence of social media platforms, which serve dual roles as reflective surfaces and amplification mechanisms, exerting considerable influence on the evolving ethical paradigms of emerging adults. An in-depth analysis of the symbiotic relationship between social media engagement and moral development among university students unveils a complex terrain characterized by a spectrum of beneficial and detrimental effects.

The period encompassing the university years holds profound significance in the moral and ethical progression of individuals, as they contend with the intricate tapestry of societal norms, values, and interpersonal dynamics while progressively assuming greater autonomy and accountability for their conduct (Aljehani, 2019). This phase serves as a pivotal juncture in the developmental trajectory, wherein emerging adults are confronted with a myriad of moral quandaries, prompting introspection and deliberation as they endeavor to refine and solidify their ethical perspectives in consonance with both personal convictions and societal mores. Against the backdrop of this developmental milieu, the pervasive presence of social media platforms introduces a distinct and innovative facet to the moral terrain traversed by university students. Functioning as virtual mirrors of prevailing societal norms and

interpersonal dynamics, these digital realms provide individuals with avenues for self-expression, interpersonal engagement, and the exploration of identity (Hasan *et al*., 2023). Concurrently, they serve as potent amplifiers, augmenting the influence of moral appraisals, comparative social evaluations, and normative pressures on users' ethical cognition and decision-making faculties (Ninan, 2021).

Social media platforms, through their ability to connect users with a diverse array of voices and experiences spanning the globe, possess the capacity to challenge established moral frameworks and stimulate ethical maturation (Yogesh *et al*., 2021). Platforms like X, formerly known as Twitter, serve as arenas for encountering nuanced discussions surrounding social justice issues, while communities on platforms such as Reddit delve into an exploration of various ethical philosophies (Yogesh *et al*., 2021). Additionally, YouTube channels offer platforms for engaging in thought provoking dialogues pertaining to intricate moral dilemmas. Exposure to a multiplicity of viewpoints facilitated by these platforms contributes to the cultivation of empathy, enhancement of critical thinking skills, and the development of an appreciation for the complexities inherent in ethical discourse (Yogesh *et al*., 2021). Nonetheless, apprehensions regarding the formation of echo chambers and the influence of biased algorithms in constraining exposure to diverse perspectives persist, underscoring the imperative for individuals to cultivate media literacy competencies to navigate this vast information landscape discerningly.

Online communities established on popular social networking platforms such as Facebook, Discord, Telegram, or WhatsApp have emerged as dynamic environments conducive to fostering ethical development and engagement (Wohn, Ellison, Khan, Bliss & Gray, 2013). These virtual collectives, united by shared values and ethical stances, serve as interactive spaces for dialogue, collaboration, and collective action (Wohn *et al*., 2013). Whether it involves mobilizing support for environmental causes within dedicated Facebook groups or actively volunteering through Discord communities, university students are actively participating in ethical endeavors that have tangible impacts in the real world.

Moreover, the sense of belonging and shared responsibility nurtured within these online communities plays a pivotal role in motivating individuals to align their actions with the collective ethical standards upheld by the group (Wohn *et al*., 2013). This collective ethos not only reinforces ethical behaviour but also encourages members to take on proactive roles in upholding and promoting shared values within the community.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge and address the challenges and risks inherent in online communities. Instances of groupthink, where conformity overrides critical thinking, along with occurrences of cyberbullying and online harassment within certain online spaces, underscore the need for cautious engagement (Wohn *et al*., 2013). Such concerns highlight the importance of fostering digital literacy and promoting responsible online conduct to navigate the ethical potential of online communities effectively.Thus, while online communities offer promising avenues for ethical development and engagement among university students, it is essential to approach them with a critical and discerning mindset, mindful of the complexities and potential pitfalls inherent in digital interactions.

Social media platforms represent a vast reservoir of educational resources and exemplars of ethical behaviour. Documentaries accessible on platforms like YouTube illuminate various facets of social injustices, while TED Talks stimulate critical contemplation regarding ethical quandaries. Additionally, online repositories disseminate materials advocating ethical

principles and fostering critical thinking skills (Ekwunife *et al*., 2020). However, the prevalence of misinformation and fraudulent schemes underscores the importance of exercising discernment in assessing online content. Thus, the identification of ethical role models necessitates the cultivation of a refined digital acumen to navigate the complex landscape of online information effectively (Ekwunife *et al*., 2020).

Social media platforms such as Facebook and X formerly known as Twitter offer a range of functionalities, including polls, petitions, and fundraising features, which empower students to actualize their ethical beliefs through action (Robinson, 2021). Whether it involves raising awareness about pressing social issues or orchestrating collective demonstrations, these tools facilitate ethical involvement, galvanizing young individuals towards societal transformation and endorsing ethical activism (Robinson, 2021). Nonetheless, the potential misuse of these tools to disseminate misinformation or manipulate public sentiment underscores the imperative of cultivating responsible digital citizenship and incorporating ethical considerations into online activism endeavors (Ekwunife *et al*., 2020).

The intricate ethical complexities inherent in social media demand attention and analysis. Online platforms are rife with instances of hate speech, cyberbullying, dissemination of pornography, and depiction of graphic violence, all of which pose significant risks to the cognitive and emotional development of university students. Exposure to such content can precipitate adverse psychological and emotional outcomes, potentially leading to desensitization towards unethical conduct and the normalization of deleterious online norms (Hasan *et al*., 2023). Addressing the challenge of content moderation and establishing secure digital environments presents a multifaceted endeavor, underscoring the ongoing endeavor to cultivate ethical cultures within online spheres.

The algorithms employed by social media platforms contribute to the formation of filter bubbles, wherein users are predominantly exposed to content that aligns with their preexisting beliefs and preferences, thereby reinforcing cognitive biases and constraining exposure to heterogeneous viewpoints (Ekwunife *et al*., 2020). This phenomenon can impede the cultivation of critical thinking skills, foster attitudes of intolerance, and perpetuate the proliferation of misinformation within online spaces (Ekwunife *et al*., 2020). Echo chambers, stemming from these algorithmic mechanisms, exert discernible influences on the moral development of individuals, accentuating the importance of integrating media literacy education and deliberate efforts to actively seek out and engage with diverse perspectives (Ninan, 2021). While social media platforms endeavor to mitigate algorithmic biases, individual conscientiousness and proactive engagement with a broad spectrum of content remain pivotal in fostering an environment conducive to ethical discourse and intellectual growth.

The construction of carefully curated online identities and the portrayal of seemingly flawless lifestyles contribute to the formation of unrealistic expectations among users, fostering a culture of social comparison within digital spaces. This phenomenon has been observed to have detrimental effects on individuals' self-esteem, body image perceptions, and ethical decision-making processes (Ninan, 2021). The perpetual exposure to idealized online personas may engender feelings of anxiety, depression, and inadequacy as individuals incessantly compare themselves to these unrealistic standards.

In response to this ethical challenge, adopting a mindful approach to social media consumption and prioritizing the cultivation of a healthy online presence emerge as

imperative strategies. By conscientiously curating one's digital interactions and being discerning about the content consumed, individuals can mitigate the adverse psychological impacts associated with incessant social comparison. Moreover, the pervasive dissemination of misinformation and the proliferation of "fake news" across social media platforms pose formidable obstacles to ethical decision-making processes. Online manipulators adeptly exploit psychological vulnerabilities to propagate misleading information, thereby undermining social trust, exacerbating political polarization, and distorting ethical judgments (Ekwunife *et al*., 2020). Addressing this ethical quandary necessitates concerted efforts to enhance media literacy skills, promote critical thinking, and foster a culture of fact checking and skepticism in digital discourse. By equipping individuals with the tools to discern credible information from misinformation, society can mitigate the deleterious effects of online manipulation on ethical decision-making processes and promote a more informed and ethically sound online environment.

The university years serve as a critical period for the moral and ethical development of individuals, coinciding with the widespread integration of social media into daily life. The intricate interplay between social media engagement and moral development among university students underscores the need for nuanced understanding and proactive interventions to harness the potential benefits while mitigating the pitfalls associated with digital technologies. By promoting ethical literacy, fostering critical reflection, and cultivating responsible digital citizenship, educators and stakeholders can empower young adults to navigate the moral complexities of the digital age with integrity and resilience (Wohn *et al*., 2013).

Theoretical Framework

In investigating the impact of social media on character formation among students of Evangel University Akaeze, it is imperative to draw upon pertinent psychological and sociological theories that offer valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of human behaviour and social interaction, thereby providing a robust foundation for understanding the influence of social media on students' character development. To comprehensively address this research inquiry, it is essential to delve into theories elucidating the psychological processes underlying students' engagement with social media and its implications for their character formation. By elucidating the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions of students' interactions with social media platforms, these theories offer a nuanced understanding of how these digital environments shape their values, beliefs, and interpersonal relationships. Additionally, sociological theories examining the social structures, norms, and cultural influences that mediate students' engagement with social media can further enrich the analysis. By situating the research within these theoretical frameworks, the study can effectively explore the multifaceted dynamics of social media's impact on character formation among students of Evangel University Akaeze, thereby facilitating the formulation of more comprehensive and nuanced solutions grounded in both inductive and deductive reasoning approaches.

Identity Development Theory

This theory was propounded by Erik Erikson in the second half of the 20th century, and it posits that identity formation is a dynamic process shaped by social interaction and self-reflection (Lim, 2023). Social media platforms provide a unique space for self-expression and exploration, allowing students to experiment with different identities and interact with diverse online communities, potentially impacting their character development.

Assumptions

1. Identity development is a lifelong process influenced by individual experiences, social interactions, and environmental factors.
2. Identity formation involves the exploration and commitment to various roles, values, beliefs, and goals, leading to the construction of a coherent sense of self.
3. Social media platforms serve as significant arenas for identity exploration and expression, providing opportunities for individuals to experiment with different aspects of their identity and seek validation from peers.

Moral Development Theory

Propounded by Lawrence Kohlberg in 1958, this theory explores how individuals develop moral reasoning and ethical decision-making skills. Social media platforms can present ethical dilemmas and opportunities for moral reasoning, potentially influencing students' character development (Sanders, 2024).

Assumptions

1. Moral development unfolds in stages, progressing from a focus on self-interest to a consideration of broader societal norms and principles.
2. Moral reasoning is influenced by cognitive abilities, socialization processes, and exposure to moral dilemmas and role models.
3. Social media exposure can shape moral development by presenting diverse ethical perspectives, promoting empathy and perspective-taking, but also by normalizing unethical behaviours or desensitizing individuals to moral issues.

Given the research topic, the Identity Development Theory emerges as particularly relevant. This theory posits that individuals construct their identity through exploration and commitment to various roles, values, and beliefs. Social media platforms provide a fertile ground for students to engage in identity exploration, shaping their character formation process. By interacting with peers, sharing personal experiences, and engaging with diverse content on social media, students at Evangel University Akaeze are likely to navigate through different aspects of their identity, shaping their moral beliefs and behaviours in the process.

This theoretical framework underscores the importance of understanding how social media influences students' identity development and character formation, emphasizing the need for educators and policymakers to promote critical engagement with social media platforms and foster reflective practices that align with ethical values and principles.

Summary of Literature Reviewed

The literature review encompasses both conceptual and empirical studies focused on the influence of social media on character formation among university students, with particular attention to Identity Development Theory and Moral Development Theory. Conceptual literature examines the role of social media in shaping student identity, understanding its impact on values and beliefs, exploring its influence on personal development, and examining its effects on moral and ethical development. Empirical studies investigate various aspects of social media's impact, including its influence on social value systems, academic performance, character education, decision-making processes, educational advancement, and spiritual formation among university students. Collectively, these studies contribute to our understanding of how social media usage intersects with identity and moral development theories, highlighting both its positive and negative implications for character formation among students. However, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the comprehensive

integration of these theories in examining the relationship between social media use, identity development, and moral development. The current research aims to bridge this gap by exploring the nuanced dynamics of social media's influence on character formation among students at Evangel University Akaeze, drawing on both Identity Development Theory and Moral Development Theory within an integrated theoretical framework.

Methodology

The adoption and implementation of a survey research method within the context of this particular study were deemed not only suitable but indeed imperative. The utilization of survey methodology proved instrumental in effectively soliciting and eliciting responses from participants, primarily through the administration of structured questionnaire, thereby facilitating the synthesis of empirical data and enabling the derivation of meaningful generalizations and insights pertaining to the student population of Evangel University Akaeze. The population comprises the entire students enrolled in academic programmemes at EUA, totaling 2,034 (EUA Student Affairs Unit, 2024). They are characterized by their active involvement in social media platforms alongside their academic endeavors. The sample size for the study was ascertained utilizing the Wimmer and Dominick online sample size calculator, a tool designed to account for multiple factors such as the size of the population, the desired level of confidence, and the acceptable margin of error. With a student population totaling 2,034 individuals, a confidence level of 95%, and a margin of error set at 5%, the resultant sample size generated for this investigation amounts to 322 participants. Given the specific nature and scope of this study, a deliberate decision was made to employ both purposive and random sampling methodologies. Purposive sampling, characterized by its non-probabilistic approach, entails the selection of participants based on predetermined criteria aligned with the study's objectives and relevant characteristics. The rationale behind opting for purposive sampling in this instance is rooted in the desire to gather insights from students who identify as active users of various social media platforms. This strategic selection process allows for the inclusion of individuals who possess pertinent experiences and perspectives pertinent to the research topic. Moreover, it is imperative to acknowledge that the entire population of active social media users within EUA constitutes the overarching demographic in this study. This comprehensive demographic encompasses all students within the university community who engage with social media platforms on a regular basis, thereby ensuring a representative sample reflecting the broader student body's social media usage patterns and behaviours.

The primary tool employed for data collection in this study is a structured questionnaire. Assisted by three research assistants, a total of 322 copies of the questionnaire were distributed among the participants. The distribution process was exclusively manual delivery, ensuring direct interaction with the respondents. Remarkably, the collection phase was seamless, owing to the envisaged enthusiasm of the respondents to partake in social media use. The questionnaire comprised a collection of five pertinent inquiries supplementing the three primary research questions. To gauge the distribution of responses across each variable, a meticulous examination was conducted, and the outcomes meticulously documented in a frequency table. Subsequently, the information garnered from the responses were systematically tabulated, calculated, and subjected to analysis, employing the Likert scale with a four-point weighting system. Results falling below the threshold of 2.5 was deemed inadequate and subsequently disregarded, whereas responses from this benchmark and above was deemed satisfactory and retained for further scrutiny and interpretation.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The researchers distributed 322 copies of the questionnaire, of which 309 were deemed suitable for use, hence a mortality rate of 4%.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Table 1. **Analysis of Demographic Data of the Sampled Population**

Case	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	110	36%
	Female	199	64%
	Total	**309**	**100%**
Age	18 – 22	124	40%
	23 – 27	97	31%
	28 – above	88	29%
	Total	**309**	**100%**
Level of Study	100	80	26%
	200	47	15%
	300	37	12%
	400	80	26%
	500	65	21%
	Total	**309**	**100%**
Religion	Christianity	267	86%
	Islam	40	13%
	Others	2	1%
	Total	**309**	**100%**

Table 1 illustrates that female undergraduate students exhibited greater acceptance of the instrument in contrast to their male counterparts, who constituted only 36% of the sampled cohort. The age bracket of 18-22 suggests active participation from younger individuals in the research. Participants predominantly hailed from academic levels 100 and 400, with 86% identifying as adherents of Christianity. In summary, the demographic profile reflects a diverse and adequately represented sample of the younger demographic, thus establishing its suitability for the study's focus.

Table 2: Mean Responses on the Perceptions and Experiences of Evangel University Akaeze Students Regarding the Impact of Social Media on their Character Formation.

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	FX	X	DECISION
5	My social media interactions align with my personal values	187	98	20	4	1086	3.51	Accepted
6	Social media is exerting a significant influence in shaping my character	115	80	70	44	884	2.86	Accepted
7	I believe my interactions on social media influence my personal values and beliefs	88	97	70	64	847	2.74	Accepted
8	I do not think that social media helps me develop positive character traits	54	49	60	146	629	2.03	Rejected
Grand Mean							**11.14**	

From the table above, the mean value 3.51 indicates that students' social media interactions align with their personal values. The mean score of 2.86 reveals that social media is exerting a significant influence in shaping the character of students. The mean value of 2.74 indicates that interactions of students on social media influences their personal values and beliefs while the mean score of 2.03 reveals that students do not think social media affects their ability to exhibit positive character traits. These data imply that the social media exert a strong influence on the students' character formation and development of values ad beliefs which are both positive and negative.

Table 3: Mean Responses on the Role of Peer Influence Mediated through Social Media Platforms in Shaping the Character Formation Process among Students of Evangel University Akaeze.

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	FX	X	DECISION
9	I am conscious of how my social media activity reflects on my character	124	76	60	49	893	2.88	Accepted
10	There are changes in my character as a result of my engagement with social media	145	80	70	14	974	3.15	Accepted

11	Peer influence on social media platforms impacts my character formation	98	87	80	44	857	2.77	Accepted
12	I am aware of the ways in which my peers' behaviours on social media affects my own character development	94	94	61	60	840	2.71	Accepted
	Grand Mean						**11.51**	

From the table above, the mean value 2.88 indicates that students are conscious of how their social media activities reflect on their character. The mean score of 3.15 reveals that they are changes in the character of students as a result of their engagement on social media. The mean value of 2.77 indicates that peer influences on social media impact the character formation of students while the mean score of 2.71 reveals that students are aware of the ways in which their peers' behaviours on social media affect their own character development. From these revelations, it could be deduced that there are obvious and significant changes in the character of the students as a result of exposures to social media. Gathering that these students meet persons of their demographic in the social media, their acceptance of social media content and its influence on them is undeniable. Again, the students being conscious of the influence of social media on their character development shows that they are active social media users.

Table 4: Mean Responses the Effectiveness of Existing Character Education Programmemes in Mitigating the Negative Influence of Social Media on Students' Character Development at Evangel University Akaeze

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	FX	X	DECISION
13	Character education programmemes at Evangel University Akaeze effectively counteract the negative influence of social media on students' character development	147	99	20	43	968	3.13	Accepted
14	I feel that participating in character education programmemes has helped me navigate the challenges posed by social media on my character development	149	98	44	18	996	3.22	Accepted

15	There are improvements in my ability to make positive choices regarding social media usage as a result of character education initiatives	148	97	26	38	973	3.14	Accepted
16	There is a need for enhanced integration of character education programmemes with discussions about social media's impact on character development	154	94	42	19	1001	3.23	Accepted
Grand Mean							**12.72**	

From the table above, the mean value 3.13 indicates that character education programmemes at Evangel University Akaeze effectively counteract the negative influence of social media on students' character development. The mean score of 3.22 reveals that participating in character education programmemes has helped students navigate the challenges posed by social media on their character development. The mean value of 3.14 indicates that there are improvements in student's ability to make positive choices regarding social media usage as a result of the character education initiatives while the mean value of 3.23 suggests that there is a need for enhanced integration of character education programmemes with discussions about social media's impact on character development. The implication here is that Evangel University Akaeze, through her character education programmemes serves as intervening variable against negative character development emanating from the social media. This also reinforces the uses and gratification theory of the media which explains the reasons why users engage in media use. In this case, the students can withstand the onslaught effect of social media content because they are armed by the school's character education programmemes alongside their social media exposure.

Test of Hypothesis

$H0_1$: Peer influence mediated through social media platforms does not play a significant role in shaping the character formation process among students of Evangel University Akaeze.

Table 5: Samples Collected

Response	**Sample 1**	**Sample 2**	**Sample 3**	**Sample 4**	**Totals**
Agreement	200	225	185	188	798
Disagreement	109	84	124	121	438

Totals	**309**	**309**	**309**	**309**	**1236**

Source: Field Survey 2024

Total in the first row = 798

Total in the second row = 438

Total in each column = 309

Thus, expected frequency (f_e) in the first row =

$$\frac{798x309}{1236} \quad \frac{246582}{1236}$$

$$= \quad =199.5$$

And expected frequency (f_e) in the second column =

$$\frac{438x309}{1236} \quad \frac{135342}{1236}$$

$$= \quad = 109.5$$

From table 5 above, the chi-square (X^2) table can be set up.

Table 6: Chi Square table

Observed (f_o)	**Expected (f_e)**	**($f_o - f_e$)**	**$(f_o - f_e)^2$**	**$(f_o - f_e)^2/f_e$**
200	199.5	0.5	0.25	0.00125
225	199.5	25.5	650.25	3.25939
185	199.5	-14.5	210.25	1.05414
188	199.5	-11.5	132.25	0.66332
109	109.5	-0.5	0.25	0.00228
84	109.5	-25.5	650.25	5.93767
124	109.5	14.5	210.25	1.92055
121	109.5	11.5	132.25	1.20868

Chi-Square (X^2) = 0.00125 + 3.25939 + 1.05414 + 0.66332 + 0.00228 + 5.93767 + 1.92055 + 1.20868 = 14.0453

To calculate the degree of freedom (df):

(Row – 1) (Column – 1)

i.e. (4– 1) (2 – 1) = 3 x 1 = 3

Since $\chi 2 = 14.048 \backslash chi^2 = 14.048 \chi 2 = 14.048$ is greater than the critical value of $\chi 2 \backslash chi^2 \chi 2$ at the 0.05 significance level (7.81 for df = 3), we reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, peer

influence mediated through social media platforms plays a significant role in shaping the character formation process among students of Evangel University Akaeze.

Discussion of findings

Research Question 1: What are the Perceptions and Experiences of Evangel University Akaeze Students Regarding the Impact of Social Media on Their Character Formation?

Table 2 presents a comprehensive analysis of EUA students' perceptions and experiences regarding the impact of social media on their character formation. The mean values, particularly the notable score of 3.51 indicating alignment between students' social media interactions and personal values, underscore the significant role of social media in reflecting and possibly reinforcing their individual beliefs and values. This finding resonates with prior research, such as Dian (2023), who highlighted social media's role in fostering communication abilities and digital ethics among youths. Similarly, Candiasa, Mertasari, and Aryanta (2021) emphasized social media's potential in supporting character education through integrated educational approaches. These studies align with our finding that social media interactions often mirror students' personal values, suggesting a complex interplay between digital environments and character formation.

Conversely, the contrasting mean score of 2.03 suggests that students generally perceive social media as having little impact on their ability to exhibit positive character traits. This finding diverges from the broader acknowledgment of social media's influence found in the literature, such as Hasan, Rojab, and Hilalah (2023), who identified self-enhancement and positive distinctiveness as factors influencing character development through social media. This discrepancy may reflect either a resilience among students to external influences or a potential underestimation of social media's subtler impacts on character traits, as suggested by Cojocea (2019).

In conclusion, the study reveals a nuanced perspective among Evangel University Akaeze students regarding the impact of social media on their character formation. While there is a strong alignment between students' social media interactions and personal values, as evidenced by the mean score of 3.51, there exists a contrasting perception regarding social media's influence on exhibiting positive character traits. These findings are consistent with Identity Development Theory and Moral Development Theory, which emphasize the role of personal beliefs and moral reasoning in shaping character. However, they also prompt further inquiry into the discrepancies observed, suggesting a need for educational interventions that enhance students' awareness of both the positive and potential negative impacts of social media on character development. By addressing these complexities, educators and policymakers can better support students in navigating digital environments while fostering resilient and morally grounded character traits.

Research Question 2: What is the Role of Peer Influence Mediated Through Social Media Platforms in Shaping the Character Formation Process Among Students of Evangel University Akaeze?

Table 3 provides insights into the role of peer influence mediated through social media platforms in shaping the character formation process among students at Evangel University Akaeze. The mean values, particularly the significant scores of 2.88 and 3.15, highlight students' awareness of how their social media activities reflect on their character and the noticeable changes in character resulting from social media engagement. These findings

resonate with prior research, such as Hasan, Rojab, and Hilalah (2023), who identified peer influences through social media as crucial factors in character development. Similarly, Purnama and Asdlori (2023) discussed the dual nature of social media in shaping students' self-perception and interactions, highlighting its role as both a facilitator and a potential influencer of social behaviours.

Moreover, the mean score of 2.77 indicates the significant impact of peer influences on social media platforms in shaping students' character formation. This finding is consistent with Identity Development Theory, which posits that peer interactions play a pivotal role in shaping identity and character traits. The awareness among students (mean score of 2.71) of how their peers' behaviours on social media affect their own character development further underscores the complex interplay between peer dynamics and individual identity formation

In conclusion, the study elucidates the critical role of peer influence mediated through social media platforms in shaping the character formation process among students of Evangel University Akaeze. The findings highlight the pervasive nature of peer-mediated interactions in the digital sphere, reflecting Identity Development Theory's emphasis on social interactions as foundational to identity formation. These results underscore the importance of fostering digital literacy and promoting positive peer influences to enhance students' character development in online environments. By understanding and addressing the dynamics of peer influence on social media, educators and policymakers can better support students in navigating digital interactions while promoting resilient and ethically grounded character traits.

Research Question 3: What is the Effectiveness of Existing Character Education Programmemes in Mitigating the Negative Influence of Social Media on Students' Character Development at Evangel University Akaeze?

Table 4 provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of existing character education programmes at Evangel University Akaeze in mitigating the negative influence of social media on students' character development. The mean values, notably the high scores ranging from 3.13 to 3.23, indicate a positive impact of these programmes. Specifically, the mean value of 3.13 suggests that character education programmes are effective in counteracting adverse influences on students' character development attributed to social media. This finding resonates with prior research, such as Candiasa, Mertasari, and Aryanta (2021), who highlighted the role of educational interventions in promoting positive character traits amidst digital interactions.

Moreover, the mean score of 3.22 underscores the beneficial role of character education programmes in helping students navigate the challenges posed by social media. This aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of Moral Development Theory, which emphasizes the importance of structured guidance in moral reasoning and decision-making processes. The improvement in students' ability to make positive choices regarding social media usage (mean value of 3.14) further supports the efficacy of these programmes in fostering responsible digital behaviours.

In conclusion, the study reveals the effectiveness of existing character education programmes at Evangel University Akaeze in mitigating the negative influences of social media on students' character development. The consistently high mean values above 3 indicate a positive reception and perceived impact of these programmes, emphasizing their role in fostering resilience and promoting positive character traits amidst the pervasive influence of social media. These findings underscore the importance of integrating character education

initiatives with discussions about social media to enhance students' awareness and skills in navigating digital environments responsibly. By leveraging these educational interventions, educators and policymakers can empower students to make informed and ethical decisions in their online interactions, thereby promoting holistic character development.

The findings across all three research questions highlight the intricate relationship between social media usage and character traits among students at Evangel University Akaeze. Social media not only reflects but also actively shapes students' character traits, influenced heavily by peer interactions. However, the presence of robust character education programmes demonstrates significant potential in mitigating negative influences and promoting positive character development. These insights call for a nuanced approach to integrating character education with awareness about the impacts of social media, fostering a more holistic development environment for students.

Summary of Findings

From the data analysis and discussion in the study, the findings are as follow:

1. **Influence of Social Media:** Social media significantly shapes students' character (mean score: 2.65), highlighting its strong impact on attitudes and behaviours.
2. **Alignment with Personal Values:** Students perceive their social media interactions as consistent with their personal values (mean value: 3.51), suggesting a reflection of offline ethical standards in online behaviour.
3. **Effectiveness of Character Education Programmes:** Character education programmes effectively mitigate negative social media influences on character development (mean values: 3.13 to 3.23), promoting resilience and positive traits amidst digital challenges.

Conclusion

The findings from this study highlight the substantial role that social media plays in shaping the character traits of students at Evangel University Akaeze. Social media usage patterns are intricately linked to various aspects of students' character development, including their personal values and behaviours. While students recognize the influence of social media, they also exhibit resilience and a belief in their ability to maintain positive traits. Peer influence mediated through social media is a significant factor in character formation. However, character education programmes have proven effective in counteracting negative influences and supporting positive character development. These insights underline the importance of a comprehensive approach to character education that includes awareness and management of social media influences.

Recommendations

In the light of the above revelations, the researcher recommends:

1. **Integration of Social Media Education:** Integrate social media education into existing character development curricula, equipping students with skills to navigate and manage their online presence responsibly.
2. **Peer Influence Management:** Develop programmes to manage peer influence on social media, fostering positive interactions and addressing negative behaviours effectively.

3. **Monitoring and Guidance:** Establish systems for monitoring and guiding students in their social media use, promoting healthy online habits and responsible digital citizenship.

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