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THE TRANSFORMATION OF CHARACTER EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL ERA: STRENGTHENING INTEGRITY AND RESPONSIBILITY AMONG GEN Z

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Abstract: *Massive digitalization has reshaped the socialization space in which Generation Z internalizes values, so that character education no longer occurs solely within the family and school but increasingly within a loosely supervised digital environment. This shift raises two pressing concerns: eroding integrity, ranging from plagiarism to the unregulated use of generative artificial intelligence, and weak awareness of digital civic responsibility. This article presents a narrative review of recent literature to map the transformation of character education in the digital era and to formulate directions for strengthening the integrity and civic responsibility of Generation Z. The review synthesizes national and international journal articles published between 2011-2026 through thematic analysis. Three major themes emerged: (1) the shifting locus of character formation from offline settings toward a hybrid digital ecosystem; (2) threats to academic and personal integrity driven by frictionless access to information and artificial intelligence technologies; and (3) the urgency of digital citizenship as an extension of conventional citizenship. The review concludes that strengthening Generation Z's character requires integrating classical character-education frameworks with digital citizenship frameworks through sustained collaboration among families, schools, and digital-literacy policy.*

Keywords: *Character Education, Integrity, Digital Citizenship, Generation Z, Digital Literacy*

Abstrak: Digitalisasi yang masif telah mengubah ruang sosialisasi nilai bagi Generasi Z, sehingga pendidikan karakter tidak lagi berlangsung semata di keluarga dan sekolah, melainkan juga di ruang digital yang minim pengawasan. Kondisi ini memunculkan dua persoalan mendesak, yaitu melemahnya integritas (mulai dari plagiarisme hingga penyalahgunaan kecerdasan buatan generatif) dan rendahnya kesadaran tanggung jawab kewarganegaraan digital. Artikel ini bertujuan menyusun kajian naratif atas literatur terkini untuk memetakan transformasi pendidikan karakter di era digital serta merumuskan arah penguatan integritas dan tanggung jawab kewarganegaraan Generasi Z. Kajian menggunakan pendekatan narrative review terhadap artikel jurnal nasional dan internasional periode 2011-2026 yang dianalisis secara tematik. Hasil kajian mengidentifikasi tiga tema utama: (1) pergeseran ruang pembentukan karakter dari lingkungan luring menuju ekosistem digital yang hibrida; (2) ancaman terhadap integritas akademik dan personal akibat kemudahan akses informasi serta teknologi kecerdasan buatan; dan (3) urgensi kewarganegaraan digital sebagai perluasan konsep kewarganegaraan konvensional. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahwa penguatan karakter Generasi Z memerlukan integrasi kerangka pendidikan karakter klasik dengan kerangka kewarganegaraan digital, melalui kolaborasi keluarga, sekolah, dan kebijakan literasi digital secara berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Karakter, Integritas, Kewarganegaraan Gidital, Gen-Z, Literasi Digital.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the social, educational, and cultural environments in which younger generations develop their identities, values, and behavioral orientations. Digital platforms, social media, and artificial intelligence (AI) have expanded opportunities for communication, knowledge acquisition, and social participation. However, these developments have also introduced complex challenges concerning moral judgment, personal integrity, and social responsibility. In contemporary educational contexts, students are increasingly exposed to information environments characterized by rapid content circulation, diverse perspectives, and varying standards of credibility. Consequently, the fundamental challenge of education is no longer limited to ensuring access to knowledge and technological competence but also involves cultivating the ethical awareness and moral responsibility necessary to navigate digital environments. UNESCO (2023a) emphasizes that the integration of technology into education requires careful consideration of its educational purposes, contextual appropriateness, and potential consequences. Similarly, Floridi (2013) argues that information and communication technologies have transformed the conditions under which individuals communicate, interact, and exercise moral responsibility. These developments underscore the importance of reconsidering character education as an essential component of educational transformation in the digital era.

Character education traditionally emphasizes the development of moral values, responsible behavior, and dispositions that enable individuals to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate actions. Lickona (1991) conceptualizes good character through the interconnected dimensions of *moral knowing, moral feeling,* and *moral action*, highlighting that moral understanding alone is insufficient unless it is accompanied by emotional commitment and consistent ethical behavior. This perspective remains relevant in contemporary education, particularly as digital environments create situations in which individuals must make ethical decisions with immediate and potentially far-reaching consequences. For Generation Z, character formation increasingly takes place through interactions involving digital content, online communities, and technology-mediated learning experiences. Accordingly, character education must extend beyond conventional classroom instruction to address the ethical dimensions of digital participation. Ribble (2015) emphasizes that responsible technology use involves multiple dimensions of digital citizenship, including digital literacy, etiquette, rights and responsibilities, and security. Choi (2016) similarly conceptualizes digital citizenship through the interconnected dimensions of ethics, media and information literacy, participation and engagement, and critical resistance. These perspectives suggest that character education in the digital era must integrate moral development with the competencies required for responsible participation in digitally mediated society.

One of the central challenges in this transformation concerns the relationship between digital competence and ethical behavior. Although younger generations may be familiar with digital devices and online platforms, technological familiarity does not necessarily indicate the ability to evaluate information critically, communicate respectfully, or make responsible decisions. Jones and Mitchell (2016) demonstrate that youth digital citizenship encompasses both respectful online behavior and online civic engagement, indicating that responsible participation involves more than technological access or usage. Choi, Glassman, and Cristol (2017) also conceptualize digital citizenship as a multidimensional construct that incorporates individuals' abilities, perceptions, and participation in internet-based communities. These perspectives

challenge the assumption that digital proficiency automatically produces responsible digital behavior. Instead, they indicate that ethical awareness, critical judgment, and social responsibility must be deliberately cultivated through educational experiences. Hobbs (2010) further argues that digital and media literacy constitutes an essential life competency for meaningful participation in an information-rich society. Similarly, McGrew (2020) demonstrates that explicit instruction in evaluating online information can improve students' ability to investigate sources, assess evidence, and identify reliable information. Taken together, these studies highlight the importance of integrating critical digital literacy with character education to help young people navigate complex information environments responsibly.

The issue of character formation becomes particularly significant when digital technology intersects with academic integrity and personal responsibility. Digital learning environments provide students with unprecedented access to educational resources, automated writing assistance, and generative AI applications. These technologies can support personalized learning, facilitate the development of ideas, and improve the efficiency of academic tasks. Nevertheless, their use also raises concerns regarding plagiarism, uncritical dependence on automated outputs, inadequate source attribution, and the displacement of independent intellectual effort. Kasneci et al. (2023) identify substantial educational opportunities associated with large language models while emphasizing the importance of critical thinking, fact-checking, human oversight, and responsible use. Similarly, Cotton et al. (2024) examine the implications of generative AI for academic integrity and emphasize the need for institutional policies and educational practices that promote ethical technology use. A systematic literature review by Sozon et al. (2024) further indicates that academic integrity violations are associated with interacting individual, institutional, social, cultural, and technological factors. These findings suggest that academic integrity should not be approached exclusively as a matter of compliance with institutional regulations. Rather, it should be understood as an expression of character involving honesty, accountability, intellectual independence, and respect for the contributions of others. Consequently, strengthening integrity among Generation Z requires educational approaches that help students translate ethical knowledge into consistent academic and personal behavior.

Beyond academic integrity, the digital transformation of character education also has implications for citizenship and social responsibility. Digital environments have become important spaces in which young people encounter public issues, express opinions, engage with diverse perspectives, and participate in collective activities. Bennett, Wells, and Rank (2009) argue that changing patterns of youth engagement require civic education to reconsider how citizenship is understood and practiced across online and offline environments. Extending this perspective, Mihailidis (2018) emphasizes that media literacy should be intentionally connected to civic engagement, critical consciousness, and the pursuit of the common good. These arguments suggest that digital participation should be evaluated not merely by its frequency or visibility but also by its ethical quality and social consequences. Individuals who share information, participate in online discussions, or support digital campaigns need to develop the capacity to verify claims, respect differing viewpoints, and recognize their responsibilities toward other members of society. Digital citizenship, therefore, represents an important extension of character education because it connects individual moral development with collective responsibility. In this context, integrity concerns the consistency between expressed values and actual behavior, while responsibility involves recognizing and accepting the consequences of one's actions in both digital and physical environments.

Despite growing scholarly attention to digital literacy, digital citizenship, and academic integrity, an important conceptual challenge remains: these domains are frequently discussed as related but distinct educational concerns. Digital literacy often emphasizes the ability to access, evaluate, and use information; digital citizenship focuses on responsible participation in digital society; and academic integrity addresses ethical conduct in learning and knowledge production. Although these perspectives offer valuable insights, their relationship to the broader process of character formation requires further conceptual integration. The need for such integration is particularly evident in educational environments where technological competence, moral development, and social responsibility are expected to develop simultaneously. UNESCO (2023b) highlights the importance of reconsidering educational purposes and institutional responses in the context of technological transformation. However, the central question is not simply how educational institutions can incorporate more technology into learning but how they can ensure that technological engagement contributes to the development of ethically responsible individuals. This distinction is important because increased digital participation does not necessarily guarantee stronger moral judgment, academic honesty, or responsible social engagement. A more integrated approach is therefore needed to connect character education with the practical ethical challenges that Generation Z encounters in digital environments.

To address this conceptual challenge, this study examines the transformation of character education in the digital era, focusing on strengthening integrity and responsibility among Generation Z. The study positions character education as a framework that connects moral development, digital literacy, academic integrity, and responsible digital citizenship. Drawing on Lickona's (1991) conception of character and the digital citizenship frameworks developed by Ribble (2015), Choi (2016), and Jones and Mitchell (2016), the discussion emphasizes the importance of aligning moral knowledge, ethical dispositions, and responsible action. The central argument is that effective character education must move beyond the transmission of moral values toward the development of practical competencies that enable young people to apply these values in complex digital situations. Such an approach requires collaboration among families, educational institutions, and policymakers to establish consistent expectations, meaningful learning experiences, and supportive institutional environments. By connecting character formation with the challenges of digital participation, this study seeks to contribute to the conceptual development of digital character education, particularly through the emphasis on integrity and responsibility as foundational dispositions for ethical academic conduct and constructive social engagement.

Accordingly, this study addresses three interrelated objectives: first, to examine how digital transformation reshapes the environments and processes through which Generation Z develops character; second, to analyze the challenges that digital technologies present to academic integrity, ethical decision-making, and social responsibility; and third, to develop a conceptual direction for strengthening digital character through the integration of character education, digital literacy, and digital citizenship. The study advances the proposition that digital integrity should be understood not merely as the avoidance of misconduct but as the consistent enactment of honesty, accountability, respect, and responsibility in technology-mediated activities. Its contribution lies in bringing together educational and digital citizenship perspectives to explain why technological competence must be accompanied by ethical development. Practically, the discussion is intended to inform educational strategies that integrate moral reflection, responsible technology use, and meaningful civic participation into learning environments. Ultimately, transforming character education in the digital era requires a shift from

treating technology primarily as an instructional instrument toward recognizing it as an environment in which moral values are continuously tested, negotiated, and enacted.

METHODS

This article employs a qualitative methodology using a narrative review approach a literature synthesis method designed to integrate findings from diverse sources into a coherent conceptual narrative. This approach was selected because the subject under study the intersection of character education, integrity, and digital citizenship among Generation Z is an evolving field spanning multiple disciplines (education, psychology, communication studies, and civic education). Consequently, a narrative review is more appropriate than a systematic review, which typically requires a high degree of homogeneity in study design. Literature was sourced from online academic databases, including Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and indexed national journal repositories, using keywords such as "character education in the digital era," "Generation Z digital citizenship," "academic integrity in the digital era," and "digital literacy for character strengthening." The publication timeframe spans from 2011 to 2026; references from 2011 are specifically included to account for foundational, classic works in character education theory. Inclusion criteria encompass scholarly journal articles and national or international conference proceedings that substantively address character education, digital citizenship, academic integrity, or Generation Z. Non-academic sources such as online forums, popular blogs, and articles lacking clear authorship were excluded. For the literature meeting these criteria, a thematic analysis was conducted: each source was examined to identify core concepts, which were then grouped by thematic commonality, synthesized, and integrated into a narrative that highlights logical connections between themes, rather than merely providing a sequential summary by individual author.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. The Shifting Spaces of Character Formation in the Digital Era

The development of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the social environments in which Generation Z develops its character. Traditionally, families, schools, communities, and peer groups have served as the primary settings for the internalization of moral values. However, the expansion of internet access and social media has extended this process into increasingly complex digital ecosystems. Generation Z acquires information and knowledge not only through face-to-face interactions but also through digital platforms that expose them to diverse values, norms, ideologies, and social practices. This transformation indicates that character formation no longer occurs exclusively within physical environments but increasingly emerges through hybrid interactions that combine offline experiences with online engagement. In this context, digital spaces function not merely as communication tools but as social environments that influence identity formation, moral orientations, and behavioral patterns among young people.

This conceptual finding is consistent with Sapdi (2023), who emphasizes that the transition toward Society 5.0 requires a transformation in the role of teachers in supporting students' character development. Education can no longer rely exclusively on face-to-face interaction but must also engage with digital environments that have become integral to students' everyday lives. Similarly, Agustini and Sucihati (2020) and Yuniarto and Yudha (2021) highlight the relevance

of digital literacy in strengthening character education, including nationalism, independence, religiosity, integrity, and mutual cooperation. These perspectives suggest that character education in a digital society requires an approach that connects knowledge, moral values, and students' everyday practices.

Nevertheless, the transformation of character-formation spaces should not be interpreted as a process that automatically produces positive outcomes. Greater access to information does not necessarily correspond to improved moral judgment or behavior. Digital environments provide opportunities to learn about democracy, tolerance, solidarity, and social responsibility. At the same time, they facilitate the circulation of misinformation, hate speech, cyberbullying, and communication practices that disregard the dignity of others. Digital technology therefore has an ambivalent character: its implications for character development depend on how it is used, the values that guide its use, and the social environments that shape users' behavior.

From the perspective of character education, this situation demonstrates that technological proficiency should not be equated with moral maturity. Individuals may possess advanced skills in accessing, processing, and distributing information without necessarily considering the ethical implications of their actions. Digital literacy must therefore extend beyond technical competence to include the ability to evaluate information, understand different perspectives, regulate behavior, and make responsible decisions. Sugiarto and Farid (2023) reinforce this argument by emphasizing that digital literacy cannot optimally support character development when it focuses exclusively on technological skills without incorporating moral values, ethical awareness, and positive communication practices.

Theoretically, this issue can be examined through Lickona's (2011) framework of character education, which conceptualizes character as an integration of *moral knowing, moral feeling,* and *moral action*. In digital environments, *moral knowing* refers to understanding principles such as honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and respect for others' rights. *Moral feeling* involves empathy, emotional awareness, and concern for the consequences of digital behavior for others. Meanwhile, *moral action* is reflected in concrete practices, such as verifying information before sharing it, respecting differing opinions, acknowledging information sources, and refraining from cyberbullying. These dimensions must be developed simultaneously to ensure that character education moves beyond normative knowledge and becomes evident in everyday digital behavior.

Within this framework, families and schools face new challenges because character formation increasingly occurs in environments that are not entirely under their control. Students encounter competing, and sometimes contradictory, values through content creators, online communities, influencers, and digital peer groups. Consequently, character education cannot rely solely on moral instruction or restrictions on digital device usage. Instead, educational practices must cultivate students' reflective capacities to understand the reasoning behind moral principles, evaluate the consequences of their actions, and take responsibility for their decisions. The shifting spaces of character formation therefore require a reconstruction of character education that connects families, schools, communities, and digital environments. The principal contribution of this discussion is the recognition that digital spaces should be treated as substantive educational environments rather than supplementary instruments for conventional learning. Character education that responds to contemporary developments must integrate digital experiences into moral reflection, behavioral habituation, and the development of social responsibility. Such an approach can support the consistent enactment of character across different contexts, whether individuals interact face-to-face or participate in digital environments.

B. Threats to Academic and Personal Integrity

The second theme highlights the significant challenges that digital technology presents to the academic and personal integrity of Generation Z. The ease of accessing information, copying online materials, using text-processing applications, and employing generative artificial intelligence has transformed how students and university learners complete academic assignments. These technologies offer opportunities to improve learning efficiency, expand access to knowledge, and facilitate the development of ideas. However, the same conveniences can also create opportunities for plagiarism, misrepresentation of academic work, cognitive dependency, and the use of information without adequate verification. The central issue is not technology itself but the relationship between technological convenience, academic achievement pressures, ethical understanding, and individuals' capacity to take responsibility for their work and its outcomes.

Sukowati and Suciptaningsih (2024), in their discussion of plagiarism in academic writing, identify the ease of copying and pasting online materials as one factor that may encourage academic misconduct. Meanwhile, research on Generation Z's learning habits, as cited by Silitonga and Tampomuri (2024, as cited in Buletin K-PIN, 2024), raises concerns about the tendency to reproduce information directly without sufficient analysis and synthesis. These perspectives underscore the importance of developing critical thinking, source evaluation, and intellectual responsibility alongside access to digital information.

Nevertheless, it is important to avoid generalizing that Generation Z inherently possesses lower academic integrity than previous generations. Plagiarism and academic dishonesty are also influenced by institutional cultures, achievement pressures, assignment design, the availability of academic guidance, and the clarity of policies governing technology use. Academic misconduct should therefore not be explained solely as an individual character deficiency. Rather, it should be examined through the interaction of personal, technological, and educational factors. This approach is essential because strengthening integrity requires more than imposing sanctions; it also requires addressing the conditions that enable misconduct.

These challenges have become more complex with the emergence of generative artificial intelligence. Such technologies can help users understand difficult concepts, develop writing outlines, improve language structure, and explore alternative arguments. However, when their use is not accompanied by transparency and ethical judgment, the boundaries between technological assistance and the replacement of intellectual responsibility may become blurred. When students delegate their thinking entirely to artificial intelligence systems, the problem extends beyond the originality of their work. It also involves the loss of opportunities to develop analytical abilities, construct independent arguments, and reflect critically on the knowledge they acquire.

In this context, academic integrity should be understood as a commitment to honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and moral courage throughout the learning process. Integrity cannot be measured solely by the absence of plagiarism. It also involves transparency regarding technology use, accurate attribution of sources, the ability to defend one's arguments, and a willingness to acknowledge the limitations of one's knowledge. Accordingly, students who use artificial intelligence transparently, critically, and in accordance with institutional policies may demonstrate stronger academic integrity than those who use the technology to avoid learning and conceal the origins of their intellectual contributions.

This phenomenon can be analyzed through Lickona's (2011) character education framework. At the level of *moral knowing*, students are expected to understand the distinction between acceptable academic assistance and practices that violate academic integrity. At the level of *moral feeling*, they need to recognize that plagiarism and academic misrepresentation harm themselves, the academic community, and those who originally produced the knowledge being used. At the level of *moral action*, they must consistently acknowledge sources, verify information, disclose the use of artificial intelligence in accordance with institutional policies, and maintain responsibility for the work they submit.

This framework helps explain the gap between moral knowledge and actual behavior. Individuals may understand that plagiarism constitutes an ethical violation but still engage in it when facing time constraints, performance pressures, or the perception that technology-assisted misconduct is difficult to detect. Academic integrity problems do not necessarily arise from ignorance of ethical standards; they may also emerge when moral understanding is insufficiently internalized to guide decisions in situations that offer immediate practical advantages. Character education must therefore strengthen ethical decision-making, self-regulation, and accountability for the consequences of individual actions.

The practical implications are that educational institutions need to develop academic integrity policies that respond to advances in artificial intelligence. Such policies should distinguish between permitted, restricted, and prohibited uses of technology according to learning objectives and the nature of academic assignments. Furthermore, assessment practices should not focus exclusively on final products but should also consider the processes through which academic work is developed. These processes may include progress documentation, individual reflection, oral discussions, source verification, and explanations of how arguments were constructed. Such strategies can strengthen academic accountability without treating technology as an inherent threat that must always be rejected.

Strengthening academic integrity in the digital era therefore requires a shift from surveillance-oriented approaches toward the development of ethical awareness and intellectual responsibility. The conceptual contribution of this theme lies in the argument that digital integrity involves the capacity to use technology productively without relinquishing moral responsibility for the processes, decisions, and outcomes involved. This form of integrity provides an essential foundation for developing honest individuals and responsible citizens in knowledge-based societies.

C. Digital Citizenship as an Extension of Social Responsibility

The third theme conceptualizes digital citizenship as an extension of civic responsibility within an increasingly interconnected society. Digital transformation has changed how individuals access public information, express aspirations, build solidarity, participate in political discussions, and respond to social issues. Generation Z has opportunities to engage with various civic issues through social media, online discussion forums, digital petitions, social campaigns, and internet-based advocacy. These developments demonstrate that civic participation is no longer confined to formal institutions or face-to-face interactions but also takes place in digital spaces that facilitate the wider circulation of ideas and the mobilization of public support.

Bangun (2024) suggests that Generation Z's understanding of citizenship has undergone significant transformation alongside digitalization, particularly in the ways civic participation and expression are conducted. However, the expansion of opportunities for digital participation does not automatically ensure substantive civic awareness. High levels of visible online activity do not necessarily indicate a deep understanding of public issues, the ability to evaluate information, or a commitment to participating in decision-making processes. Similarly, the popularity of an issue

on social media does not necessarily translate into sustained collective action to address the problem being discussed.

In the context of political participation, Gultom and Iswahyudi (2025) highlight concerns regarding Generation Z's political engagement, including electoral abstention. This issue should be interpreted cautiously because access to digital information cannot be considered the sole determinant of whether individuals exercise their voting rights. Political participation is also influenced by institutional trust, perceived political efficacy, the quality of political representation, political experiences, and socioeconomic conditions. The gap between access to information and political engagement is therefore more appropriately understood as an indication that digital access needs to be connected with political education, political efficacy, and meaningful opportunities for participation.

This issue reveals a fundamental distinction between digital activity and responsible digital citizenship. Posting political opinions, sharing news, or supporting a campaign may constitute forms of civic expression. However, the quality of such participation should also be assessed through the ability to understand the substance of public issues, verify information, respect others' rights, and consider the social consequences of individual actions. Digital participation without these competencies may develop into symbolic activism, the circulation of misinformation, identity-based polarization, or temporary engagement that produces little sustained social change.

Ribble's (2015) framework of nine elements of digital citizenship provides a useful foundation for understanding this complexity. The framework encompasses digital access, digital commerce, digital communication, digital literacy, digital etiquette, digital law, digital rights and responsibilities, digital health and wellness, and digital security. These elements demonstrate that digital citizenship is a multidimensional concept connecting technological competence with awareness of rights, obligations, norms, and social consequences in digital environments.

Within the context of character education, Ribble's framework needs to be operationalized through learning experiences that help students apply these principles to real-life situations. Digital literacy, for example, should not merely teach students how to access and evaluate information but also develop their ability to distinguish facts, opinions, and manipulated information. Digital etiquette involves more than polite communication; it also requires respect for human dignity, diverse perspectives, and individuals' rights to express their opinions. Meanwhile, digital rights and responsibilities should be translated into an understanding that freedom of expression must be exercised with due consideration for the rights of others and the legal and social consequences of digital actions.

Digital citizenship should also be examined through the perspective of deliberative democracy. From this standpoint, the quality of public participation is determined not simply by the number of individuals expressing opinions but also by the quality of argumentation, openness to different perspectives, and willingness to consider the reasons presented by others. Digital environments have the potential to expand deliberative opportunities by enabling individuals from diverse backgrounds to interact beyond geographical boundaries. Nevertheless, this potential may be undermined when platform algorithms reinforce exposure to similar viewpoints, online discussions become dominated by personal attacks, or emotionally charged content circulates more widely than evidence-based arguments.

Digital citizenship education should therefore integrate critical thinking, democratic dialogue, and social responsibility. Students need to learn not only how to avoid harmful online

behavior but also how to use digital spaces to pursue public interests ethically. Relevant learning activities may include digital-source-based public policy analysis, fact-checking political information, discussions of civic issues involving competing perspectives, and collaborative projects addressing community problems. Through these activities, technology becomes not merely a communication medium but also a platform for democratic learning and the practical exercise of civic responsibility.

The international comparison presented by Choi and Lee (2023), concerning the integration of digital citizenship education into South Korea's curriculum reform, offers an important perspective on the role of educational policy. Developing digital citizenship requires systemic support through curricula, teacher professional development, learning resources, and appropriate evaluation mechanisms. Nevertheless, practices from other countries cannot be adopted mechanically without considering the characteristics of the educational system, social conditions, and digital challenges in Indonesia. National policy development must account for unequal access to technology, differences in school capacity, cultural contexts, and the need to ground civic education in Pancasila and the Indonesian Constitution.

Digital citizenship should therefore be understood as an extension of social responsibility rather than merely the relocation of civic activities from physical to online environments. The principal contribution of this discussion is the argument that meaningful digital participation requires the integration of information competence, ethical awareness, deliberative capacity, and an orientation toward the public interest. Through this integration, Generation Z can develop beyond active technology users into critical, inclusive, responsible digital citizens capable of contributing to democratic life.

D. Strategic Directions for Strengthening Generation Z's Digital Character

The synthesis of the preceding themes demonstrates that strengthening Generation Z's digital character cannot be achieved through fragmented interventions. The transformation of socialization spaces requires adjustments to educational environments; threats to academic integrity demand stronger ethical awareness; and the expansion of digital citizenship requires the development of social responsibility and democratic participation. These challenges are interconnected because digital behavior emerges through interactions among personal values, technology-use habits, group norms, and institutional regulations. Character-strengthening strategies should therefore be designed as systematic, sustainable, and collaborative approaches involving multiple socialization environments.

Agustini and Sucihati (2020) propose five components for implementing character education: socialization, regulatory development, capacity building, implementation and collaboration, and monitoring and evaluation. This framework can be adapted to develop a digital character ecosystem that extends beyond communicating values to ensuring that those values are supported by policies, educational practices, and evaluation mechanisms. Within this framework, the role of teachers, as emphasized by Sapdi (2023), is particularly important. Teachers function not only as knowledge providers but also as facilitators of moral reflection, guides for responsible technology use, and role models for ethical digital behavior.

Based on this synthesis, this study proposes a conceptual model for strengthening Generation Z's digital character built around three principal pillars: family, school, and educational policy. These pillars operate within a broader digital environment and are directed toward the development of digital integrity as the intended outcome. The model positions the family as the foundation of moral habits, the school as an environment for developing competencies and reinforcing behavior, and policy as the structural framework that supports consistent implementation.

First, the family pillar provides the foundation for character development and digital habits. Families constitute the initial environment in which individuals learn honesty, responsibility, respect, self-regulation, and concern for others. In digital contexts, these functions can be realized through guided technology use, open discussions about the benefits and risks of digital platforms, the habit of verifying information before sharing it, and parental modeling of ethical communication. Family guidance should not be limited to restricting screen time or prohibiting particular platforms. Instead, it should develop children's capacity to make independent and responsible decisions.

In relation to Lickona's (2011) framework, families contribute to *moral knowing* by introducing values and norms, *moral feeling* by fostering empathy and concern, and *moral action* by encouraging honest and responsible behavior. These dimensions enable moral values to be internalized through everyday experiences rather than verbal instruction alone. Accordingly, the effectiveness of family guidance should be assessed not only through children's compliance with rules but also through their ability to explain the ethical reasoning behind their decisions when using technology.

Second, the school pillar provides a systematic environment for integrating digital literacy, character education, and digital citizenship. Schools occupy a strategic position because they can connect conceptual knowledge with structured learning experiences. Such integration should extend beyond technical instruction concerning devices and applications to include information evaluation, communication ethics, academic integrity, personal data protection, social responsibility, and civic participation in digital environments.

Implementation can take place through cross-curricular integration, case-based learning, ethical dilemma discussions, digital citizenship projects, and assignments that require responsible use of information sources. In Pancasila and Citizenship Education, for example, students can analyze the spread of misinformation, evaluate arguments in public debates, or design digital campaigns to raise awareness of social issues in their communities. These activities connect civic knowledge with practical experiences while developing reflective, deliberative, and collaborative competencies.

Schools also need to strengthen teachers' professional capacities through training that integrates digital literacy, pedagogy, character education, and the ethics of artificial intelligence. Teachers require adequate understanding to guide students in evaluating AI-generated outputs, identifying inaccurate information, and using generative AI appropriately in learning activities. This approach should be supported by clear, proportionate, and consistently implemented academic policies so that students understand the boundaries of acceptable technology use without losing opportunities to benefit productively from digital innovation.

Third, the educational policy pillar provides the structural framework for ensuring the sustainability and consistency of digital character development. Family and school initiatives face limitations when they are not supported by clear policies on digital literacy, academic integrity, digital security, and digital citizenship. Educational policies should establish an integrated direction for the competencies to be developed, recommended learning practices, student protection, and indicators for evaluating program effectiveness. The international experience discussed by Choi and Lee (2023) illustrates the relevance of curricular support and teacher professional development in strengthening digital citizenship education.

In Indonesia, these policies should be aligned with Pancasila, national educational objectives, and principles of human rights and civic responsibility. Policy development should not

focus exclusively on controlling technological risks but should also ensure equitable opportunities to access quality digital education. This is particularly important because disparities in technological access, institutional capacity, and teachers' digital competencies may create unequal opportunities for students to develop critical and responsible technology-use practices.

Effective policies also require monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that measure behavioral change rather than merely the availability of devices or the frequency of learning-platform use. Evaluation indicators may include students' ability to verify information, adherence to academic integrity principles, the quality of digital communication, respect for differing perspectives, digital security awareness, and participation in social projects. Appropriate assessment methods may combine performance-based assessments, student reflections, observations, digital portfolios, and program evaluations. This approach enables policies to be refined on the basis of evidence concerning changes in competencies and behavior.

These three pillars are mutually reinforcing and cannot operate optimally in isolation. Families can establish moral foundations, but schools must provide opportunities to apply those values in learning and social interactions. Schools can develop digital competencies, but their implementation requires regulatory support, adequate resources, and teacher capacity development. Meanwhile, policies can establish standards, but their effectiveness ultimately depends on the ability of families and schools to translate those standards into meaningful educational experiences.

Based on these relationships, this study proposes digital integrity as the conceptual outcome of integrating character education, digital literacy, and digital citizenship. Digital integrity is defined here as an individual's consistent application of honesty, responsibility, respect for others, and accountability when using technology in academic activities and social life. This definition emphasizes that digital integrity is not merely the ability to avoid misconduct but also the capacity to make ethical decisions and take responsibility for one's actions in diverse digital situations.

Conceptually, digital integrity comprises at least four interrelated dimensions. First, digital honesty refers to consistency in communicating accurate information, attributing sources, and using technology without misrepresenting intellectual contributions. Second, digital responsibility concerns the willingness to consider the consequences of one's actions and remain accountable for behavior in digital environments. Third, digital respect involves recognizing the dignity, rights, privacy, and diverse perspectives of others. Fourth, responsible digital participation refers to the ability to use technology to engage critically, ethically, and constructively in social and civic life.

These four dimensions represent conceptual propositions derived from the literature synthesis in this study rather than a validated measurement instrument. Further research is therefore required to establish operational indicators, examine relationships among the dimensions, and assess the model's applicability within the Indonesian educational context. From a theoretical perspective, the proposed model connects character education, digital literacy, and digital citizenship within an integrated conceptual framework oriented toward integrity. This connection extends approaches to character education that have traditionally focused on the internalization of general moral values by positioning digital environments as an important context for the enactment of moral principles. At the same time, the model extends digital literacy beyond technological competence and information evaluation toward ethical responsibility, while positioning digital citizenship as a setting in which character is enacted through constructive social participation.

From a practical perspective, the model provides direction for developing educational programs that connect family-based guidance, school-based learning, and policy support. However, the effectiveness of the model cannot be assumed solely on the basis of its conceptual coherence. Future empirical research should examine how the three pillars interact, which contextual conditions strengthen or weaken their implementation, and to what extent digital integrity can be developed through structured educational interventions.

Ultimately, strengthening Generation Z's digital character should aim to develop individuals who are not only technologically competent but also capable of self-regulation, ethical decision-making, respect for others' rights, and responsible participation in society. Digital integrity serves as the central orientation connecting personal, academic, and civic dimensions within a character education framework that responds to the challenges of contemporary digital society.

CONCLUSION

This narrative review demonstrates that the transformation of character education in the digital era is not merely a normative discourse, but a direct consequence of the structural reality of digitalization, which has reshaped the spaces where Generation Z internalizes values. Data on internet penetration and the intensity of digital media usage confirm that much of the value-formation process now occurs within a digital ecosystem that lacks pedagogical curation. In this context, Generation Z faces a dual challenge: the erosion of academic and personal integrity facilitated by the convenience of technology and a diminished sense of civic responsibility within digital spaces, despite the widespread availability of information. Integrating Lickona's (2011) character education framework with Ribble's (2015) digital citizenship framework provides a coherent conceptual pathway to address both challenges holistically. This is achieved through the concept of "digital integrity," which bridges internal moral dimensions with social responsibility in cyberspace. Practically, this review recommends that schools and educational policymakers explicitly incorporate digital citizenship into character education curricula, supported by active collaboration from families in providing digital guidance from an early age. A limitation of this study is its conceptual nature, as it is based on a synthesis of existing literature rather than empirical field data that would directly test the effectiveness of the proposed three-pillar model. Consequently, further empirical research such as large-scale surveys or case studies within educational institutions is essential to test and refine the model for strengthening digital integrity and civic responsibility among Generation Z, as formulated in this review.

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