

# Analysis of Middle School Students' Mental Readiness for Using Social Media

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## ARTICLE INFO

### *Keywords:*

*Mental Health; Social Media; Student*

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### *Article history:*

*Received 08-05-2026*

*Revised 15-05-2026*

*Accepted 27-05-2026*

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## ABSTRACT

Social media has become an inseparable part of students' lives, bringing dual impacts as a learning tool and a source of mental pressure. This study aims to analyze the mental readiness of middle school students in using social media based on Ann Masten's resilience theory, as well as to identify efforts to prepare their mental state. A qualitative phenomenological research method was applied through in-depth interviews with two students to explore their subjective experiences. The results indicate that students' mental readiness is characterized by their ability to manage emotions, social support, and adaptive competence in facing adversities such as cyberbullying and distractions. Resilient students tend to choose positive content, have coping strategies, and utilize social media productively. Based on these findings, the study recommends three main strategies: (1) strengthening critical digital literacy, (2) training in emotional regulation, and (3) building a supportive environment through collaboration between schools and families. The implications of this research emphasize the importance of a holistic approach to developing students' digital resilience in an ever-evolving technological era.

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## INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an integral part of everyday life, especially among students. The rapid development of information technology has changed the way individuals communicate, interact, and obtain information through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok (Dorchester & Chandel, 2019; Sharma et al., 2022). For students, social media is not only a means to connect with peers, but also a

source of learning and a place for expression (Teng & Joo, 2020; Syahraini et al., 2024). Furthermore, social media is also used to preserve culture by uploading local cultural content, as explained by Karimah et al. (2024) who stated that social media plays a key role in efforts to preserve and pass on cultural heritage.

The use of social media allows students to access a variety of information anywhere and anytime (Sharma et al., 2022). This phenomenon is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, social media supports the learning process, increases motivation, and facilitates creative discussions between teachers and students (Raja, 2024; Ziaulhaq, 2023). However, on the other hand, social media use can also have negative impacts, such as decreased productivity, distraction, and mental health problems (Oktavia et al., 2024; Samala et al., 2024). Lack of parental supervision makes students more vulnerable to exposure to false information or negative content (Castaneda & Castaneda, 2022). Pertiwi & Sihotang (2023) also stated that uncontrolled social media use can disrupt adolescents' psychological well-being, especially with easy access to hoaxes, violence, pornography, and hate speech (Rosyidah & Ismeirita, 2023). Therefore, students need direction and guidance to be able to use social media positively and responsibly (Handayani, 2019).

Several previous studies have discussed the impact of social media on mental health, such as increased risk of anxiety, depression, and social isolation due to cyberbullying or unhealthy social comparisons (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Most of this research focuses on general negative impacts without specifically addressing students' mental preparedness to face these risks. Few studies have examined how students can survive and adapt, particularly using Masten's (2001) resilience theory framework.

The novelty of this research lies in its integration of resilience theory to describe the mental preparedness of junior high school students in dealing with mental stress from social media, such as distraction, cyberbullying, and negative content. Furthermore, this study proposes a religious approach and direct guidance as concrete strategies to help students use social media wisely. Thus, this research not only describes the problem but also offers theoretical and practical solutions.

Based on this description, the purpose of this study is to describe students' mental preparedness and the steps needed to support their mental health when interacting on social media. It is hoped that the results of this study will provide new insights into the role of resilience and supporting strategies for students in facing the challenges of the digital era.

This study has several limitations, including focusing only on junior high school students, making the results inconclusive and not necessarily generalizable to other levels of education. It also uses Masten's (2001) resilience theory as its primary framework, thus failing to examine other approaches, such as social cognitive theory or developmental ecology, which are also relevant. Furthermore, this study fails to

fully explore the influence of local cultural factors, family environment, and social relationship dynamics, which influence students' mental readiness. Another limitation lies in the literature-based nature of the study, making the findings highly dependent on the availability and quality of previous research. While this study offers recommendations in the form of a religious approach and direct guidance, its effectiveness may also vary depending on the cultural and religious backgrounds of students in different regions.

## **METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach to investigate the lived experiences of junior high school students in using social media and its impact on their mental health. Phenomenology, as a philosophical approach, focuses on how individuals understand and perceive their interactions with social media. In this study, the object of study is the mental readiness of students of SMPN 7 Cirebon City in using social media, while the subjects are the students themselves. The respondents were two students who actively use social media and each student has a different nature when using it. being students' experiences interacting with social media. The data collection technique used in-depth interviews, in which researchers developed open-ended questions to encourage students to share their experiences, including how social media impacted their lives and mental health.

Data analysis used a phenomenological method adapted from Husserl (Husserl, 1931; Feist, 2004), with the initial step being data collection through purposive sampling. The interviews were open-ended and semi-structured, often recorded and repeated to obtain more comprehensive information. The analysis process began with verbatim transcription of the interviews, followed by accuracy checks and analysis using the Colaizzi method (1978). This involved rereading the transcripts to understand the data, extract specific statements, formulate meaning, and develop themes from those statements. After the analysis was complete, the researcher compiled a complete description of the phenomenon under study and validated the results with the participants.

Research ethics were also a key concern, including providing information about the nature of the study, voluntary participation, permission to record interviews, and maintaining participant confidentiality. To protect student identities, the researchers used terms such as student 1 and student 2 in the results and discussion. With this approach, the study aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of students' experiences using social media and its implications for their mental health.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Twenty different answers were provided to the same ten questions. The data were obtained from interviews with two students who had different experiences using social media. The first student had extensive experience using social media since fifth

grade of elementary school, while the second student had experience using social media when he got a new device in seventh grade of junior high school. The answers of both students will be analyzed based on resilience theory by Ann Masten (2001). Resilience is influenced by various factors, including individual factors (cognitive abilities, social skills, family factors (social support, family environment), and external factors (society, culture). Masten (2001) stated that resilience arises from the basic human adaptive system, one of which is the ability to manage emotions.

### **Mental Readiness of Students in Using Social Media**

In this study, researchers used Ann Masten's resilience theory to assess junior high school students' mental readiness to face the challenges of social media. Resilience is the ability to survive and recover from adversity. Junior high school students are considered ready if they can manage their emotions, deal with distractions, overcome cyberbullying, and avoid other negative impacts of social media. This allows them to use social media in a positive and healthy manner.

#### **Social Support**

Student 1 demonstrated a strong reliance on social support to overcome difficulties. When facing cyberbullying due to a misunderstanding on TikTok, he received support from Friend A, who not only provided encouragement but also helped clarify the issue. This aligns with Masten's concept of "social support." *protective factors*", where positive social relationships can act as a buffer (*buffer*) to stress. Additionally, Student 1 enjoys interacting with friends on social media, such as sending each other funny videos and communicating with people from different cities. This suggests that he has a broad social network, which can increase a sense of connectedness and reduce social isolation, important factors in resilience.

Student 2 relies on close friends for emotional support, especially when feeling anxious or insecure. He mentioned that sharing his feelings through social media made him feel valued and less alone. This aligns with Masten's concept of "*social scaffolding*", where supportive relationships help individuals face challenges. However, he is also selective in sharing problems, only confiding to friends who are truly trusted. This shows the ability to limit negative or inappropriate exposure. *oversharing*, which is part of healthy emotional regulation.

#### **Emotional Management**

When faced with anxiety caused by a negative comment going viral, Student 1 took an active step by creating a clarification video to apologize and clear up the misunderstanding. This demonstrates the ability *problem-solving* and good emotional regulation, two key components of resilience, according to Masten. However, she also admitted to being influenced by unrealistic standards on social media (for example, criteria for an ideal partner). Initially, this made her anxious, but then she realized that dwelling on such things only made her uncomfortable. This process demonstrated cognitive reframing, where she learned to be less affected by unhealthy content.

Student 2 admitted that he often feels anxious when he sees posts from friends who appear happier or more successful. This is an example of "*social comparison*", which can trigger feeling insecure. However, she realized that what was portrayed on social media didn't necessarily reflect reality. This realization helped her develop cognitive coping strategies, learning to avoid comparing herself to others. This is a form of emotional resilience, enabling her to manage negative feelings with a more realistic perspective.

### **Adaptive Competence**

Student 1 learned from his negative experience by concluding that he should be more careful in his comments and not spread information without confirmation. This is an example of adaptive learning, where a negative experience is transformed into a lesson for better future behavior. He also plans to reduce his social media use in 9th grade, demonstrating awareness of time management and an effort to minimize distractions. This action reflects the ability anticipatory coping, where he prepares himself to avoid potential problems in the future.

Student 2 actively selects positive content (such as motivational and learning) and avoids anxiety-provoking content (such as unrealistic beauty standards). This demonstrates the ability *self regulation* and adaptation to the digital environment. He also recognizes the importance of mental health and plans to be more judicious in using social media in the future. Statements such as "*Bad content will only have a bad influence on yourself too*" reflects a deep understanding of the influence of social media on psychology.

### **Mental Readiness**

Overall, Student 1 showed good mental readiness in using social media because; (1) He was able to survive *cyberbullying* with the help of social support and problem-solving strategies, (2) managing distractions by choosing positive content (such as study tips) and planning to reduce social media use, and (3) not easily falling into bad influences because of learning from experience and having critical awareness of social media content.

Student 2 also showed good mental readiness because: (1) He was able to manage social pressure by not getting carried away comparing himself with other people's achievements, (2) he chose content that supported positive development, such as educational and motivational information, (3) he was aware of his own limitations and the importance of maintaining mental readiness.

It can be concluded that both of them also meet the criteria for mental readiness in using social media because; (1) they are able to survive cyberbullying and distraction, (2) they are not easily influenced by negative content and (3) they have a long-term strategy to maintain mental balance. Thus, their answers are very relevant to the research objective to understand students' mental readiness in facing social media pressure.

## **1. Preparing Students Mentally for Using Social Media**

Based on an analysis of the two students' responses using Ann Masten's resilience theory (Masten, 2001), it can be concluded that mental readiness for using social media requires multidimensional support, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and social aspects. Here are some strategies that can be implemented to prepare students mentally.

## **2. Building Digital and Critical Literacy**

Schools and teachers can educate students about the dangers and benefits of social media. Students need to understand that social media is a neutral tool and its impact depends on how they use it. Schools can hold workshops on digital footprints, how to distinguish between fake and real news, and the dangers of social media *cyberbullying* and procedures for reporting them. Isabella et. al. (2023) in their research explained that through social media, many people still reveal that they share sensitive personal information. Furthermore, between 30% and 60% of respondents to Isabella's study reported being exposed to hoaxes, and 11% admitted to spreading hoaxes without considering their truthfulness. Some of the hoaxes found were often related to political, health, and religious issues, which were most often accessed through Facebook. This government action clearly shows that the increased use of ICT and the Internet in Indonesia can have negative impacts. Therefore, digital literacy programs are crucial for students, and schools and teachers must regularly promote them.

In addition, schools also need to conduct critical learning regarding content. In this learning, students are expected to be able to: (1) Question the truth of content before sharing it (*critical thinking*). (2) Do not immediately believe in unrealistic beauty/lifestyle standards (3) Choose inspirational accounts (educational, motivational, skills) rather than content that only seeks social validation. (F. Handayani, 2020) explains that critical thinking is the skill of giving opinions and systematically evaluating the weight of one's own and others' opinions. In the context of learning, critical thinking is carried out by students who can answer questions about how (*how*) and why (*why*) by relying on existing principles and concepts.

## **3. Developing Emotional Regulation Skills**

Students are encouraged to recognize their emotions when using social media, for example, "Do I feel anxious after seeing this post?". *mindfulness* Digital detox can be introduced to reduce dependency. Emotional regulation can prevent students from becoming aggressive, which often leads to chaos in both the real and virtual worlds. As explained by Supratman & Ekawati (2024), developing emotional regulation skills among students can be a solution to reducing aggressive behavior. Programs that focus on emotional management, such as relaxation techniques or self-awareness training, can help students control their emotional reactions. By improving emotional regulation skills, not only can student aggression be reduced but it can also create a more positive learning environment. Students who are better able to manage their emotions tend to be more cooperative and supportive of their peers.

## **4. Strengthening Social Support and Positive Environment**

One of the main keys to preparing students mentally for the dynamics of social media is creating a solid support network and a positive environment. Students cannot be expected to face digital challenges alone; they need a support system consisting of peers, teachers, and family. In line with what Sagala et al. (2024) stated, teachers and parents must collaborate to support students in facing digital challenges. Teachers need to continue to develop learning methods that are appropriate to the digital reality and provide a deep understanding of desired character values. Meanwhile, parents must be actively involved in supervising and guiding children in their use of technology, as well as providing positive examples in their daily lives.

Social interactions on social media are often a source of both joy and anxiety. As seen in the responses of students 1 and 2, they feel comforted when friends provide positive comments or support when facing problems. To strengthen this, schools can encourage a culture of mutual support among students, for example with a "Support Your Friends" campaign. *like for goodness* or the challenge of posting positive content. Forming discussion groups where students can share experiences about pressure on social media without fear of judgment is also an effort by the school to strengthen a culture of mutual support among students.

#### **5. Encouraging Productive and Meaningful Use of Social Media**

Social media is often seen as a source of distraction, but it can actually be a very powerful tool for self-development if used consciously and with clear goals. The challenge is to shift students' perspective from simply *passive consumers* who spends time with *scroll* without meaning, become active users who utilize this platform for empowering purposes. As Ainy & Nahla (2024) stated in their research, social media can encourage student creativity in entrepreneurship if utilized properly. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube not only contain entertainment content but also a storehouse of knowledge if you know how to search for it. Following educational accounts, such as simple science discussions on TikTok, foreign language learning tutorials on YouTube, or time management tips from productivity experts can be additional learning strategies outside of formal class hours. Furthermore, students can also join online groups or communities that focus on positive interests, such as digital reading clubs, science discussion forums, or creative hobby groups. Teachers can facilitate this by providing recommendations for useful accounts or even creating assignments that involve searching for valid information on social media.

Despite the various positive achievements, several obstacles remain that require attention. Because it was implemented on junior high school students, the results cannot necessarily be generalized to other levels of education. Furthermore, it only used Masten's (2001) resilience theory as the main framework, thus not examining other approaches such as social cognitive theory or developmental ecology, which are also relevant. Furthermore, the study did not explore the influence of local cultural factors, family environment, and social relationship dynamics that influence students' mental readiness. Another limitation lies in the literature-based nature of the study,

so findings are highly dependent on the availability and quality of previous research. Nevertheless, the findings of this study provide an important contribution to formulating strategies for strengthening digital resilience, particularly through critical digital literacy, emotional regulation training, and building a supportive environment based on school-family collaboration. Therefore, this research is expected to serve as an initial reference for developing educational programs that are more holistic and adaptive to the challenges of the technological era. For further studies, it is recommended to conduct empirical research using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed approaches (*mixed methods*) to measure the influence of mental readiness on the use of social media.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that junior high school students' mental readiness to use social media is significantly influenced by resilience, which encompasses social support, emotional management, and adaptability. Peer and teacher support, emotional regulation, and productive social media use are crucial factors in building resilience in the face of digital challenges. School interventions, parental guidance, and fostering critical thinking are key strategies for fostering responsible social media behavior. These findings have the potential to be developed by expanding the subject to other educational levels, applying different theories such as social cognitive theory or developmental ecology, and exploring the role of culture, family background, and social relationships. Further research using empirical approaches such as surveys or experiments is also needed to test the effectiveness of digital literacy strategies and religious approaches in enhancing students' mental readiness in a more contextual and applicable manner.

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