
The Digital Arena of Character: Examining the Application of Virtue Ethics in Social Media Use

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Abstract: This research examines the application of virtue ethics as a framework for understanding daily social media use. Unlike ethical theories that focus on consequences or rules, virtue ethics emphasizes the cultivation of character and moral virtues. Drawing on the work of Aristotle, particularly his concept of *eudaimonia*—or the pursuit of a flourishing life—this study aims to demonstrate how social media users can act with moral wisdom. The paper employs a qualitative methodology, analyzing existing scholarly literature to argue that a user's moral character, rather than mere obligation, should guide their digital behavior. Ultimately, the paper concludes that the pursuit of wisdom in the digital sphere is a critical area for further investigation.

Keywords: Digital; character; virtue; ethics; social media

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INTRODUCTION

The digital world, commonly known as social media, is an integral part of modern life, driven by the rapid development of technology. This technological advancement has profoundly influenced human existence, with social media becoming a central aspect of our daily routines. This paper seeks to explore the role of social media in everyday life, examining it through an ethical lens. Specifically, it focuses on the importance of using social media wisely. Wisdom, in this context, is a fundamental virtue that must be cultivated for its responsible use.

Social media is a digital platform that allows users to create, share, and interact with various types of content online. It enables people to communicate, build relationships, disseminate information, and form virtual communities (Rahmelia & Apandie, 2023). Social media plays a significant role in our digital lives, serving as a communication tool, an information source, a platform for self-expression, a means for promotion and

business, and even a tool for education and lifestyle. It is crucial to examine the role of social media more deeply and use it wisely to ensure it remains a helpful tool.

The use of social media has grown exponentially in a short period. This continuous development of electronic communication technology facilitates efficient and low-cost communication. However, this ease has also led to a number of negative consequences, particularly cyberbullying, privacy violations, and the spread of explicit content. These new media platforms have been misused by various groups, especially teenagers, for malicious purposes such as threats, harassment, fraud, and making negative comments to other users, including those they do not even know. Research has shown that these risky online behaviors are common among teenagers, with one-third of them becoming victims of cyberbullying while using social media (Ashari & Yuliana, 2023).

Ethics, as a field of study, reflects on moral behavior. It examines humans as moral beings and is closely linked with morality, as the two are intertwined in guiding people toward a wise life. The connection between ethics and moral teachings helps individuals achieve a better life orientation and act responsibly (Amrullah, 2025). While morals refer to teachings and rules, ethics is a critical analysis of these moral teachings. Ethics is a discipline, not a set of instructions. Moral teachings tell us how to use social media properly, whereas ethics asks why we follow those moral teachings. It encourages us to take responsibility for our moral actions. Thus, ethics critically observes moral reality using reason (Rici et al., 2021).

Virtue ethics is highly relevant to daily social media behavior because it emphasizes the development of good moral character as the basis for action. It focuses on personal qualities like honesty, courage, patience, and responsibility rather than just rules or consequences. Therefore, virtue ethics provides a framework for social media users to lead a wise life and use these platforms effectively to guide their daily lives and find meaning. Virtue ethics helps users better understand social media, enabling them to use it properly in their daily lives.

METHOD

The research methodology employed in this paper is the library research method, which is a qualitative approach. This method involves a systematic and critical engagement with existing literature, including books, academic journals, and other scholarly materials. By meticulously reading and analyzing these sources, the author aims to build a robust theoretical foundation for the study, particularly in understanding the nature of social media and the principles of virtue ethics.

This method serves two key purposes. First, it enables the author to accurately describe and define the core concepts of the paper, such as social media's role in modern life and the specific tenets of virtue ethics. Second, it provides a "critical injection" into the research process, allowing the author to move beyond a simple description of the topic. By critically analyzing the arguments and findings within the literature, the author can identify key relationships, nuances, and areas that require further examination. This deeper, more critical perspective is essential for developing a compelling argument and for influencing the reader's understanding.

Ultimately, the library method is not merely about gathering information. It is a process of using existing knowledge to construct a well-supported and original argument.

This approach ensures the paper is academically sound and provides a clear, ethical framework for analyzing the complex relationship between our digital lives and the pursuit of a virtuous character.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics is composed of two words: ethics and virtue. The term "ethics" comes from the Greek word *ethikos* or *ethos*, meaning custom, habit, character, attitude, feeling, and way of thinking. The plural form, *taetha*, refers to the customs or thought patterns of a group of people, or the actions highly valued and upheld by a community. The word "virtue" in English translates to *keutamaan* in Indonesian, meaning excellence, distinction, or superiority (Yulanda, 2020).

According to Magnis Suseno, "virtue" is a translation of the word *virtue* which means strength or ability. The word also refers to a person's capacity to be a complete human being, not just a moralistic form of piety. Virtue is good character, which is a will that has been habituated. When a person's will is accustomed to what is good, this quality is called virtuous. A virtuous person is someone with good character who habitually performs actions consistent with what is commanded by that character. Thus, there is a difference between virtue and duty. Virtue is a quality of the soul, while duty is an external action. Virtue ethics does not focus on whether a single action is in line with moral norms, but rather on the person themselves. It studies virtue, which refers to the character traits a person possesses.

Aristotle, a key philosopher, provided his own view on ethics. In addition to logic, psychology, and metaphysics, he also discussed virtue ethics. Unlike duty ethics, which asks, "What should I do?" by focusing on moral principles and rules, Aristotle's virtue ethics centers on character. Aristotle's virtue ethics refers to a person's internal disposition (*Hexis Prohairesitike*). Every virtue or excellence makes a thing good in itself and allows it to perform its function well. For example, the virtue of a horse makes it a good horse because it is good at running, carrying its rider, and facing its enemy. Similarly, a human virtue is a quality that makes a person good and allows them to perform their function well. For Aristotle, the purpose of human life is not to achieve goodness for its own sake, but to achieve happiness or flourishing (*eudaimonia*).

According to Aristotle, virtue is the golden mean, a middle ground between two extremes (Bistara, 2020). For example, courage is the virtue between the two extremes of cowardice and recklessness. A coward runs from danger, while a reckless person takes on too much risk. Therefore, virtue is a central point between two extremes. The purpose of ethics is to cultivate a person's ability to act appropriately in all situations (Harahap et al., n.d.). A person should have good judgment, self-control, and be able to balance desires and ideals.

Aristotle prioritized virtues of the mind, such as wisdom, responsibility, intelligence, and sound judgment, over virtues of character, such as courage, simplicity, and generosity. He believed that virtues are ingrained through practice. The doctrine of the golden mean represents a lifestyle consistent with Greek philosophy. For Aristotle, a person's life is better if they prioritize mental virtues over virtues of character, because

mental virtues can control all systems, from the individual to society as a whole (Bistara, 2020).

Relevance of Virtue Ethics in Daily Life (Social Media)

Social media is not just a tool for communication and information; it also allows people to build a reputation through personal branding. According to Gorbatov, personal branding is a way of communicating favorable individual attributes to differentiate oneself and achieve specific goals in the digital world (Alfredo Kevin, 2023). This can be problematic as a digital image often doesn't align with reality, which can harm a person's real-world reputation.

Social media platforms have facilitated the spread of information, representing a new realization of our social nature. However, if users become overly consumed by these tools, they risk losing control over their digital actions. As philosopher Hardiman noted, people aren't always rational when using their devices; they tend to adapt to the demands of the internet, which can even alter their sense of right and wrong. This issue is similar to Hannah Arendt's concept of the "banality of evil," which describes how people can commit harmful acts out of thoughtless obedience, as seen in the case of Nazi criminal Adolf Eichmann (Alfredo Kevin, 2023).

In the context of social media, users are free to access and share information, which can have both positive and negative consequences. This is why virtue ethics is so important. It highlights the need for personal responsibility and self-control on these platforms. A person who acts without virtue is someone who is irresponsible with their social media use. Virtue ethics provides a framework for users to be wise and responsible for their digital actions. According to Agung, self-control on social media is crucial for daily life, as it helps individuals regulate their online behavior and avoid excess. Those who can critically evaluate information are less likely to engage in excessive or harmful social media use (Kurnia Azzahra et al., 2022).

The relevance of virtue ethics in daily life, especially on social media, is paramount because the digital world has become the primary space for social interaction (Yulanda, 2020). Virtue ethics helps us remain wise, moral, and responsible in a virtual space that is often anonymous and impulsive. It encourages us to develop a good character online by resisting the urge to be impulsive or manipulative. Virtue ethics teaches us to restrain ourselves from sharing negative or provocative content, to avoid spreading hoaxes, and to communicate respectfully. Users also need to cultivate empathy and care, treating others wisely even if they don't know them.

Table 1.1: Comparison of Social Media Situations and Virtue Ethics Actions

Situation on social media	Action based on virtue ethics
Seeing provocative news	Verify the facts first (prudence)
Receiving negative comments	Respond politely or don't reply (patience, self-control)
Seeing a friend attacked online	Defend them wisely (moral courage, empathy)
Sharing personal content	Think about the impact on yourself and others (wisdom)
Sharing false information	Be meticulous in verifying information
Mindless scrolling	Practice self-control (wisdom)

Virtue ethics helps us shape a good character in the digital world, not just to look good publicly, but to truly become responsible and moral individuals. In a fast-paced and distracting world like social media, the practice of virtues is key to preserving our humanity.

Challenges and Opportunities for Character Development via Social Media

Social media, although often considered a source of distraction and conflict, can also be a crucial tool for developing character and moral virtue. Despite its rapid technological advancements, social media actually helps people simplify work and other activities. While looking at the positive side of social media, we also need to consider what it truly offers, specifically character development. Through social media, people can develop their character (Khuryati et al., 2023). Therefore, in its relevance to virtue ethics, it offers an interesting contribution to users, namely fostering wise human character.

Social media, as a tool for character formation and growth, requires a closer look at several factors that make it a character-building tool (Endang Supriatna & Linda Putri Sari, 2023). However, it's important to examine and analyze the potential character-building aspects of social media, based on what the author has observed in his writings and other information. Therefore, each person needs to examine their inner self. Is social media a tool for character formation? If so, what do you need to look at?

In this case, the author attempts to explore several aspects that need to be considered to shape human character in general. First, positive access; for this, we need to learn from public figures and communities that provide positive content. Second, space for self-reflection: by viewing motivational content and real-life stories, users are encouraged to reflect on their life values. Third, participation in social action: social media makes it easy for individuals to get involved in social campaigns and charitable activities. Fourth, authentic self-expression: social media provides a space for people to creatively voice their personal values, for example through writing, videos, and illustrations.

Aside from these driving forces for character formation, we also need to recognize the challenges that must be faced. First, the culture of likes and external validation: the drive to seek popularity can lead to manipulative or image-building behavior. Second, the spread of hoaxes: misinformation can fuel hatred and weaken wisdom or responsibility. Third, addiction to distraction: excessive use can weaken self-discipline and hinder moral reflection.

CONCLUSION

Ethics significantly impact a person's life because with ethics, a person will know how to live their life well through their daily actions and behavior. Furthermore, ethics also serves as a guideline for someone to be able to take the right actions and make the right decisions. In interacting and socializing with their surroundings, a system is needed to regulate how a person should act properly. With this system, each person can become an individual who can understand and respect others around them, this is called courtesy, ethics, manners, and so on. Guidelines in socializing are useful for protecting the interests of others involved, thus creating a sense of security, comfort, peace, calm, and protection. This is especially true in the use of social media. The term ethics is related to an

individual's morality. Society views a person's ethics as being determined by how they act and speak. A person is considered unethical or immoral if their actions and words do not consider the good or bad. This shows that someone who lacks ethics cannot interact well with their surroundings.

In the digital age, or in the social media space, many people try to use social media as a tool for self-transformation to express themselves in a philosophical way. This means that people display something other than their whole selves on social media. This is where Aristotle's virtue ethics comes into play. A perfect person who can achieve happiness is one who is able to do good without coercion or reward. However, what often happens is that social media becomes a space for sharing negative values. In view of this, virtue ethics plays a crucial role in demonstrating to social media users the importance of being wise in their use of social media. This will ultimately shape a holistic and authentic character. Therefore, according to Aristotle, to become a perfect human being, one must cultivate humility, generosity, courage, and responsibility.

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