



# The Use of Mobile Phones as a Digital Literacy Medium Among Religious School Students

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**Abstract.** During the long school holiday marking the transition to a new academic year, some students or religious boarding school students spend their time playing with smartphones. They take advantage of the school break by engaging in social media and online gaming. The average duration of smartphone usage is approximately 5 (five) to 10 (ten) hours per day. Some parents of the boarding school students are unable to prevent their children from these holiday activities as it is considered normal. This acceptance is due to the fact that students are prohibited from using smartphones while at the boarding school. However, the parents of the students are aware that excessive smartphone usage can have a negative impact on their behavior in their immediate surroundings. The method of implementing community service utilizes an educational approach. The outcomes of this community engagement activity include students understanding the positive and negative effects of excessive smartphone usage. Additionally, students are now capable of selecting content and applications that are suitable for their learning needs when they are at home.

**Keywords:** Students, Digital Literacy, Education.

## 1 Introduction

Communication technology, such as smartphones, has proliferated throughout all layers of society. However, some individuals still struggle to use this technology wisely. Inappropriate digital technology usage has negative implications for both individual and societal well-being. To address these adverse effects, digital literacy implementation must be carried out promptly to educate the nation's character. Digital communication technology is unavoidable in that it offers convenience to anyone, yet it also results in losses in various ways.

Everyone can easily share and access news on social media or online platforms, with news sources accessible from anywhere. The digital era is already here, and anyone can readily embrace it.

According to a survey conducted by the Indonesian Internet Service User Association (APJII), the number of internet users in Indonesia reached 215.63 million people in 2022-2023, marking a 2.67% increase compared to the previous period, which had 210.03 million users. (<https://dataindonesia.id/digital/detail/apjii-pengguna-internet-indonesia-21563-juta-pada-20222023>).

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The development of the digital world has two opposing sides concerning the advancement of digital literacy. On one side, it supports human work, while on the other, it raises concerns. One of these concerns is the large number of youths accessing the internet, approximately 70 million of them. They spend nearly 5 hours a day online, whether through smartphones, personal computers, or laptops. The high internet penetration among young people is a cause for worry about Indonesian children accessing pornography content. The average number of children or youths accessing pornography content reaches 25,000 individuals (Republika, 2017).

Furthermore, unhealthy online behaviors, such as spreading fake news, hate speech, and intolerance on social media, present significant challenges for parents in preparing the 21st-century generation, which is media-savvy through digital literacy. According to David Buckingham (2001), media education aims to develop critical understanding and active participation, empowering youths as media consumers to interpret and evaluate information in their own way, thus becoming empowered participants in their society.

Media education is about developing youths' critical and creative abilities to seek, learn from, and use various media sources in various forms. Adequate understanding of the digital world among young people and the negative impact of information openness on social media often affect young individuals. According to Stefany et al. (2017), media literacy is the ability of social media users to critically and creatively filter information circulating on various media.

According to Ryan T & Xenos (2011), there are three types of social media users: narcissism, loneliness, and isolation, characterized as follows: Narcissism - frequently posting daily activities to showcase oneself; Loneliness - excessive use of social media leading to a decrease in the quality of social interactions with the surrounding environment. This lack of social interaction leads to a high level of social anxiety; Isolation - preferring online relationships among humans. This behavior is manipulative because real-life meetings or face-to-face interactions are often ignored.

After assessing the need for media education through digital literacy outreach, the researcher attempts to formulate the problem: how to implement a digital literacy education program using smartphones during school holidays for students at the Manbaul Hikam Islamic Boarding School in Tanggulangin, Sidoarjo, East Java.

## 2 Method

The digital literacy outreach activities were aimed at the students of the Manbaul Hikam Islamic Boarding School in Tanggulangin, Sidoarjo, East Java. The series of activity stages are as follows:

1. The Community Engagement Team (PKM Team) coordinated with the management of Manbaul Hikam Islamic Boarding School in Tanggulangin, Sidoarjo, to plan the digital literacy outreach activities and assess the needs of the participants.
2. The preparation of the proposal was adjusted to the partner's needs.
3. Designing the activity techniques in collaboration with the management of Manbaul Hikam Islamic Boarding School in Tanggulangin, Sidoarjo.

4. The dissemination of the activity plan to the management of Manbaul Hikam Islamic Boarding School in Tanggulangin, Sidoarjo, and subsequently announced to the students.
5. Delivery of digital literacy outreach materials.

The target group for this activity was students in grades 7, 8, and 9. The implementation of this activity took place at the Manbaul Hikam Islamic Boarding School in Tanggulangin, Sidoarjo, East Java. The activity spanned two days, specifically on Tuesday and Wednesday, August 1 and 2, 2023.



**Fig. 1.** Digital Literacy Outreach Activities Among Students

Pondok Pesantren Manba'ul Hikam Tanggulangin is located approximately 15 km from the city of Sidoarjo. Manba'ul Hikam is one of the traditional Islamic boarding schools with around 1500 students, consisting of both male and female students. This boarding school is situated in the village of Putat, Tanggulangin, Sidoarjo, and is currently led by KH. Abdul Wahid Harum.

Pondok Pesantren Manba'ul Hikam was founded in 1982 by KH. Khozin Mansur and his wife, Nyai Hj. Machniyah Mansur. The boarding school offers both formal and non-formal education programs. Formal education includes early childhood education (PAUD) up to high school (Madrasah Aliyah). Non-formal education covers various levels of religious studies from Diniyah Wustho to Ulyah. To this day, Manba'ul Hikam enforces a prohibition on students using telecommunication devices while within the boarding school premises. This restriction aims to ensure that students are more focused on their education at the boarding school. Students are only allowed to use them for communication with their parents every Friday, with limited duration.

The digital literacy outreach activities at Pondok Pesantren Manba'ul Hikam begin with a pre-test to assess the participants' knowledge of digital literacy. The pre-test involves two questions:

1. Name the applications you frequently use when spending the school holiday at home?
2. How long do you usually use a smartphone when spending the school holiday at home?

The pre-test responses were recorded on a sheet of paper distributed by the outreach team. The outreach team consisted of the Team Leader, Farid Pribadi S.Sos, M.Sosio, along with team members Diyah Utami, S.Sos., M.M; Drs. FX. Sri Sadewo, M.Si; and Kholida Ulfi Mubaroka, S.Sos., M.Sosio. The expertise possessed by the outreach team from the Sociology Program at Universitas Negeri Surabaya to address the partner's issues includes the following:

Expertise in communication sociology: designing and assessing programs to empower proper and effective social media usage among students.

Cultural and gender expertise: evaluating the effectiveness of gender-friendly social media usage, especially among women or female students, while considering the surrounding cultural context.

Economic expertise: designing and evaluating media suitable for empowering students' economic well-being.

The outreach team from the Sociology Program collaborates with Islamic media and broadcasting expert, Moch Rofi'I Boenawi, S.Pd.I, M.A.g., from Surabaya.

The outreach material covers various topics, including:

1. The positive and negative impacts of digital communication technology.
2. Fundamental principles of digital and social media literacy.
3. Information and Technology Law (ITE Law).
4. Negative content on the internet (hoaxes, hate speech, provocation).
5. Strategies for recognizing trustworthy news, fake information, and online games with potential gambling elements.

Digital literacy was first introduced by Gilster in 1997 through his book titled "Digital Literacy." Gilster explained that digital literacy is the ability to understand and utilize information from various digital sources, which includes reading and critical thinking skills to evaluate information obtained through digital media. According to Alkalai (2004), there are five types of skills or competencies included in the general term of digital literacy:

1. Photo-visual literacy, which is the ability to read and interpret information from visuals.
2. Reproduction literacy, which is the ability to use digital technology to create new works from existing content.
3. Branch literacy, which is the ability to navigate non-linear digital spaces successfully.
4. Information literacy, which is the ability to search, find, critically assess, and evaluate information found on the web.
5. Socio-emotional literacy, which refers to the social and emotional aspects present online, whether through socialization, collaboration, or content consumption.

Meanwhile, Douglas A.J. Belshaw, in his thesis "What is 'Digital Literacy'?" (2012), asserts that there are eight essential elements in developing digital literacy:

1. Cultural, involving an understanding of various cultural contexts in the digital world.
2. Cognitive, related to the ability to critically assess content.
3. Constructive, involving the creation of something with skills and tangible outcomes.
4. Communicative, concerning understanding networks and communication in the digital world.
5. Confidence and responsibility.
6. Creative, meaning doing new things in new ways.
7. Critical in responding to content.
8. Socially responsible.

These elements are fundamental in the development of digital literacy. Among all these elements, the cultural aspect is the most significant because an understanding of cultural values and norms can help users evaluate content or applications.

Through digital literacy, individuals are expected to gain better understanding and develop cognitive and communicative skills. They should be able to be creative, have confidence, and maintain a critical attitude when consuming media, which can help them avoid misinformation and ensure that the information received through social media is accountable for its accuracy.

The proposed solution by the outreach team from the Sociology Program at Universitas Negeri Surabaya is to teach media users to analyze messages conveyed by various applications. Additionally, the team provides an understanding of the positive and negative impacts of smartphone usage among students during the school holiday at home.



**Fig. 2.** Picture 2. Participants Listening to Explanations from the Outreach Team

During the pre-test activity, participants provided answers regarding the applications they often use when using their smartphones at home. Among the applications frequently used by the participants are YouTube, TikTok, WhatsApp, Instagram,

Facebook, and similar platforms. Additionally, online gaming applications such as World of Tanks Blitz, eFootball, Mobile Legends, Free Fire, and the like. The duration of time spent by participants is approximately 5 (five) to 10 (ten) hours per day.

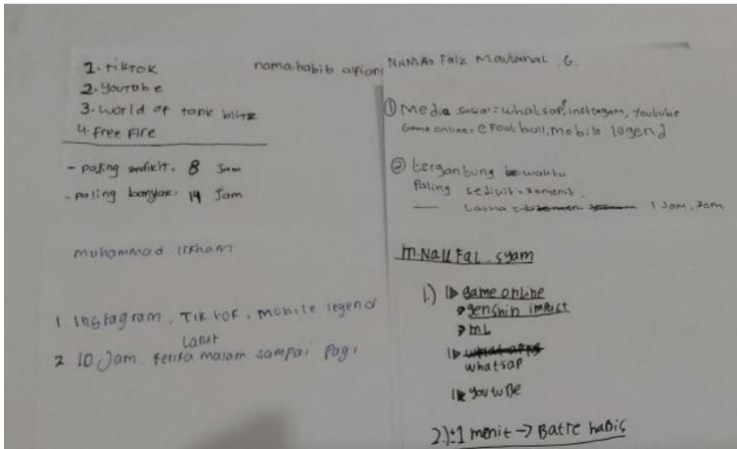


Fig. 3. Participants' Pre-Test Responses

This outreach activity is delivered in the form of lectures and simulations of selecting positive applications that can stimulate creativity and productivity.



Fig. 4. Interaction between the Outreach Team and Participants  
This outreach activity has achieved its objectives, including:

1. Improved digital literacy skills among students in identifying fake news, hate speech, or illegal content. This is indicated by participants' responses demonstrating their

ability to identify hoax characteristics and their legal consequences. Students have become more cautious when receiving and disseminating information to the public.

2. Enhanced abilities among students to determine trustworthy information based on their needs. This is evident from students' ability to identify credible information by practicing steps to identify hoaxes, knowing fact-checking websites, and gathering information through discussions with adults who have expertise in verifying information accuracy.
3. Increased understanding among students in maximizing the use of digital technology for learning during the school holidays at home. This is indicated by students' ability and willingness to select digital information that aligns with their needs and learning. Students are trained to create productive and valuable content, such as creating video posts about proper Quran reading tips and techniques on their social media platforms.

## Conclusion

This outreach aimed to ensure supervision and guidance for students at the Islamic boarding school while they are at home. Proficiency in digital literacy competence is expected to be possessed by the students.

Some recommendations that can be provided to the management of Pondok Pesantren Manba'ul Hikam Tanggulangin, Sidoarjo are to actively engage with parents or guardians of students to monitor and guide students during the school holidays when they use smartphones. One action that can be taken is to organize parenting sessions for parents or guardians of students.

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