



The Role of Social Media in Digital Literacy and Reading Interest of SMP Telekomunikasi Pekanbaru Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe and analyze the role of social media in students' digital literacy and reading interest at SMP Telekomunikasi Pekanbaru. The study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. It was conducted at SMP Telekomunikasi Pekanbaru during the 2025/2026 academic year, while data collection was carried out from April to May 2026. The participants consisted of five students and one Indonesian Language teacher who served as a triangulation informant. Data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. Data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data credibility was examined through source triangulation and technique triangulation. The findings indicate that social media contributes to students' digital literacy through access to learning information, information evaluation, understanding and use of digital media, digital content creation, and digital ethics. Its role is most visible in information access and content creation, whereas students' ability to evaluate information credibility and apply digital ethics still requires guidance. Regarding reading interest, social media provides access to digital reading materials and encourages reading based on students' interests. Nevertheless, reading frequency and duration vary among students, and preferred materials tend to include fiction, comics, short stories, articles, light news, and other digital content related to personal interests. The findings also show that school literacy activities remain important in strengthening students' reading habits.

Keywords: social media, digital literacy, reading interest

INTRODUCTION

Advancements in information and communication technology have transformed how learners acquire, comprehend, and disseminate information. Social media, initially used primarily for communication and entertainment, has now emerged as a space for information exchange that can be leveraged for learning. In the school environment, platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp enable students to access supplementary materials, discuss assignments, and create digital content. This usage positions social media not merely as a source of entertainment but as an integral part of the student learning experience.

This shift in information access patterns is closely linked to the need for digital literacy. Dig-

ital literacy requires students to go beyond simply operating devices; they must also be able to locate, understand, evaluate, utilize, and generate information responsibly. Faizah et al. (2024) demonstrate that literacy-based learning encourages students to utilize diverse information sources, while Fitrianolinda et al. (2024), Razak et al. (2020), identify information literacy, media literacy, and digital literacy as competencies essential to educational practice. In this context, social media can serve as a space for practicing literacy skills, as students directly engage with a wide array of information sources and forms of digital communication.

Meanwhile, the changing nature of reading materials has also influenced reading habits. Stu-

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dent reading is no longer confined to printed books; it now encompasses articles, digital stories, news, comics, and other content accessible via digital devices. Maulida et al. (2024) indicate that digital environments can broaden students' access to reading materials and boost reading motivation through interactive content. Arvind and Harshini (2021) further highlight enjoyment and the willingness to dedicate time as crucial elements of the reading experience. Thus, social media offers a potential gateway to reading activities, although the type and quality of the reading material remain important considerations.

However, the use of social media for educational purposes does not always yield uniform results. Padmasari et al. (2025) found that social media usage can become a distraction from learning when it is primarily directed toward entertainment activities. In this study, this condition warrants close attention because mobile phone usage in schools occurs within specific limits and is directed by teachers for learning purposes. Research observations indicate that students are permitted to use mobile phones when teachers require them for learning activities, whereas school literacy activities continue to be conducted in person prior to Indonesian language lessons.

SMP Telekomunikasi Pekanbaru was selected as the research site because the school environment is strongly linked to the use of digital technology. Observations indicate that students utilize digital devices for learning activities when guided by teachers. Outside of formal instruction, students also use social media to seek information, communicate, and read various types of content. These conditions suggest an opportunity to specifically examine the role of social media in shaping digital literacy skills and its relationship to students' reading interest.

Previous studies have demonstrated a connection between social media, digital literacy, and reading interest, though their contexts and focuses differ. Rosmiati (2022) investigated the role of social media in public reading interest,

highlighting the ease of accessing news and diverse reading materials. Putri (2023) showed that school literacy initiatives could foster increased student reading interest. Maulida et al. (2024) examined the role of digital literacy in student reading interest, while Anita et al. (2024) discussed the enhancement of communication skills and reading interest through digital literacy. This study differs by positioning social media as the primary focus of analysis regarding its role in two areas—digital literacy and reading interest—among students at SMP Telekomunikasi Pekanbaru.

Based on this background, the study aims to describe and analyze: (1) the role of social media regarding digital literacy among SMP Telekomunikasi Pekanbaru students; and (2) the role of social media regarding reading interest among SMP Telekomunikasi Pekanbaru students. This dual focus enables the study to provide an empirical overview of both the benefits and the limitations of social media usage within an educational context.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive method. This approach was chosen because the research aims to understand the phenomenon of social media usage based on the experiences, perspectives, and behaviors of informants within a natural setting. The study was conducted at SMP Telekomunikasi Pekanbaru, Riau Province, during the 2025/2026 academic year. Data collection was conducted from April to May 2026. The study involved five students as primary informants—coded I1, I2, I3, I4, and I5—and an Indonesian language teacher as a triangulation informant.

Student informants were selected purposively, taking into account their engagement with social media and their willingness to provide information relevant to the research focus. Primary data consisted of information gathered from interviews with students and teachers, while supporting data were obtained through observations of learning and



literacy activities, as well as documentation. The documentation used in the study included screenshots of social media usage, educational accounts or channels, digital reading activities, the use of editing applications and assignment outputs, WhatsApp groups for assignments, school literacy activities, students searching for information via Google, group-based creation of instructional videos, assignment uploads on TikTok, and the dissemination of school information via the principal's WhatsApp status.

The researcher served as the primary research instrument. Supporting instruments included interview guidelines, observation sheets, recording devices, and supporting documents. The interview guidelines were developed based on indicators of digital literacy and reading interest. Digital literacy indicators encompassed the ability to access digital information, evaluate information credibility, understand and utilize digital media, create digital content, and communicate ethically. Indicators of reading interest included enjoyment of reading, reading frequency and duration, reading motivation, independent reading habits, and preferred types of reading material.

Data analysis was conducted interactively through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification. During the reduction stage, data from interviews, observations, and documentation were selected based on their relevance to the two research questions. The data were then presented descriptively based on findings associated with each indicator. Conclusions were drawn after iteratively comparing data patterns. Data validity was verified through source triangulation—comparing accounts from five students and the Indonesian language teacher—and technique triangulation—comparing results from interviews, observations, and documentation. Through these procedures, the interpretations in the article were limited to findings supported by field data.

RESULTS

1. The Role of Social Media in the Digital Literacy of SMP Telekomunikasi Pekanbaru Students

1.1 Accessing Digital Information via Social Media

Research findings indicate that all informants utilized digital platforms to search for both lesson materials and supplementary information. The platforms mentioned by the informants include YouTube, Google, TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp. The information sought relates to lesson material that is not yet understood, practice questions, explanations, and supplementary information. The informants' statements indicate that platform usage varies according to each student's habits.

"I often look for lesson materials—such as Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and Indonesian—on YouTube. Additionally, I search for practice questions and their explanations to make it easier to understand the material being studied at school." (I1)

"I usually use Google, YouTube, and Instagram because the information is abundant, comprehensive, and easy to understand." (I2)

"I usually look for information via YouTube and TikTok." (I3)

"I usually search for study materials—such as IPAS and PKN—on YouTube." (I4)

"I usually use Google and YouTube to find additional information." (I5)

Based on the interviews as a whole, YouTube was mentioned by every informant as a medium used to obtain learning information, while Google was used as a search engine by several informants. The materials sought were not limited to a single subject; informant statements indicated searches for content related to Mathematics, Natural Sciences (IPA), Indonesian Language, IPAS, and PKN. Thus, the interview data demonstrates that students use social media and search engines to

acquire diverse information tailored to their learning needs.

Observation results indicate that when teachers assign tasks requiring students to find information, the students use mobile phones to access YouTube and Google. This use of mobile phones occurs under the teacher's direction. These observational findings align with documentation showing students searching for information via Google during lessons. The data reveals the direct use of digital devices in learning activities.

1.2 Ability to Evaluate Information Credibility

Research findings indicate that students employ specific methods to verify information obtained from the internet. I1 stated that they look at the information source and compare it with other sources. I2 mentioned conducting further research and comparing the findings with other information. I3 performs verification first, while I4 checks the source of the information. I5 uses a simpler approach: looking at who uploaded the information and reading the comments.

"I look at the information source first and compare it with other sources." (I1)

"I research further and compare it with other information." (I2)

"I verify it first to ensure the information is correct." (I3)

"I check the information source to avoid misunderstanding." (I4)

"I look at who uploaded it and read the existing comments." (I5)

These statements demonstrate the variety of methods students use to verify information. Some informants employ source comparison or verification, while others rely on simpler indicators. Interview results with Indonesian language teachers support these findings; the teachers noted that while some students are beginning to distinguish between accurate and inaccurate information, those in grades VII and VIII still require guidance. Observations also indicate that grade IX students tend to be more

independent in seeking information, whereas students in grades VII and VIII still require teacher direction.

1.3 Understanding and Utilizing Digital Media

All informants stated that they could understand learning materials via digital media provided the explanations were clear. I1 stated they could understand instructional videos as long as the explanation was clear. Other informants also indicated they were able to follow the material through videos without constantly relying on the teacher. When using digital media, students utilized search functions, subtitles, and the pause feature to locate or review sections of the material they did not yet understand.

"I can understand instructional videos as long as the explanation provided is clear." (I1)

This statement was corroborated by observations made when students used digital devices under teacher guidance. Students appeared capable of navigating the media used to access the material. The Indonesian language teacher also noted that, in general, students were quite proficient in using digital media for learning, although guidance was still necessary to ensure its use supported learning objectives. Observations regarding the use of Smart TVs as a learning medium also demonstrated that digital technology was being employed to deliver material at the school.

1.4 Ability to Create Digital Content

Research findings indicate that students had previously created assignments or content in digital formats. The types of work produced included digital posters, presentation videos, and instructional videos. I1 and I2 mentioned their experiences creating presentation videos and digital posters. I3 created digital posters and participated in sharing ideas for group assignments. I4 created digital posters, while I5 had created and shared instructional videos via TikTok.



“It is easier and allows for more creativity when working on assignments using digital media.” (I1)

These findings were supported by documentation showing the use of the Canva app and the resulting student work, documentation of group-based instructional video creation, and documentation of assignment uploads on TikTok. The documentation data reveals that the use of digital media extended beyond merely receiving information; it was also utilized to produce assignments in digital formats.

1.5 Digital Ethics

All informants admitted to having encountered hoaxes, negative comments, or inappropriate content on social media. Student responses to such content varied. I1 chose to ignore the content and not disseminate the information. I2 stated they would block the account or content whenever possible. I3 and I4 chose to skip over negative content without responding, while I5 ignored the content and did not engage with it.

“I ignore the information and do not share it.”
(I1)

“I block the account or content if possible.”
(I2)

The interview results indicate that students possess a basic awareness regarding the avoidance of spreading negative content. However, their actions primarily consist of ignoring, skipping, or blocking such content. The Indonesian language teacher emphasized that social media usage requires guidance and supervision to ensure a positive impact. Thus, the data reveal both a basic ethical awareness and a need for guidance in social media usage.

2. The Role of Social Media in the Reading Interest of SMP Telekomunikasi Pekanbaru Students

2.1 Enjoyment of reading activities

Interview results show that all informants are interested in reading, though their preferences vary.

I1 stated they quite enjoy reading articles and novels that align with their interests. I2 expressed a strong preference for reading both books and online articles. I3 and I4 showed interest in light reading materials such as comics, short stories, and motivational quotes on social media. Teacher observations indicate that student interest leans towards light, entertaining reading—particularly fiction—while interest in non-fiction or textbooks remains relatively low.

“I really enjoy reading both books and online articles.” (I2)

“Student reading interest tends to be higher for light, entertaining material, especially fiction. Interest in non-fiction or textbooks remains relatively low, so encouragement and guidance from teachers are needed.” (Indonesian Language Teacher)

Observations reveal that the school also conducts reading sessions prior to Indonesian language lessons. Teachers direct students to read books brought from home for approximately 10 minutes. After reading, some students are asked to share the content or information they have gathered. Documentation of literacy activities shows the implementation of these reading sessions and the presentation of reading outcomes in class.

2.2 Reading Frequency and Duration

Research findings indicate variations in students' reading frequency and duration. I1 reads approximately seven to eight times a week, with each session lasting 40 to 50 minutes. I2 reads about five to six times a week, with a duration of around 60 minutes per session. I3 reads almost every day for 20 to 30 minutes. I4 reads about twice a week for 15 minutes, while I5 reads approximately two to three times a week for around 15 minutes.

“I read about seven to eight times a week outside of school assignments.” (I1)

“About 40 to 50 minutes per reading session.”
(I1)

“I read almost every day.” (I3)

“About 15 minutes per reading session.” (I4)

These differences indicate that reading habits outside of school assignments vary among the students. Observations revealed a scheduled reading activity at school lasting approximately 10 minutes prior to Indonesian language lessons. Thus, the students' reading activities in this study occurred through both personal habits outside of school and school-facilitated literacy activities.

2.3 Reading Motivation

The informants' reading motivation was linked to their interest in the topic, content, and title, as well as their curiosity and need for information. I1 stated an interest in reading when the topic aligned with their personal interests. I2 was interested because they enjoyed the content and gained new information. I3 was interested when the content met their needs or covered a preferred topic. I4 cited titles that were engaging or sparked curiosity, while I5 was interested due to compelling titles and story content.

“Usually, it is because the topic aligns with my interests. If the topic is engaging, I feel more enthusiastic about reading it.” (I1)

“I am interested in reading because the content appeals to me and provides me with new information.” (I2)

“Because the title and story content are engaging, making me curious enough to read them.” (I5)

Four informants stated that they read more often out of personal initiative rather than due to school assignment requirements, whereas I4 noted that their motivation could stem from either assignments or curiosity. The Indonesian language teacher confirmed that students are more interested in reading materials presented via digital media because they feature images, illustrations, and visual layouts that are more appealing than those found in printed textbooks.

2.4 Independent Reading Habits

Students primarily engage in independent reading at home. I1 mentioned reading at night

before bed or during spare time. I2 and I3 also read at home during their free time or before going to sleep. I3 stated that the use of mobile phones for digital reading is not permitted at school; consequently, digital reading activities mostly take place at home. I4 stated that they read more frequently at school whenever the opportunity arises, while I5 reads both at home and at school during spare time.

Observations revealed that mobile phone usage at school is restricted and permitted only when teachers provide instructions for learning purposes. This situation prevents digital reading activities from taking place freely within the school environment. Conversely, conventional reading activities continue to be facilitated through the school's literacy program prior to Indonesian language lessons.

2.5 Preferred Types of Reading Material

Research findings indicate a tendency among students to choose digital reading materials over printed books. I1 stated that they read digital materials more often due to their accessibility, while I2 expressed a preference for digital reading because the materials can be accessed at any time. I3, I4, and I5 also demonstrated a preference for digital reading materials. The students' reading preferences varied: I1 preferred educational articles and digital novels; I2 favored tutorials and world news; I3 liked short stories and comics; I4 preferred comics and gaming information; and I5 read short stories and light news via social media. Teacher interviews revealed that students preferred reading materials presented on social media—featuring images, illustrations, and engaging visuals—over printed textbooks. Supporting documentation, such as screenshots of digital novel reading activities, further confirmed that reading was indeed taking place via digital devices. These findings indicate that social media and digital devices offer reading formats that align with some of the students' interests, even though their choices varied in terms of content and purpose.



DISCUSSION

The following discussion presents arguments regarding two sets of research findings. Each argument is evaluated against at least two perspectives: the conceptual framework and relevant prior research. The discussion is not intended to introduce new data but rather to interpret the field data previously presented in the results section.

The Role of Social Media in Digital Literacy

The finding that all informants use digital platforms to seek learning-related information indicates that social media serves as a gateway to knowledge sources beyond classroom explanations. The fact that all informants use YouTube—alongside Google, TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp—to search for information demonstrates that students are not confined to a single type of digital source. These findings align with Faizah et al. (2024), who emphasize the use of diverse sources in literacy-based learning, and with Pratama et al. (2024), who view digital literacy as a crucial component of the transformation of learning. Thus, the primary contribution of social media in this regard lies in expanding opportunities for students to discover information relevant to their learning needs.

However, access to information does not automatically imply that students possess strong critical digital literacy skills. Research data reveals that while students do check sources, compare information, or verify content, their methods are not uniform. Informant I5, for instance, considers the uploader and the comments section when evaluating content. Teachers also noted that 7th and 8th-grade students still require guidance. From this perspective, the findings highlight a gap between the ability to use media and the ability to evaluate information. This is significant because Muhajir (2023) positions digital literacy as a competence that must be developed alongside an awareness of appropriate technology use, rather than merely as an operational skill.

Regarding the understanding and utilization of digital media, students are capable of following instructional videos and using specific features to search for or review material. This demonstrates that social media usage provides hands-on experience in operating digital features for educational purposes. These findings can be linked to Fitri (2023), who situates digital literacy within the context of utilizing instructional media. However, the research results also indicate that the use of devices in schools requires teacher guidance. Consequently, the effective use of social media is not merely a matter of students' technical proficiency but also a matter of managing the learning context. The ability to create posters, presentation videos, and instructional videos demonstrates that students can shift from being mere recipients of information to creators of digital products. This expands the meaning of digital literacy, as students not only use media to access information but also generate it. Anita et al. (2024) indicate that digital literacy activities can be linked to the development of students' communication skills and reading interests. In this study, the students' digital products serve as evidence that the use of digital media can be directed toward productive activities when clear tasks and contexts are provided.

Regarding the aspect of digital ethics, the results indicate a cautious approach. Students already demonstrate behaviors such as ignoring, bypassing, or blocking negative content rather than spreading it. However, more proactive actions—such as reporting content or educating peers—are not yet evident. From an educational perspective, this suggests that while social media usage has fostered basic ethical awareness, the development of more mature digital behavior still requires guidance. Teachers' observations regarding the importance of supervision support this conclusion. Therefore, the role of social media in digital literacy—as revealed in this study—is most apparent in information access and content production, whereas the evaluation of credibility

and digital ethics requires pedagogical reinforcement.

The Role of Social Media in Reading Interest

The study results indicate that all informants enjoy reading, though this enjoyment is not always directed toward academic material. Teachers' statements noting that students prefer light, entertaining reading clarify that reading interest must be understood not merely by the presence or absence of reading activity, but also by the type of material chosen. These findings align with Arvind and Harshini (2021), who link reading interest to enjoyment and the willingness to dedicate time to the activity. In this study, reading enjoyment is evident in materials that align with students' personal interests.

Social media also provides an environment that connects students with a wide range of digital reading materials. Informants I1 and I2 expressed a preference for digital reading due to ease of access, a choice shared by other informants. These findings are consistent with Rosmiati (2022), who found that social media facilitates access to diverse news and reading sources. Maulida et al. (2024) also demonstrated that digital environments can support access to reading materials and foster reading motivation. These similarities suggest that digital formats can serve as a gateway to reading activities, as they are readily available within the context of students' device usage habits.

However, the study findings do not indicate that all students exhibit the same level of reading intensity. I1 reads seven to eight times a week, I2 five to six times, and I3 almost every day, whereas I4 and I5 read only two to three times a week. The duration also varies, ranging from approximately 15 to 60 minutes. Such variation indicates that access to social media does not automatically result in uniform reading habits; reading habits remain influenced by personal interests, available free time, and reading choices. Putri's (2023) findings regarding the importance of school-based literacy activities reinforce the view that an educational

environment remains essential for helping to shape reading habits.

The type of reading material is a crucial factor in assessing the role of social media in reading interest. Informants chose educational articles, digital novels, tutorials, world news, short stories, comics, gaming information, and light news. This diversity demonstrates that while social media can expand reading opportunities, the quality and purpose of the reading material do not automatically shift toward academic content. Padmasari et al. (2025) indicate that social media can also serve as a distraction from learning when its use is primarily geared toward entertainment. In this study, teacher observations regarding the low interest in textbooks offer a complementary perspective: social media draws students to reading, yet that appeal is stronger for light, entertaining material.

School-based literacy activities provide a counterbalance to this trend. Observations indicate that prior to Indonesian language lessons, students read for approximately 10 minutes, with some presenting the information they have gathered. This suggests that the culture of conventional reading has not vanished due to the advent of social media; rather, the two coexist: social media offers access to digital reading materials aligned with personal interests, while schools foster more structured reading habits. This perspective aligns with Anita et al. (2024), who position digital literacy as an integral part of efforts to develop communication skills and reading interests.

Based on these two viewpoints, social media in this study is best understood as a medium that creates opportunities for reading rather than the sole driver of increased reading interest. Its positive role is evident in the ease of access, the diversity of reading materials, and the alignment of content with student interests. At the same time, there are limitations, such as the prevalence of light reading material, varying levels of reading intensity, and the potential for distraction. Therefore, leveraging social media to foster reading interest would be more effective if teachers guided students toward



informative digital materials relevant to their studies, while simultaneously maintaining school-based literacy activities.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, social media plays a role in the digital literacy of SMP Telekomunikasi Pekanbaru students across five aspects. First, social media and digital platforms are used to access learning materials, with YouTube cited by all informants. Second, students have developed methods to evaluate information—such as checking sources, comparing information, verifying facts, and considering the uploader—though these skills are not yet uniform, and some students still require guidance. Third, students are able to understand and utilize digital media for learning, including using specific features to search for or review course material. Fourth, students have created digital products such as posters, presentation videos, and instructional videos. Fifth, students demonstrate basic ethical awareness by ignoring, skipping, or blocking negative content, although more proactive ethical actions still need to be reinforced.

Social media also contributes to students' reading interest by providing access to a wide range of digital reading materials that align with their personal interests. All informants expressed an interest in reading, though the frequency and duration of their reading varied—ranging from two or three times a week to almost daily, and from approximately 15 to 60 minutes per session. Their reading interests included educational articles, digital novels, tutorials, world news, short stories, comics, gaming information, and light news. Thus, while social media can serve as a gateway to reading, it cannot be viewed as the sole factor in fostering an interest in reading. School-based literacy activities remain essential to reinforce reading habits and guide students toward more diverse and educational reading materials.

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