Digital-Based Character Education Innovation for Shaping a Well-Characterized Indonesian Generation

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Abstract: The use of information technology as a learning medium reflects the process of modernization in education in Indonesia, aligning with the demands of the times and global developments. However, behind these benefits, there are risks that need to be addressed, such as the potential increase in demoralization among students. This concern is significant for educators, parents, and society as a whole. This article aims to analyze the strengthening of character education based on information technology as a significant innovation in the formation of a better national character. This study employs a qualitative approach with an in-depth literature review, analyzing research related to the utilization of information technology for character development among students. The findings indicate that the modernization of education through information technology can create more equitable and inclusive access to education, open new perspectives for educators and learners, and enhance the overall quality and meaning of education. Additionally, information technology accelerates the exchange of information, making it an effective means for strengthening student character. Information technology products provide a broad and engaging learning space, enabling students to share experiences, exchange information, and interact with experts. This supports the development of personal potential and character strengthening, allowing students to become more responsible and integral individuals.
Keywords:
Character; Education; Information; Technology

Abstrak: Penggunaan teknologi informasi sebagai media pembelajaran mencerminkan proses modernisasi pendidikan di Indonesia, yang sejalan dengan perkembangan zaman dan tuntutan global. Namun, di balik manfaat tersebut, terdapat risiko yang perlu diperhatikan, yaitu potensi peningkatan demoralisasi di kalangan pelajar. Hal ini menjadi perhatian penting bagi pendidik, orang tua, dan masyarakat. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penguatan pendidikan karakter berbasis teknologi informasi sebagai sebuah inovasi yang signifikan dalam pembentukan karakter bangsa yang lebih baik. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi pustaka yang mendalam, menganalisis kajian terkait pemanfaatan teknologi informasi dalam penguatan karakter peserta didik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa modernisasi pendidikan melalui teknologi informasi dapat menciptakan akses pendidikan yang lebih adil dan inklusif, membuka perspektif baru bagi pendidik dan peserta didik, serta meningkatkan kualitas dan makna pendidikan secara keseluruhan. Selain itu, teknologi informasi mempercepat pertukaran informasi, menjadikannya sarana yang efektif untuk penguatan karakter peserta didik. Produk teknologi informasi memberikan ruang belajar yang luas dan menarik, memungkinkan peserta didik untuk saling berbagi pengalaman, bertukar informasi, dan berinteraksi dengan para ahli. Hal ini mendukung pengembangan potensi diri dan penguatan karakter, sehingga peserta didik dapat menjadi individu yang lebih bertanggung jawab dan berintegritas.
Kata Kunci:
Informasi; Karakter; Pendidikan; Teknologi

INTRODUCTION

In this digital era, the utilization of information technology as a learning tool offers opportunities to strengthen character education among the younger generation. Indonesian society faces various moral and social issues that require serious attention, making character development a priority in the education system. The integration of information technology into education not only enhances access and quality of learning but also provides a platform for more dynamic interactions between students, educators, and other educational resources. By leveraging information technology, character education is expected to be more effective in shaping individuals with positive values, social responsibility, and a sense of national pride, thereby contributing to the advancement of a better nation (Hidayati & Prabowo, 2021).

The rise of demoralization in the digital era has become a phenomenon in the historical journey of the Indonesian nation. The weakening of noble cultural values such as honesty, politeness, responsibility, tolerance, empathy, and integrity has become a fact evident across various levels of society, from ordinary citizens to state officials. The prevalence of immoral acts such as physical violence, sexual harassment, bullying, hate speech, radicalism, premarital sex, drug abuse, and other inappropriate behaviors among students and university students is an irony amid the government's efforts to modernize education to enhance students' competencies in addressing global challenges (Suhendro & Rahardjo, 2020).

The emergence of a physical violence case involving the child of a former tax official against a teenager in Jakarta has delivered a serious blow to the education sector. The act was premeditated, recorded using a smartphone, and shared on social media by one of the perpetrators. Ironically, the assault concluded with a celebration that starkly depicted a loss of humanity—one of the nation's noble cultural values. Another concerning fact is the increasing number of students dropping out of school due to pregnancies outside of marriage, reflecting the prevalence of promiscuity among teenagers. Data from the Religious Court (Pengadilan Agama, PA) of Ponorogo Regency, provided to the Gender and Children Studies Center (PSGA) at IAIN Ponorogo, reveals this alarming trend. In 2019, out of 97 marriage dispensation cases received by the court, 42 cases (43.2%) were due to pregnancy, while 55 cases (56.7%) were for other reasons. In 2020, of 241 dispensation cases, 91 (37.7%) were pregnancy-related, and 150 (62.2%) were for other reasons. By 2021, the number of dispensation cases increased to 266, with 131 cases (49.2%) due to pregnancy and 135 cases (50.8%) for other reasons (Syah et al., 2023). In addition, the rise of hate speech that occurs on social media that triggers brawls between students or physical and verbal violence should be a serious concern for the government, especially the ministry of education and culture as a policy maker in Indonesia.

The presence of information technology as a supporting tool for education is akin to a double-edged sword; on one hand, it can bring significant benefits, while on the other, it can lead to detrimental effects. It is undeniable that the development of information technology, with its various digital platforms, has

become a medium that contributes to the process of demoralization among students. The availability of information technology has made it easier for students to access a wide range of news and information (Khan & Hamid, 2022). Various acts of demoralization reflecting a decline in ethics and morality—such as pornography, indecent behavior, hedonistic lifestyles, physical violence, and hate speech perpetrated by peers, adults, or even public officials—are easily accessible to everyone, including students and university students who represent the future pillars of the Indonesian nation.

The Indonesian education system is currently facing a dilemma. The acceleration of Information Technology (IT) in the form of digital media within the education sector no longer merely demands readiness from education providers and users but forces all stakeholders to master and implement it in educational practices (Andalas, 2020). A study by Massie and Nababan on the impact of online learning on students' character education revealed alarming findings: character education and student character are in a concerning state because most schools and teachers are unprepared to face social changes and employ modern learning methods to harness technological advancements (Massie & Nababan, 2021). Meanwhile, research by Nisa Khairuni highlighted that the use of social media—one aspect of technological advancements—though bringing positive impacts, also has negative effects on the character formation of students. These include a lack of discipline, laziness, frequent lying, engaging in fights, disrespectful communication and attire, lack of respect for parents, and a tendency to insult others (Khairuni, 2016) (Khairuni, 2016). These findings provide empirical evidence of the adverse effects of social media on the changes in students' character, ethics, and morality when social media is not used wisely and intelligently.

The novelty of this research lies in its holistic approach, integrating character education reinforcement with digital literacy and responsible utilization of information technology. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on the negative impacts of technology use, this research emphasizes optimizing information technology to foster positive student character through programs that teach digital ethics and the wise use of social media. Additionally, the study proposes developing a curriculum that incorporates critical and creative skills in using technology, enabling students to not only consume information but also become creators who can disseminate positive values. Through this approach, character education is expected not only to address existing issues but also to create a younger generation that is sensitive to social issues, possesses high moral awareness, and serves as agents of change capable of contributing to the development of Indonesian national character..

Despite the controversies it has sparked, the development of information technology with various digital products in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era should serve as a turning point for the rise of a new education model in Indonesia, particularly in strengthening character education for students. According to Sutomo, elementary and middle school students, typically aged between 10–15 years, are highly susceptible to character changes (Sutomo & Milyani, 2019). Therefore, elementary and middle school students can receive

character education through social media, a product of information technology (Liu & Kuo, 2020) .

Information technology products in the form of digital platforms have become public spaces capable of transforming the way teenagers live (Zis et al., 2021). The perspective of needs serves as the key to utilizing technology in education. Ethics and guidelines for becoming wise users of information technology across various platforms remain a critical area of discussion, seeking appropriate models that can be easily accepted by all stakeholders in the educational sphere. These include parents, students, educators, educational institutions, and the government as policymakers. (Restianty, 2018).

Students and university learners are assets of a nation. They are educated individuals who will carry forward the history and existence of Indonesia. As part of the global community, they will spend significant time in the virtual world while facing the realities of the demographic bonus predicted to occur between 2030 and 2040. This implies that today's students will become the active contributors during this period.

Therefore, the new normal era, marked by increased use of information technology, should serve as a momentum for strengthening character education. This effort must begin early to ensure that the younger generation can thrive and compete in a predominantly virtual world. This paper aims to analyze the effectiveness of information technology as a tool for strengthening students' character to enhance the moral foundation of the Indonesian nation. Information technology, with its array of digital products, should not merely be a means of entertainment. Instead, it must be leveraged to reinforce the internalization of character education across all educational levels, emphasizing role models and harmonizing educational elements to nurture the character of the nation's youth.

To enhance the effectiveness of information technology in strengthening the character of students, there needs to be a systematic integration between digital technology and character education curricula at all educational levels. First, schools should develop learning programs that utilize applications and digital platforms that support the teaching of moral and ethical values, allowing students to learn through practical experiences. Additionally, there should be training for educators to optimize the use of technology in the classroom, including ways to demonstrate exemplary behavior in their interactions with students. Collaborative programs between schools, parents, and the community should also be implemented, where information technology is used to create social projects that involve students, allowing them to contribute positively and internalize character values in their daily lives. With this integrated approach, it is hoped that information technology will function not only as an entertainment tool but also as an effective means of building strong and positive character in Indonesia's younger generation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with content analysis as the data analysis technique. The data collection techniques employed in this study include library research, observation, and note-taking. The steps for data collection in this study follow the suggestions of Arikunto, which are: (1) reading relevant books and journals related to Character Education Strengthening based on Information Technology to shape the character of the Indonesian nation, (2) mastering theory, (3) mastering methods, (4) searching for data and finding data, (5) analyzing the data found in-depth, (6) making comprehensive improvements, and (7) drawing conclusions (Arikunto, 2014).

The focus of this study is an analysis of how information technology, including social media and digital platforms, can be used as a tool to support character education. In this research, the author uses qualitative data analysis, conducting direct synthesis of the methods in the research articles through a process of (1) data reduction, where the author selects and categorizes data to be analyzed, including words, sentences, or expressions according to the qualitative research methods, both direct and indirect methods; (2) data display, where the author presents the selected and categorized data and analyzes the research method types used; and (3) verification, where the author concludes the results of the analysis of the qualitative research method used (Muchtar, 2013).

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Urgency of Character Education

Character is a reflection of a person's behavior that distinguishes them from others. According to Poerwadarminta, character refers to habits, nature, mental traits, morals, and ethics that set a person apart from others (Poerwadarminta, 2007). According to Endang Sumantri, character is a positive quality possessed by an individual that makes them attractive and appealing, indicating a person's reputation or someone who is unusual or has an eccentric personality (Sumantri, 2011). Meanwhile, Ahmad Tafsir defines character as the spontaneity of human actions or behaviors that have become ingrained in the individual, so when they emerge, there is no need to think about them again (Tafsir, 2014). Therefore, as a behavior or attitude that arises spontaneously, character can be shaped, developed, and strengthened through education as an effort to develop the potential possessed by individuals over a certain period systematically.

Character education can be understood as a means to develop students' potential so that they can think positively, behave morally, and act in accordance with the character and noble values of the nation (Aruzi et al., 2022). Aan Hasanah argues that character education is a systematic effort to instill and consistently develop the qualities of character based on religious, cultural, and national philosophical values, which are internalized by students at home, in school, and in society in their daily lives, shaping their behavior and character (Hasanah, 2012). Character education involves moral education, which includes knowledge, feelings, and actions (Salahudin & Alkrienchie, 2017). Zubaedi describes it as the process of cultivating intelligence in thinking, attitude, and behavior according to the noble values that form one's identity (Zubaedi, 2011).

It is done with full awareness to change one's nature, morals, and ethics to grow into maturity, enabling them to make wise decisions (Ratna Megawangi, 2004), distinguishing between right and wrong, and practicing the truth in accordance with human values, while avoiding actions that can harm others, thus creating a conducive environment for the growth of individual freedom (Koesoema, 2010).

Character education implemented in schools essentially serves to: 1) develop the fundamental potential of students to be good-hearted, think positively, and behave appropriately; 2) strengthen and build the behavior of a multicultural nation; 3) enhance the civilization of the nation to be competitive in the global community. Character education is carried out through various media, including families, educational units, civil society, the government, and mass media. The essence of character education is to shape a resilient, competitive, dynamically developing nation, oriented towards science and technology, all of which are imbued with faith and devotion to God Almighty based on Pancasila (Daryanto & Darmiatun, 2013). Therefore, the formation of character is a necessity in educational implementation, alongside the specific competencies required by students. Competencies based on good character will lead individuals to realize their essence and life's purpose, which is to contribute positively to their family, society, and country. On the other hand, competencies that are not balanced with good character are more likely to create selfish individuals who may justify various means to achieve their goals, even at the expense of the interests of many others.

Information Technology as an Educational Media

The term Information Technology (IT) refers to the combination of two words that carry essential meanings. According to Law No. 11 of 2019 on the National System of Science and Technology, technology is defined as a method or technique, as well as the process or product resulting from the application of various scientific disciplines that generate value to meet human needs, sustain life, and improve the quality of life. Technology can also be understood as the knowledge of techniques, methods, or ways to create or make something from what did not exist into something that helps sustain human life.

Meanwhile, information, according to the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), refers to a message (utterance or expression) or a collection of messages consisting of an ordered sequence of symbols, or meanings that can be interpreted from a message or a collection of messages. Information can be recorded or transmitted. According to McLeod (2001), as quoted by Agustin in the Tabarru' Journal, information is data that has been processed, or data that carries meaning, and is also one of the data sources available to managers and can be managed like other resources (Agustin, 2018). Information is data that has been handled to form a more useful and critical design for the recipient. The source of information becomes data. Information represents reality that illustrates events and actual occurrences (Hisabi et al., 2022). In everyday life, information is often synonymous with news, reports, or announcements about an event conveyed by someone or media, whether in the form of data, audio, visuals, or audio-visual.

Thus, information technology is a general term for any technology that helps humans create, modify, store, communicate, and/or disseminate information. Information technology integrates high-speed computing and communication for data, audio (sound), and video. Information technology also includes communication technology, so it is not only in the form of computers but also includes smartphones, TVs, and electronic devices. Information technology, both implicitly and explicitly, is not just about computer technology; rather, it is a combination of computer technology and communication technology, which can be classified into six forms, including: 1) communication technology; 2) input technology; 3) output technology; 4) software technology; 5) storage technology; and 6) processing machine (Stair & Reynolds, 2021).

The advent of information technology is one of the products of advancements in science. Every innovation created in information technology is intended to benefit human life in carrying out daily activities. Applications in information technology have made it easier to access up-to-date information for personal life, such as health information, hobbies, culinary, healing places, education, and spiritual well-being. It also facilitates access to a variety of news or events happening in the local environment as well as events occurring around the world.

The development of information technology has become a medium that connects interactions and cooperation between individuals and groups, or between one group and another, regardless of boundaries, distance, time, race, social status, ideology, or other factors that have historically hindered communication and exchange of ideas. Its presence is increasingly needed by all layers of society to carry out various business sectors, professions, and services, thus driving the transformation of civilization towards a society that is technologically literate and knowledgeable.

In the field of education, the emergence of terms related to information technology that begin with "e," such as e-learning, e-journal, e-books, e-library, e-paper, and so on, marks a significant change in the way educational processes are carried out, driven by the advancements in information technology. This has become a new fact, indicating that there has been a shift in educational practices that are becoming increasingly familiar to educators and students. The rapid development of technology demands that the education sector adapt to the digitalization of educational systems based on information technology, which is a hallmark of the Society 5.0 era. In preparing for the challenges of the Society 5.0 era, the curriculum design highlights several substantive points, including: 1) character education, 2) the ability to think critically, innovatively, and creatively, and 3) the ability to apply technology in this era (Yuniarto & Yudha, 2021).

The use of technology in education is considered crucial in the global era because it aligns with the ongoing developments in the world. The integration of technology into the learning process can take place during tasks, assignments, and evaluations. Through technology, students not only gain references for additional materials but more importantly, they develop a deeper understanding of technology as a learning medium. According to Aan Hasanah, students should be guided to become knowledge producers, not just passive consumers of

knowledge or mere users of technology. This can bring about positive changes in students, instilled through a strong reading and writing culture that is practiced using technology in the right way (Hasanah et al., 2022).

Wisdom in responding to or utilizing digital technology involves a shift in mindset towards the role of information technology. It's not just about being aware of it or using it for entertainment, but about maximizing its potential to enhance the educational process. According to Aan Hasanah, there are three mindsets in approaching digital technology: 1) Self-regulation, the drive to accept the presence of new technologies and the belief that technology should be learned with discipline and consistency; 2) Self-Motivation, building self-confidence in using new technology to foster innovation, exploration, and the willingness to take risks; and 3)Leadership, the ability to develop independent, optimistic, and visionary thinking (Hasanah, 2023)

The role of educators and parents in providing guidance and support to students in using information technology as a learning medium is essential. This guidance is necessary to direct students to use technology wisely and intelligently, making it a habit that produces positive outcomes and valuable digital products for their lives in the digital era. The existence of digital products serves as a medium that connects teachers and parents, facilitating monitoring and evaluation of students' progress. Therefore, teachers and parents must continuously update themselves on technological developments so they can consistently monitor and supervise students' learning processes in a sustained and effective manner.

Development of Nation Character Education

The model of teaching national character values often experiences dynamic changes in line with changes in national leadership. National character education policies are not free from various problems and challenges, as these policies influence the model of teaching national character values in schools. The realization of national character development is achieved by helping students build strong character. The essence of delivering the values of national character is to be possessed and developed by students as preparation for their future. Character education aims to develop values that form the national character, namely Pancasila. This education is carried out to foster and develop the character of citizens so that they can realize a society that is devoted to the Almighty God, just and civilized in humanity, united in spirit of Indonesia, democratic in nature, led by wisdom in deliberation, and with social justice for all Indonesians (Alawiyah, 2012). (Faridah Alawiyah, 2012).

The implementation of individual character derived from the result of the integration of the four parts of the nation's character in accordance with the principles of Pancasila was developed from the Master Design of the National Character Development in 2010-2025 as follows:

1. Heart training related to feelings, attitudes and beliefs or faith that produce indicators in the implementation of becoming religious, honest, responsible, social care and environmental care;

2. Thinking related to the reasoning process to seek and use knowledge critically, creatively, and innovatively, it produces indicators of the implementation of intelligent, creative, reading-loving, and highly curious human beings;

3. Sensory processing related to the process of perception, readiness, imitation, manipulation, and creation of new activities accompanied by sportsmanship and producing healthy and clean human indicators;

4. Sport is concerned with willpower and creativity which is reflected in caring, imagery, and the creation of novelty which then produces indicators of human beings who care and can work together (Permatasari, 2024).

Character education has become one of the priority programs in the National Policy for the Development of National Character. This policy was developed collaboratively by various ministries, non-ministerial agencies, and non-governmental organizations involved. The implementation of the character education policy is carried out in three stages: 1) The first stage (2010–2014), which was a phase of consolidation and implementation; 2) The second stage (2015–2019), which was a phase of strategy consolidation and implementation; 3) The third stage (2020–2025), which is a phase of sustainable development based on the results achieved in the first and second stages. The character education policy is then implemented through three strategies: top-down stream, bottom-up stream, and revitalization of programs (Alawiyah, 2012). The use and utilization of information technology has become a reality as a medium for character development that aligns with behavioral changes and character formation.

The involvement of the government in shaping students' character is crucial because character education plays an essential role in students' success, which is closely related to the instilling of values and moral behavior that reflect the noble values of the nation. Therefore, to develop the previous character education policies that align with the era, the government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture as the educational policymaker in Indonesia, has issued the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation (Permendikbud) No. 20, Article 1, of 2018, on the strengthening of character education in formal education units. This regulation states that the strengthening of character education (PPK) is an educational movement under the responsibility of educational units to strengthen students' character through the harmonization of the heart, feeling, mind, and physical activities, with the involvement and cooperation between educational units, families, and communities as part of the National Mental Revolution Movement (GNRM) (Panoyo et al., 2019).

The Strengthening Character Education (PPK) embodies core values that are interrelated: religiosity, nationalism, independence, mutual cooperation, and integrity. These values are integrated into the curriculum and are implemented through formal, non-formal, and informal education channels. There are five main character values sourced from Pancasila that are prioritized in the development of the PPK movement. Each value does not stand alone; instead, they interact with one another, develop dynamically, and form the wholeness of

personal integrity. The main character values include: (Rahmadani & Hamdany, 2023):

1. Of religious character reflects belief in God Almighty, which is manifested through behavior in carrying out religious teachings and beliefs adhered to. This includes respect for religious differences, prioritizing tolerance in carrying out worship, and living in harmony and peace with adherents of other religions. The implementation of these values can be seen in the attitude of love of peace, tolerance, respect for differences, firmness of stand, self-confidence, cooperation between adherents of various religions, rejection of bullying and violence, friendship, sincerity, non-imposition of will, love for the environment, and protection of the weak and marginalized;

2. The value of nationalist character reflects a way of thinking, behaving, and acting that shows loyalty, concern, and high appreciation for the nation's language, physical, social, cultural, economic, and political environment. This involves placing the interests of the nation and state above the interests of individuals and groups. Nationalist attitudes can be seen through respect for one's own culture, efforts to preserve cultural heritage, willingness to sacrifice, achievement, love for the homeland, protecting the environment, obeying the law, discipline, and respecting cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity; cultural,

3. The value of integrity is a foundational value that shapes a person's behavior to become an individual who is always trustworthy in speech, actions, and work. This includes commitment and loyalty to humanitarian and moral values. The character of integrity encompasses responsibility as a citizen and active involvement in social life, with consistency between actions and words based on truth. An individual with integrity also respects the dignity of every person, including those with disabilities, and is capable of providing a good example.

4. The value of independence reflects the attitude and behavior of not being dependent on others, and using all one's energy, thoughts, and time to achieve hopes, dreams, and goals. Independent students demonstrate a strong work ethic, resilience, fighting spirit, professionalism, creativity, courage, and a commitment to lifelong learning.

5. The value of mutual cooperation reflects actions that appreciate the spirit of teamwork and collaboration in solving problems together. This includes building communication and friendship, as well as providing assistance to those in need. Students are expected to show respect for one another, be able to cooperate, be inclusive, commit to collective decisions, and engage in deliberation to reach consensus. Furthermore, they are expected to demonstrate attitudes of mutual help, empathy, solidarity, reject discrimination and violence, and show voluntary action.

The strengthening of national character education should involve non-educational aspects, such as economic, legal, political, socio-cultural, and

religious aspects, leadership, the environment, and the integration of information technology (Sutarjo, 2021). Character education is developed through three educational pathways: formal, non-formal, and informal education. Formal education includes primary, secondary, and higher education. Character education in non-formal education is carried out in early childhood education, courses, equivalency education, literacy education, and other non-formal educational programs. Meanwhile, informal education takes place within the family and community. Character education in formal and non-formal education is carried out through an integrated approach across all subjects, the development of the school culture, the implementation of co-curricular and extracurricular activities, and the habituation of behaviors within the educational environment. The process of character education in informal education, such as within the family, involves education, nurturing, habituation, and role modeling carried out by parental (Alawiyah, 2012). The continuity of the educational process in all educational pathways cannot be separated from the role of information technology.

Therefore, character education can be implemented in all subjects that relate to norms and should be developed and linked to everyday life. The function of implementing character education strengthening is to improve and reinforce the roles of families, educational institutions, communities, and the government to participate and take responsibility in developing the potential of citizens and the nation, aiming to build an advanced, independent, and prosperous nation.

Strengthening Information Technology-based Character Education.

The use of information technology as a form of education modernization to improve the quality and standards of education in the global era has had a significant impact on the effectiveness of the learning process. Educators and students can take advantage of educational technology media by identifying problems encountered in learning and finding solutions through appropriate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) applications (Gani, 2014). However, in reality, the modernization of education often reduces competencies in the field of character education and tends to be neglected (Santoso, 2017).

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic became a turning point for accelerating the use of information technology in the implementation of teaching and learning processes, which had to be conducted online (Hanifah Salsabila et al., 2020). The phenomenon of activities carried out virtually in education and other sectors, such as Work From Home (WFH), online learning, online seminars or webinars, online markets (buying and selling), and so on, has created new habits (the new normal) that must be addressed wisely by various parties.

The role of information technology in the new normal era in the education sector has become crucial for all educational stakeholders, including schools, parents, students, and policymakers. The development of information technology in the form of social media and various digital platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, YouTube, and others has become a close companion for both educators and students. A teacher can use these platforms to

conduct teaching activities that are efficient, inexpensive, and easy. For some students, social media can serve as a means of self-actualization and a space to share personal experiences that they cannot find in the real world. In the modern era, many students aspire to become YouTubers, vloggers, or content creators because of the prestige and financial rewards they can gain once their content goes viral (Reynard et al., 2024). Therefore, the transition in life style and culture of students should be addressed wisely immediately.

In building character, the education and learning process should not only be oriented toward becoming consumers of knowledge but also producers of knowledge. To become producers of knowledge, a culture of reading and writing must be nurtured through the use of information technology. The use of information technology should encourage students to become individuals who can write in a scientific and systematic manner. This must be done integratively through character-based and culturally grounded information technology education. Information technology should be used to nurture and develop students' character so that they can produce creativity and productivity (Hidayah, 2011).

According to Lickona, character education must involve methods, techniques, and materials to ensure that children have no excuse or desire for goodness that precedes knowledge of the value of goodness, so they develop an attitude of loving what is good, such as kindness, and ultimately they are willing to perform good deeds (Lickona, 1991). Therefore, the momentum of the development of information technology and its digital platforms should be wisely utilized by all parties as a medium to strengthen the character of students, who have already embraced and become comfortable with using these platforms in their learning activities and daily life interactions.

According to Aan Hasanah, there are 8 methods for utilizing the presence of information technology to strengthen character education in the global era, as follows:

1. Use Technology Wisely: Technology is a medium that should be used proportionally, according to its primary purpose and function, by accessing only sites or content that are relevant to the needs. Overuse that wastes time and data on less useful information or content should be avoided.
2. Provide Good Examples: Social media, as a product of information technology, was created to facilitate communication and interaction in an open manner. Therefore, it is essential to prioritize good ethics, courtesy in communication, and exchanging information on social media. Avoid provocative, insulting, or harmful speech as it leaves a digital footprint accessible to all users.
3. Be an Open Character Educator: Information technology, with its various digital platform derivatives, is an "open space" that can be accessed by anyone. Therefore, anyone can become a source of inspiration by sharing principles of goodness, honesty, wisdom, and values that reflect the culture of the nation.

4. Use Social Media Positively: Social media is a vast "space" that stores content created by its users. Social media should be utilized to post positive content that can provide information and inspiration to others, encouraging them to improve themselves.

5. Provide Enjoyable Learning: Digital media is dynamic and can adapt to users' needs. The use of digital products for learning purposes is an enjoyable medium for students, as educational games can serve as both an educational tool and entertainment that alleviates boredom and increases interest in learning.

6. Utilize Character Education Apps: Digital technology is a product of scientific progress designed to meet human needs through algorithms that automatically categorize various needs. Therefore, digital technology can be set up to access inspiring stories, games, or educational content that delivers moral messages, strengthening students' character when accessed continuously and consistently.

7. Provide a Safe Learning Space: Digital products like social media, in its various forms, act as source linkers that connect students with vast information and knowledge, accessible anytime and anywhere as long as there is an internet connection. Students can quickly gain knowledge and learn independently, no longer relying solely on information from teachers or parents.

8. Teach About Online Rights and Safety: The presence of digital technology teaches students about the rights that need to be protected, such as setting specific passwords to avoid phishing attempts—efforts to gain personal, account, and financial data for criminal purposes (Hasanah, 2023).

The development of digital platforms as a derivative product of information technology has increasingly raised public awareness of the crucial role of social media as a contemporary medium that can be utilized as part of the learning process in character building. The presence of various digital platforms can serve as a supportive media for strengthening the character of students. Therefore, elementary and secondary school students can benefit from character education through social media (Juwita et al., 2015). The presence of religious leaders, scholars, academicians, cultural figures, motivators, and influencers through content on digital social media platforms can be leveraged by educators or parents as references and digital literacy resources to strengthen the character of students.

Students can learn independently by becoming role models for themselves or their peers through the creation of positive content on character formation as part of the innovative values of implementing the Merdeka Belajar curriculum and Kampus Merdeka (MBKM), as envisioned by the Ministry of Education and Culture in line with the development of the digital world. This includes the creation of creative positive content related to self-actualization and the filtering of content on digital platforms appropriate for the students' age and needs. Therefore, character education through information technology can become an effective medium for shaping a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also possesses integrity and high social responsibility. This will

contribute to the formation of a better society where every individual can actively participate in creating a positive environment and supporting the development of the nation's character.

Previous research by (Andalas, 2020; Massie & Nababan, 2021), focused primarily on the negative impact of technology use. However, this study highlights significant benefits, such as empowering students to learn independently and act as role models through the creation of positive content, which aligns with the values in the Merdeka Belajar curriculum and Kampus Merdeka (MBKM). This not only encourages students to develop creativity but also helps them build better character and social responsibility. However, this study also has limitations, especially related to the restricted access to technology, which may hinder participation from all students. Additionally, not all students may be motivated to engage in content creation or possess the required skills, which could lead to variability in the quality of content produced. Another challenge is the content filtering process, which requires critical skills that may not be present in all students. Therefore, while this research offers a promising approach to character education, it is necessary to consider factors that could affect its success in practice.

CONCLUSION
The need for information technology has increasingly become a priority in education at all levels, serving as a medium for learning that supports the strengthening of character education. With proper utilization, information technology can enhance equitable and inclusive access to education, open new perspectives for both educators and students, and accelerate the exchange of information. This creates an interactive and enjoyable learning environment for students, facilitating the sharing of experiences and interactions with experts. Thus, information technology plays a crucial role in shaping the nation's character through the development of the younger generation's potential.

Suggestions for future research include conducting longitudinal studies to understand the long-term impacts of technology use in character education. Research can also include an analysis of the challenges faced by educators and students in implementing information technology, as well as strategies to overcome these obstacles.

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