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Literature Study on the Influence of Social Media on the Increase in Early Marriage Rates Among Contemporary Adolescents

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Article Info

Abstract

Early marriage remains a significant global and national challenge despite tightened legal regulations. This study aims to analyze the influence of social media on the increasing trend of early marriage among contemporary adolescents, identify the dominant factors within digital platforms that drive the decision to marry young, and outline the negative impacts from social, psychological, and legal perspectives. The method used is a literature study with a descriptive-qualitative approach, examining various policy documents, reports from international organizations (UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA), and relevant previous research findings. The results indicate that social media, particularly TikTok and Instagram, acts as a catalyst through the glorification of "young marriage" content and unrealistic "wedding goals" narratives. Dominant factors found include social comparison mechanisms, the influence of algorithms that create visual echo chambers, and low digital literacy among adolescents. Identified negative impacts encompass reproductive health risks, intergenerational poverty, identity crises, and vulnerability to domestic violence. This study concludes that social media has reconstructed the meaning of early marriage from a mere personal choice into a digital lifestyle trend, necessitating the strengthening of digital literacy and more intensive parental supervision.

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1. Introduction

Child marriage internationally refers to a legal marriage or marriage-like relationship that occurs before a person reaches the age of 18. This is considered a violation of human rights because it hinders the physical, emotional, and social development of children who are not yet ready to live as a family. According to UNICEF and UNFPA, approximately 640 million women worldwide are married before the age of 18. Among women aged 20–24, approximately 1 in 5 are victims of early marriage (UNICEF, 2023; UNFPA, 2022) [25, 23]. Although global rates are declining, this progress is not fast enough to eliminate early marriage by 2030 in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 5.3 (UNICEF, 2023) [25].

In Indonesia, the minimum age for marriage was tightened through Law No. 16 of 2019, which sets the age limit at 19 years for both men and women. This aims to ensure that they are physically, mentally, and socially ready before getting married. However, marriages below the legal age still occur. Data from BPS and KemenPPPA in 2024 shows that 5.9% of women aged 20–24 were married before the age of 18. This figure has decreased compared to before, but it still requires attention, as it previously reached 10% or about 1 in 9 women (MPR RI, 2023) [15].

The impact of early marriage is extensive and complex. In terms of health, pregnancy at a young age increases the risk of complications during childbirth that can endanger both the mother and the baby (UNFPA, 2022) [23]. Children of young mothers are also at greater risk of stunted growth and developmental problems because the mother's body is not ready or does not have

access to health services (UNICEF, 2021) [24]. Other impacts on education and the economy include many adolescents who marry early dropping out of school, difficulty finding work, and being trapped in intergenerational poverty (UNICEF, 2020) [24]. Psychologically, young couples often experience emotional pressure, stress, and the risk of depression because they are not ready for married life (Chandra, 2022) [7].

In addition to structural factors such as poverty and low access to education, social media plays a role in reinforcing the trend of early marriage among contemporary adolescents. First, from a social construction perspective, Dewi (2024) [8] research shows that romantic content displayed on social media, including wedding goals, couple videos, and narratives of ideal relationships, significantly influences adolescents' perceptions that romantic relationships and marriage are forms of success or achievement that must be attained from a young age. This study confirms that visual representations on social media can shape new social expectations and standards regarding relationships and marriage.

Second, social comparison mechanisms also play a role. Research on the Douyin platform (the Chinese version of TikTok) by Li (2024) [13] found that exposure to videos of couples showing emotional closeness, intimacy, and seemingly harmonious married life encourages adolescents to experience social comparison and fear of missing out (FOMO). This makes them feel left behind if they do not follow relationship trends or marry young, thereby increasing social pressure from the digital environment.

Third, social media facilitates intense communication in romantic relationships. A study from Jurnal Masyarakat (2023) explains that continuous, rapid, and intimate interactions through direct messages, videos, and other communication features can accelerate emotional closeness between young couples. The intensity of this communication causes relationships to develop rapidly, prompting some teenagers to make impulsive decisions, including the decision to marry, even though they do not yet have adequate psychological and social readiness.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that social media not only serves as a space for entertainment but also as a factor that shapes perceptions, social pressure, and relationship dynamics, which ultimately reinforce the tendency toward early marriage among today's teenagers.

Based on the above background, the following questions arise:

1. How do social media (Instagram, TikTok, etc.) influence the increase in early marriage among contemporary adolescents?
2. What are the dominant factors found in the literature that indicate the role of social media in shaping adolescents' decisions to marry at a young age?
3. What are the negative impacts (social, psychological, legal) of early marriage?

2. Method
This study uses a literature review method with a descriptive approach based on demographic data analysis. This approach is used to examine, compare, and interpret various data and empirical findings related to the phenomenon of early marriage and the factors that influence it, including the role of social media. The descriptive approach was chosen because it is in line with the nature of Demographic Data Analysis, which emphasizes the reading of patterns, trends, and population dynamics based on official statistical data and relevant scientific studies.

The type of data used in this study is secondary data. The data was obtained from various official sources and previously published scientific publications. Data sources include official Indonesian statistics published by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), specifically the National Socioeconomic Survey (SUSENAS), data on gender development progress, and marriage statistics. In addition, data was also obtained from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA), the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) regarding marriage registration, and the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kominfo) regarding data on internet and social media usage.

To strengthen the analysis, this study also uses reports from international institutions such as UNICEF, UNFPA, and WHO, which provide global estimates and trend analyses on child marriage and adolescent dynamics. In addition, national and international scientific publications that examine the phenomena of social media, early marriage, adolescent digital behavior, and their relationship with demographic indicators are also used as key references.

Data collection was conducted through literature searches of various national and international journal portals, such as reputable scientific journals, official agency reports, and national and global statistical documents. Literature selection was carried out selectively, taking into account the relevance of the topic, the credibility of the source, and its suitability to the focus of the study on early marriage, social media, and adolescent characteristics.

The selected literature and data were then extracted to obtain statistical information and key findings, such as age at first marriage, the proportion of women aged 20–24 who married before the age of 18, the distribution of age at marriage by region, education, and socioeconomic characteristics, and trends in early marriage over the years. In addition, information was also collected on the level of adolescent exposure to social media, the dominant types of platforms, the characteristics of content that influence perceptions of marriage, and relevant digital social mechanisms.

3. Literature Review
3.1. Concept of Early Marriage and Contemporary Adolescents
Early marriage is a complex socio-legal and psychological phenomenon. From a legal perspective, the Indonesian Government through Law No. 16 of 2019 defines marriage as permissible only when both men and women have reached the minimum age of 19, aiming to ensure physical and mental readiness. This national regulation aligns with international standards from UNICEF (2021) [24] and UNFPA (2020) [23], which define child marriage as any formal or informal union occurring before the age of 18. Psychologically, marriage at this stage is considered premature because adolescents are still in the process of identity formation and generally lack emotional maturity and stable coping mechanisms to handle marital responsibilities (UNICEF, 2021) [24].

Adolescence itself is recognized as a critical transitional period characterized by biological, emotional, and cognitive changes. WHO (2020) [29] and UNICEF (2021) [24] classify adolescents as individuals aged 10–19 years, while Indonesian institutions such as BKKBN (2019) [5] and the Ministry of Health (2014) [11] extend or adjust this range.

These varying definitions indicate that adolescents represent a heterogeneous group that requires developmentally appropriate protection policies, particularly in relation to marriage and reproductive health.

Contemporary adolescents, commonly referred to as Generation Z, are distinguished by their strong attachment to digital environments. UNESCO (2017) [22] characterizes this generation as digital natives whose daily lives are deeply embedded in cyberspace. OECD (2019) [18] highlights that intensive internet use shapes adolescent identity construction, where social media functions as a primary arena for social validation. This condition increases adolescents' vulnerability to social comparison processes, influencing their perceptions of romantic relationships and marriage ideals.

3.2. Determinants and Negative Impacts of Early Marriage

Early marriage is driven by multiple interconnected structural factors. United Nations (2015) [27] emphasizes poverty as a major determinant, where economically vulnerable families tend to marry off children as a survival strategy. UNICEF (2021) [24] further reports that low educational attainment and school dropout rates are strongly correlated with higher risks of early marriage. Cultural norms and gender inequality also play significant roles, positioning marriage as a mechanism to preserve family honor and control adolescent sexuality (UNFPA, 2020) [23].

The impacts of early marriage are multidimensional and often long-term. WHO (2020) [29] documents that complications during pregnancy and childbirth are among the leading causes of death for girls aged 15–19, due to biological immaturity. UNFPA (2020) [23] identifies long-term socioeconomic consequences, particularly disrupted education and limited employment opportunities. Psychologically, early marriage increases vulnerability to stress, depression, and domestic violence, reflecting unequal power relations within young marriages (UNICEF, 2021) [24].

3.3. Social Media, Communication Theory, and Adolescent Behavior

Social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have become primary social environments for contemporary adolescents. These platforms facilitate content creation, interaction, and rapid dissemination of lifestyle narratives, enabling adolescents to be continuously exposed to trends, values, and behavioral models.

The influence of social media on adolescent behavior can be explained through Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) [6], which states that individuals learn behaviors by observing models presented in their environment, including digital figures such as influencers. In addition, Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) [9] explains that adolescents tend to evaluate themselves by comparing their lives to curated online representations. This mechanism can foster unrealistic expectations regarding relationships and marriage, potentially encouraging impulsive life decisions.

3.4. Relationship Between Social Media and Early Marriage

Social media acts as a catalyst that strengthens both direct and indirect pathways toward early marriage. Wahyuni *et al.* (2025) [28] show that the intensity of social media use correlates significantly with adolescents' decisions to engage in early romantic relationships and marriage. Platforms facilitate unsupervised emotional interactions, accelerating intimacy and attachment processes.

Indirectly, social media glorifies "young marriage" narratives through aestheticized wedding content and influencer lifestyles. Azkia *et al.* (2025) [4] demonstrate that exposure to romanticized marriage portrayals on TikTok constructs marriage as a desirable lifestyle choice detached from its responsibilities. Similarly, Alexander *et al.* (2019) [2] found that Instagram exposure increases adolescents' interest in early marriage by framing it as a pathway to emotional security and social recognition.

3.5. Reinforcing Factors: Digital Literacy and Parental Supervision

The impact of social media on early marriage tendencies is amplified by low digital literacy and weak parental supervision. Rambe (2023) [20] reports that multi-platform exposure without critical digital skills significantly increases adolescents' susceptibility to early marriage narratives. Adolescents lacking evaluative abilities tend to accept idealized representations of marriage uncritically.

Furthermore, Muliyah *et al.* (2024) [17] emphasize that limited parental involvement in adolescents' digital lives increases vulnerability to unhealthy virtual relationships. Weak parental monitoring allows social media to become a primary reference point for emotional decision-making, positioning early marriage as an escape mechanism rather than a mature life choice.

4. Results and Discussion
4.1. The Influence of Social Media on the Increase in Early Marriage among Contemporary Adolescents

Based on the results of the literature review, social media plays a significant role in shaping adolescents' perceptions of romantic relationships and marriage. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and other visual-based social media present content that depicts romantic relationships in an aesthetic, harmonious, and conflict-free manner, thereby creating an idealized image of married life. Such content tends to emphasize aspects of happiness, emotional stability, and social validation, without showing the complexity of actual household responsibilities (Mau, 2024) [16].

Research on content related to young couples and marriage on social media shows that romantic videos and narratives of "ideal couples" have a strong emotional impact on teenagers. Repeated exposure to such content encourages a process of identification and imitation, whereby teenagers begin to view marriage as a life goal that must be achieved immediately. In this context, love is represented as something easy, enjoyable, and risk-free, thereby influencing how teenagers perceive long-term commitment (Agustin, 2025) [1].

Furthermore, studies on digital culture on TikTok show that the platform's algorithm plays a role in reinforcing exposure to content about early marriage. When teenagers show interest in romantic content, the algorithm system will continue to display similar videos, including narratives about "viral couples getting married young" who are portrayed as symbols of social and emotional success. This pattern normalizes early marriage as a digital lifestyle trend, rather than a decision based on psychological and economic readiness (Sholeha, *et al.*, 2025) [21].

These findings are in line with legal studies showing that even though the state has set a minimum age for marriage, the

practice of early marriage continues to increase through dispensation mechanisms. Social media indirectly reinforces this trend by constructing a discourse that marrying young is normal and even something to be proud of, especially for teenagers who are still in the process of finding their identity (Ati *et al.*, 2024) [10]

4.2. Dominant Factors Indicating the Role of Social Media in Encouraging Early Marriage

Based on a synthesis of various journals reviewed, there are several dominant factors that indicate how social media contributes to encouraging the trend of early marriage among teenagers. First, the idealization of marriage and romantic relationships. Social media content often portrays domestic life as harmonious and full of romantic surprises, thereby creating unrealistic expectations. Teenagers then view marriage as an instant solution to obtain happiness and emotional stability, without understanding the dynamics of conflict and responsibility that come with it (Agustin, 2025) [1].

Second, social comparison and the need for recognition. Social media encourages teenagers to compare their personal lives with representations of ideal couples in the digital world. This process of comparison triggers a desire to imitate the lifestyle of "young adults," including the desire to get married, in order to gain social validation in the form of likes, comments, and public recognition (Sholeha, *et al.*, 2025) [21].

Third, the pressure of algorithms and digital culture. Social media algorithms create echo chambers that reinforce certain narratives. Teenagers who frequently consume romantic content will continue to be inundated with similar content, reinforcing the view that marrying young is normal and attractive (Mau, 2024) [16].

Fourth, low digital media literacy. Several studies show that teenagers do not yet have the critical ability to distinguish between reality and content that has been curated for the sake of popularity. As a result, wedding content on social media is considered a true representation of married life, when in fact most of it has undergone editing and a certain narrative construction (Agustin, 2025) [1].

Fifth, mutually reinforcing social and legal factors. Legal studies on marriage dispensations reveal that weak family supervision, social pressure, economic factors, and certain religious interpretations contribute to the practice of early marriage. Social media reinforces these factors by portraying early marriage as something normal and socially beneficial (Ati *et al.*, 2024) [10].

4.3. Social, Psychological, and Legal Impacts of Early Marriage

The literature consistently shows that early marriage has multidimensional negative impacts, especially when influenced by social media narratives. From a social perspective, marriage at a young age often leads to the termination of formal education and limited access to employment opportunities. This condition increases vulnerability to structural poverty and long-term economic dependence (Mau, 2024) [16].

From a psychological perspective, the discrepancy between the expectations created by social media and the reality of married life often triggers stress, anxiety, and depression. Young married teenagers are also at risk of experiencing an identity crisis because they have to take on adult roles before their psychological development is complete. Studies based

on digital media show that this emotional immaturity increases the potential for conflict and relationship instability (Agustin, 2025) [1].

Meanwhile, from a legal perspective, early marriage has the potential to violate the minimum age requirements stipulated in the Marriage Law. Although marriage dispensations are possible, this practice demonstrates the weakness of the child protection system. Adolescents who marry underage risk losing their rights to education and legal protection, as well as facing administrative problems, including invalid marriage registrations and minimal protection in cases of domestic violence (Ati *et al.*, 2024) [10].

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the literature study, it can be concluded that early marriage among contemporary adolescents is a complex phenomenon influenced by the interaction between psychological, social, legal, and digital factors. Social media not only functions as a means of entertainment and communication, but also as a new social space that shapes the construction of meaning of marriage for adolescents. Visual representations of ideal domestic life, stories of young couples, and the glorification of early marriage create a false perception that marrying young is a symbol of success and happiness.

The mechanisms of social comparison and fear of missing out (FOMO), reinforced by social media algorithms, encourage adolescents to make impulsive relational decisions. The intensity of digital communication also accelerates emotional closeness without being balanced by psychological readiness and family guidance. Low digital literacy further increases adolescents' vulnerability to romantic narratives that do not reflect the reality of the responsibilities of marriage.

Overall, the literature shows that early marriage has significant negative impacts, including the risk of dropping out of school, economic instability, reproductive health problems, psychological stress, and legal vulnerability. Therefore, prevention efforts cannot rely solely on marriage age regulations, but must be accompanied by strengthening digital literacy, education on healthy relationships, and the active involvement of families and educational institutions in monitoring adolescents' interactions in the digital space.

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