

PROSOCIAL MEDIA, PARENTAL BEHAVIORAL CONTROL, AND STUDENTS' CHARACTER BUILDING IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract: The development of students' character increasingly occurs within interconnected digital and family environments. This systematic literature review examines the contribution of exposure to prosocial media and parental behavioral control to character building among school students. The evidence base consisted of 24 publications, including 20 studies from two predefined literature corpora and four additional internationally verified studies. Narrative-comparative synthesis was employed because the studies varied substantially in media measures, parenting constructs, samples, and character-related outcomes. Findings indicate that media effects depend strongly on content. Studies specifically addressing prosocial media consistently associate such exposure with empathy, helping behavior, and other prosocial outcomes, whereas studies measuring general social-media use produce mixed positive, negative, and nonsignificant findings. Parental behavioral control may support discipline, future planning, self-regulation, and reduced risk behavior when implemented through clear monitoring and proportionate behavioral boundaries. Excessive or autonomy-restricting control may produce less adaptive outcomes. The synthesis suggests a complementary mechanism in which prosocial media provides behavioral models while parental behavioral control regulates exposure and supports internal self-regulation. Direct empirical tests of their combined effect on character building, however, remain limited.

Keywords: prosocial media, parental behavioral control, character building, prosocial behavior, self-regulation, empathy, adolescents.

Abstrak: Pembentukan karakter siswa semakin terjadi dalam lingkungan digital dan keluarga yang saling terhubung. Tinjauan pustaka sistematis ini mengkaji kontribusi paparan terhadap media prososial dan kontrol perilaku orang tua terhadap pembentukan karakter di kalangan siswa sekolah. Basis bukti terdiri dari 24 publikasi, termasuk 20 studi dari dua kumpulan literatur yang telah ditentukan sebelumnya dan empat studi tambahan yang telah diverifikasi secara internasional. Sintesis naratif-komparatif digunakan karena penelitian-penelitian tersebut sangat bervariasi dalam hal pengukuran media, konstruk pengasuhan, sampel, dan hasil yang berkaitan dengan karakter. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa efek media sangat bergantung pada konten. Penelitian yang secara khusus membahas media

prososial secara konsisten mengaitkan paparan tersebut dengan empati, perilaku membantu, dan hasil prososial lainnya, sedangkan penelitian yang mengukur penggunaan media sosial secara umum menghasilkan temuan yang beragam, baik positif, negatif, maupun tidak signifikan. Pengendalian perilaku oleh orang tua dapat mendukung disiplin, perencanaan masa depan, pengaturan diri, serta mengurangi perilaku berisiko apabila diterapkan melalui pemantauan yang jelas dan batasan perilaku yang proporsional. Pengendalian yang berlebihan atau yang membatasi otonomi dapat menimbulkan hasil yang kurang adaptif. Sintesis ini menunjukkan adanya mekanisme komplementer di mana media prososial menyediakan model perilaku, sementara pengendalian perilaku oleh orang tua mengatur paparan terhadap media tersebut dan mendukung pengaturan diri internal. Namun, pengujian empiris langsung terhadap efek gabungan keduanya terhadap pembentukan karakter masih terbatas.

Kata kunci: media prososial, pengendalian perilaku oleh orang tua, pembentukan karakter, perilaku prososial, pengaturan diri, empati, remaja.

INTRODUCTION

Students' character building increasingly takes place within a social environment that extends beyond the boundaries of the family and the school. Digital technology enables students to engage with values, behaviors, and social models through the media they consume every day. Social media, videos, digital games, influencers, and various forms of online communication can display helping behavior, cooperation, empathy, tolerance, and responsibility, but also behaviors that contradict these values.¹ At the same time, the family retains a central position in regulating children's behavior through monitoring, rules, boundary setting, communication, and parental involvement. These changes mean that character building can no longer be understood merely as an outcome of formal education. Students' character develops through the encounter between the messages received through media and the parental behavioral control exercised at home. Both media use and parental behavioral control practices are associated with discipline, morality, prosocial behavior, social adjustment, bullying, substance abuse, and character development.²

¹ Mainita, Y. Santi, and I. Murdani, "The Importance of Positive Culture in Students' Character Education in the Digitalization Era" (2025), <https://doi.org/10.26811/4m228f91>.

² J. Jamaluddin and A. Sukandar, "The Dynamics of Family's Role in Character Formation," *Urwatul Wutsqo: Jurnal Studi Kependidikan dan Keislaman* 14, no. 3 (2025): 959–71, <https://doi.org/10.54437/urwatulwutsqo.v14i3.2443>.

The strengthening of students' character essentially occurs through interrelated relationships among the family, the school, and the social environment that shape students' daily experiences.³ Parental support and the quality of the school environment have been found to be related to the building of disciplined character, which indicates that character develops through monitoring, habituation, and consistent social experiences.⁴ Similar findings appear in the relationship of parenting style and the school environment with the moral conduct of junior high school students.⁵ Parental attention is also related to character building among junior high school and elementary school students, so family involvement remains a foundation in the development of children's values and behavior.⁶ In more structured educational settings, parental attention and school culture are likewise related to the character building of Islamic boarding school students (santri), while the religious climate of madrasah provides space for the habituation of values that support students' character development.⁷ Character strengthening is also associated with role modeling and the quality of social interaction, as shown by the links between worship habituation, the role of parents, teachers' role

³ A. Hamsiah, "The Process of Character Development in Early Children: The Role of Family, School, and Community in Perspective," *Klasikal: Journal of Education, Language Teaching and Science* 5, no. 2 (2023): 452–58, <https://doi.org/10.52208/klasikal.v5i2.1208>.

⁴ Hamsiah, "Process of Character Development"; D. Darmawan and E. Wijayanti, "Lingkungan sekolah dan dukungan orang tua dalam pembentukan karakter disiplin siswa," *Ihsan: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 4, no. 2 (2026): 197–223, <https://doi.org/10.61104/ihsan.v4i2.5484>.

⁵ N. Laila, "The Influence of the School Environment on the Formation of Primary School Students' Character" (2024): 184–89, <https://doi.org/10.62966/ijose.vi.761>; N. R. Rahmawati and P. Utomo, "The Role of School Environment and Its Influence on Students' Discipline and Politeness Character in Primary School Students" (2024): 64–76, <https://doi.org/10.64420/ijces.v1i2.193>; D. Darmawan, A. Irsyadul'Ibad, and A. Arrisallah, "Pengaruh pola asuh orang tua dan lingkungan sekolah terhadap akhlak siswa SMP sederajat," *Didaktik: Jurnal Ilmiah PGSD STKIP Subang* 11, no. 4 (2026): 214–37, <https://doi.org/10.36989/didaktik.v11i04.11771>.

⁶ R. Sugiarti et al., "The Influence of Parenting on Building Character in Adolescents," *Heliyon* 8, no. 5 (2022): e09349, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e09349>; F. Nuriyah and D. Darmawan, "Pengaruh perhatian orang tua terhadap karakter siswa setingkat menengah pertama," *Jurnal Media Akademik (JMA)* 2, no. 12 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.62281/v2i12.1407>; D. Darmawan and N. A. Rodliyah, "Pengaruh perhatian orang tua terhadap pembentukan karakter siswa SD," *Global Education Journal* 4, no. 1 (2026): 519–28, <https://doi.org/10.59525/gej.1489>.

⁷ A. Kibtiyah et al., "The Impact of School-Parent Collaboration and Family Environment on Character Education of Students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah" (2025), <https://doi.org/10.18326/mudarrisa.v17i2.4070>; A. S. Risqi and D. Darmawan, "Pengaruh perhatian orang tua dan budaya sekolah terhadap pembentukan karakter santri di Pondok Pesantren Nurul Ikhlas Sidoarjo," *Ambarsa: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 4, no. 2 (2024): 151–61, <https://doi.org/10.59106/abs.v4i2.231>; D. Darmawan and S. M. Mahbubah, "Iklim religius madrasah dan pembentukan karakter siswa MI," *Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Pendidikan* 12, no. 3.C (2026): 245–70.

modeling, peers, and community support and students' religious behavior.⁸ School culture and teachers' personality competence further reinforce this process because both provide norms and behavioral models that students can observe and learn from.⁹ Taken together, these findings show that character building does not occur through a single source of influence, but through the interaction of multiple environments that provide behavioral models, boundaries, habituation, and value reinforcement. As students' lives become increasingly connected to digital media, this pattern of reinforcement extends to the type of content they consume and to the way parents guide and exercise behavioral control over their media use.¹⁰

Media exposure needs to be distinguished according to the content students receive. The amount of media use alone does not explain whether its influence supports or instead hinders character building.¹¹ Exposure to prosocial media refers to exposure to media content that portrays or encourages acts of helping, cooperating, showing empathy, sharing, providing support, and attending to the well-being of others.¹² The cross-national longitudinal study by Prot et al.¹³ showed that prosocial media use was positively related to helping behavior and that empathy was one of the

⁸ N. A. Mardatillah, Muh. R. T, and M. B, "Religious Program as a Medium for Moral Character Formation in Elementary School," *Indonesian Journal of Innovation Studies* (2025), <https://doi.org/10.21070/ijins.v26i4.1761>; D. Darmawan and H. Umar, "Perilaku religius siswa Madrasah Ibtidaiyah: Tinjauan atas pembiasaan ibadah, peran orang tua, keteladanan guru, teman sebaya, dan dukungan masyarakat," *Rayah Al-Islam: Jurnal Ilmu Islam* 10, no. 2 (2026): 286–302, <https://doi.org/10.37274/rais.v10i2.241>.

⁹ C. Chadija et al., "Embedding Character Education through School Culture in Islamic Junior High Schools: A Qualitative Study of Religiosity, Honesty, Tolerance, and Discipline" (2026), <https://doi.org/10.62951/ijeepa.v3i1.460>; M. Z. Yusuf and D. Darmawan, "Pengaruh budaya sekolah terhadap pembentukan karakter siswa sekolah menengah atas," *Jurnal Al-Fatih* 9, no. 1 (2026): 490–514, <https://doi.org/10.61082/alfatih.v9i1.739>; N. N. I. Nafisa and D. Darmawan, "Pengaruh kompetensi kepribadian guru terhadap pembentukan karakter setingkat sekolah menengah atas," *Karakter: Jurnal Riset Ilmu Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 2 (2025): 307–21, <https://doi.org/10.61132/karakter.v2i2.616>.

¹⁰ A. M. S. Shofwan and M. Hayeemaming, "Implementation of Character Building in the Era of Digital Technology" (2025): 25–28, <https://doi.org/10.59966/1zp0jh22>; A. T. Amelia and A. Juhana, "Literature Review: The Effectiveness of Educational Media in Building Positive Character among Students," *Sukma* 9, no. 1 (2025): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.32533/09101.2025>.

¹¹ Z. Zhang, "A Study on the Influence of Media Usage Habits of Youth Groups on the Formation of Values," *Advances in Education, Humanities and Social Science Research* (2025), <https://doi.org/10.56028/aehtsr.15.1.781.2025>.

¹² L. M. Padilla-Walker et al., "Longitudinal Associations between Parents' Prosocial Behavior and Media Use and Young Children's Prosocial Development: The Mediating Role of Children's Media Use," *Infancy* 29, no. 2 (2024): 95–112.

¹³ S. Prot et al., "Long-Term Relations among Prosocial-Media Use, Empathy, and Prosocial Behavior," *Psychological Science* 25, no. 2 (2014): 358–68, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613503854>.

mechanisms explaining this relationship. In a sample of Singaporean children and adolescents followed over two years, changes in prosocial game use were associated with changes in helping behavior through changes in empathy. These findings confirm that the analysis of media in character building needs to attend to the quality of the message, not merely the duration of use.

Experimental evidence also shows that media content can produce different social consequences. Greitemeyer and Osswald¹⁴ found that playing prosocial games increased several forms of helping behavior, while the meta-analysis by Greitemeyer and Mügge¹⁵ showed that prosocial games and violent games exhibit different directions of social association. These findings are relevant to character building because prosocial behavior can be a practical expression of empathy, care, cooperation, and social responsibility. Media can then function as one of the social learning agents that present behavioral models to students.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the capacity of media to shape character still depends on how messages are received, how often students are exposed, the characteristics of the users, and the social experiences available outside the media.

More varied results emerge because most articles do not specifically distinguish prosocial content from general social media use. Labuang et al., Aufa, Silas and Mwila, Lashire and Ringmu, Shawareb, Hermanto et al., Ichsan et al., Rusman et al., and Reysa et al.¹⁷ examined social media or technology use in relation to character, moral, social

¹⁴ T. Greitemeyer and S. Osswald, "Effects of Prosocial Video Games on Prosocial Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 98, no. 2 (2010): 211–21, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016997>.

¹⁵ T. Greitemeyer and D. O. Mügge, "Video Games Do Affect Social Outcomes: A Meta-Analytic Review of the Effects of Violent and Prosocial Video Game Play," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 40, no. 5 (2014): 578–89, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213520459>.

¹⁶ F. Xia, "Media Effects on Prosocial Thought and Behavior across the Lifespan" (2023): 290–98, <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-818872-9.00157-6>.

¹⁷ Y. A. Labuang et al., "Social Media for the Character Changing of Students in Central Basic Education 3rd Cycle in Cadson Villa Beto-Dili," *ISCE: Journal of Innovative Studies on Character and Education* 5, no. 2 (2021); M. I. Aufa, "The Influence of TikTok on the Moral Conduct of High School Students: A Case Study in MAN Purwakarta," *Heutagogia: Journal of Islamic Education* 4, no. 1 (2024): 107–21, <https://doi.org/10.14421/hjie.2024.41-08>; T. Silas and P. M. Mwila, "The Effects of Technology Adaptation on Students' Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Nyamagana District, Tanzania" (2024); A. H. Lashire and H. S. Ringmu, "The Impact of Social Media on Moral Values among Young Adults in Cameroon Secondary Schools in the Centre Region," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 8, no. 12 (2024): 162–74, <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.8120012>; I. J. Shawareb, "The Predictive Ability of Social Media Usage in Cognitive, Moral, and Social Values among Students at Amman Arab University," *Migration Letters* 21, no. 3 (2024): 463–78; A. W. Hermanto et al., "The Effect of Nurturing Program, Boarding School, and the Use of Social Media on the Character-Building of Politeknik Ilmu Pelayaran Semarang Cadets," *Applied Quantitative Analysis*

value, or discipline outcomes. Quach, Cheah, and Thaichon¹⁸ are closer to the prosocial media construct because their experimental study showed that virtual influencer characteristics and perceived authenticity can encourage donations, click-through for social causes, and willingness to support fundraising activities. This diversity of results indicates that the type of media content needs to be included in the interpretation.

Beyond the media environment, parents provide regulatory mechanisms that influence how students select, use, and respond to their social environment. Parental behavioral control differs from psychological control.¹⁹ Barber, Olsen, and Shagle²⁰ distinguished behavioral control as regulation directed at behavior through monitoring, rules, and supervision, whereas psychological control operates through control over the child's psychological experience. Behavioral control is more strongly related to externalizing behavior, whereas psychological control is more closely related to internalizing problems. This distinction is important because control that sets behavioral boundaries cannot be equated with control that suppresses psychological autonomy. In character building, behavioral control can give students a structure for learning responsibility as long as its implementation is proportionate and does not turn into intrusive control.²¹

4, no. 2 (2024): 19–31, <https://doi.org/10.31098/quant.2318>; I. Ichsan et al., "The Influence of Social Media on the Formation of Student Morals in the Digital Era," *Al-Ilmu* 1, no. 3 (2024): 12–22, <https://doi.org/10.62872/r0shk118>; A. H. Rusman, M. Rapi, and A. Maulana, "The Influence of Social Media Use and Peer Association on the Morals of Grade XI Students at SMA Negeri 9 Gowa," *Al Qalam: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan dan Kemasyarakatan* 20, no. 4 (2026): 2250–73, <https://doi.org/10.35931/aq.v20i4.6872>; R. Reysa, R. Susanti, and K. Washfiah, "The Influence of Social Media Use on Students' Morals at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 3 Tabalong, South Kalimantan," *Al Husna: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Agama Islam* 2, no. 2 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.69900/ah.v2i2.4>.

¹⁸ S. Quach, I. Cheah, and P. Thaichon, "The Power of Flattery: Enhancing Prosocial Behavior through Virtual Influencers," *Psychology & Marketing* 41, no. 7 (2024): 1629–48, <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.22001>.

¹⁹ N. Steinfeld, "Parental Mediation of Adolescent Internet Use: Combining Strategies to Promote Awareness, Autonomy and Self-Regulation in Preparing Youth for Life on the Web," *Education and Information Technologies* 26, no. 2 (2021): 1897–1920, <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10639-020-10342-W>.

²⁰ B. K. Barber, J. E. Olsen, and S. C. Shagle, "Associations between Parental Psychological and Behavioral Control and Youth Internalized and Externalized Behaviors," *Child Development* 65, no. 4 (1994): 1120–36, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.1994.tb00807.x>.

²¹ D. Shek and M. Law, "Assessment of Parent-Child Subsystem Qualities in Chinese Adolescents: Behavioral Control, Psychological Control and Parent-Child Relational Qualities," *International Journal of Child Health and Human Development* 8, no. 2 (2015): 207.

The impact of parental control does not always move in one direction. Wang, Liu, Sun, and Li²² found that parental behavioral control was positively related to future planning among rural Chinese adolescents, including through personal growth initiative and meaning in life. In contrast, Ma, Ma, and Lan²³ showed that certain forms of parental control were negatively related to academic grades and, under certain conditions, to social competence and peer acceptance. These differences confirm that the effects of control depend on the form of control, the behavioral domain being regulated, its intensity, students' characteristics, and the quality of the relationship with parents. Control that provides boundaries can be protective, whereas excessive control can hinder the development of social autonomy.

The relationship between media use and parental control becomes increasingly relevant because students face a digital environment that is difficult to supervise through prohibitions alone.²⁴ In a three-wave longitudinal study, Padilla-Walker, Coyne, and Collier²⁵ found that parental media monitoring was related to prosocial behavior, aggression, and externalizing problems through sympathy and self-regulation. Active monitoring showed a more adaptive pattern than overly strong restrictive monitoring. These results indicate that it is not enough for parents merely to determine the duration of device use. Conversations about media content, the values it contains, the behavioral consequences, and ways of evaluating content can become part of building internal regulation. Effective behavioral control can then help students build the ability to choose content, rather than merely complying with restrictions when parents are present.

The research gap lies in the limited number of studies that directly bring together exposure to prosocial media, parental behavioral control, and character building in a single model. Most of the media-related literature collected still measures

²² R. Wang et al., "Different Impacts of Parental Psychological and Behavioral Control on the Cultivation of Advantageous Strength in Chinese Rural Adolescent," *Frontiers in Psychology* 15 (2024): 1349386, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1349386>.

²³ C. Ma, Y. Ma, and X. Lan, "The Moderating Role of Social Identity and Grit in the Association between Parental Control and School Adjustment in Chinese Middle School Students," *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2020): 677, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00677>.

²⁴ H. Kwon, "A Study of the Self-Regulations on Adolescent Media Usage," *Korea International Trade Research Institute* 20, no. 5 (2024): 131–46, <https://doi.org/10.16980/jitc.20.5.202410.131>.

²⁵ L. M. Padilla-Walker, S. M. Coyne, and K. M. Collier, "Longitudinal Relations between Parental Media Monitoring and Adolescent Aggression, Prosocial Behavior, and Externalizing Problems," *Journal of Adolescence* 46 (2016): 86–97, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2015.11.002>.

general media use, while studies of parental control use diverse outcomes such as school adjustment, discipline, bullying, social development, drug abuse, future planning, and religious character. International research on prosocial media provides more direct evidence on empathy and prosocial behavior, but has rarely linked it to parents' regulation of behavior. Based on this gap, this systematic literature review poses three research questions: (1) How does exposure to prosocial media contribute to students' character building? (2) How does parental behavioral control contribute to students' character building? and (3) How can the interrelationship between exposure to prosocial media and parental behavioral control explain students' character building more comprehensively?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a systematic literature review with narrative-comparative synthesis. The initial corpus consisted of 20 studies from two provided documents, ten studies in the domain of media use and ten studies in the domain of parental behavioral control. All studies were retained so that the evidence mapping would correspond to the literature base that had been compiled. A limited additional search was conducted to address two conceptual gaps in the corpus, namely the small number of studies that truly measure exposure to prosocial content and the need for a clear distinction between behavioral control and psychological control. Four authentic and verifiable additional studies were selected, namely Prot et al., Greitemeyer and Mügge, Barber et al., and Padilla-Walker et al.²⁶ With these additions, the substantive evidence base totaled 24 publications. The reporting procedure refers to the PRISMA 2020 principles of Page et al.²⁷

The inclusion criteria comprised empirical studies or scientific syntheses that address media exposure or use with prosocial, moral, discipline, social value, or character building outcomes; studies on behavioral control, monitoring, parenting behavior, parental support, or family practices related to behavioral regulation; and studies with populations of children, adolescents, students, or populations providing

²⁶ Prot et al., "Long-Term Relations"; Greitemeyer and Mügge, "Video Games Do Affect"; Barber, Olsen, and Shagle, "Psychological and Behavioral Control"; Padilla-Walker, Coyne, and Collier, "Longitudinal Relations."

²⁷ M. J. Page et al., "The PRISMA 2020 Statement: An Updated Guideline for Reporting Systematic Reviews," *BMJ* 372 (2021): n71, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>.

direct mechanistic evidence. All articles were included even though their degree of closeness to the main constructs differed. This difference was assessed at the synthesis stage as direct, strong supporting, or contextual supporting. The heterogeneity of designs, populations, constructs, and outcomes meant that no meta-analysis was conducted. The synthesis focused on patterns of relationship direction, mechanisms, boundary conditions, and the quality of construct fit, so that conclusions were not built on statistical significance alone.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Exposure to Prosocial Media and Students' Character Building

The synthesis results show that the relationship between media and character building is strongly determined by media content. This finding is an important basis because most of the collected articles use the general term social media use. General media use can include educational, prosocial, entertainment, commercial, aggressive, or morally irrelevant content. Consequently, positive or negative relationships found in general studies cannot be directly interpreted as the effects of prosocial media. Additional international sources were needed to isolate this content component.

Table 1. Synthesis of Media and Character Building Studies

No .	Study	Sample/design	Main focus	Key Findings
1	Labuang et al. ²⁸	60 students; correlational	Social media → character change	Positive; $R^2 = 0.240$
2	Aufa ²⁹	118 students; survey	TikTok → moral conduct	Reporting results are not entirely consistent; the table shows a significant relationship
3	Silas and Mwila ³⁰	119 respondents; mixed methods	Technology → discipline	Significant model; $R^2 = 0.714$
4	Lashire and Ringmu ³¹	60 students; survey	Social media → moral values	Excessive use negative; school factors dominant

²⁸ Labuang et al., "Social Media for Character Changing."

²⁹ Aufa, "Influence of TikTok."

³⁰ Silas and Mwila, "Effects of Technology Adaptation."

³¹ Lashire and Ringmu, "Impact of Social Media."

No	Study	Sample/design	Main focus	Key Findings
5	Quach et al. ³²	3 experiments; N = 321, 402, 575	Virtual influencer → prosocial	Authenticity encourages donations and social support
6	Shawareb ³³	567 university students; survey	Social media → cognitive, moral, and social values	Media use has significant predictive power
7	Hermanto et al. ³⁴	200 cadets; survey	Social media → character building	Social media not significant when access is restricted
8	Ichsan et al. ³⁵	60 respondents; survey	Social media → morals	Positive; $R^2 = 0.842$
9	Rusman et al. ³⁶	100 students; ex post facto	TikTok + peers → moral conduct	TikTok partially negative; joint model $R^2 = 0.976$
10	Reysa et al. ³⁷	35 students; survey	Social media → morals	Positive; contribution 21.8%
11	Prot et al. ³⁸	Multinational + longitudinal	Prosocial media → helping	Positive; empathy as mediator
12	Greitemeyer and Mügge ³⁹	Meta-analysis	Prosocial gaming → social outcomes	Prosocial content is associated with prosocial outcomes

Labuang et al.⁴⁰ is one of the studies that directly links social media with changes in students' character. The study of ninth-grade students in Dili produced a correlation of 0.490 and an R^2 of 0.240. This finding indicates that variation in media use is related to character change, but about three-quarters of the variation in the outcome comes from other factors. This value is consistent with the understanding that media is one socialization environment and not the sole determinant of students' behavior.

The relationship between digital platform use and character building cannot be viewed as a single cause-and-effect relationship. Over-interpreting

³² Quach, Cheah, and Thaichon, "Power of Flattery."

³³ Shawareb, "Predictive Ability of Social Media."

³⁴ Hermanto et al., "Effect of Nurturing Program."

³⁵ Ichsan et al., "Influence of Social Media."

³⁶ Rusman, Rapi, and Maulana, "Influence of Social Media."

³⁷ Reysa, Susanti, and Washfiah, "Influence of Social Media Use."

³⁸ Prot et al., "Long-Term Relations."

³⁹ Greitemeyer and Mügge, "Video Games Do Affect."

⁴⁰ Labuang et al., "Social Media for Character Changing."

correlational findings risks overlooking the diversity of factors that also shape adolescent behavior. Aufa⁴¹ examined TikTok and the moral conduct of students at MAN Purwakarta. This study is safer to treat as evidence that the relationship between TikTok and moral conduct needs to be interpreted cautiously, rather than as definitive causal evidence. The observed association does not yet reflect the direction of influence or its independence from other variables that were not studied. A careful conclusion maintains objectivity while inviting deeper investigation into the interrelated dynamics.

The influence of technology on behavior is not uniform, but depends on the type of device, the purpose, and the nature of the activity performed. Grouping diverse media into a single category can conceal real and important differences in impact. Silas and Mwila⁴² showed that a combination of forms of technology adaptation was significantly related to students' discipline. The use of smartphones, television, social media, the internet, and games displayed unequal coefficient patterns. These results strengthen the argument that media is not a uniform stimulus. Platforms, purposes of use, and types of activity can produce different consequences. From the perspective of character building, this study constitutes supporting evidence because discipline is one expression of behavioral regulation, but content that supports others was not measured directly. The holistic formation of personality demands measurement that covers broader behavioral dimensions, not merely compliance with rules. The limited scope of measurement is an important note for the design of future studies so that the picture obtained becomes more complete.

Relationships among variables in social research are always influenced by various factors, so a perfect model fit value deserves rigorous testing. Balancing appreciation of substantial findings with caution about methodological limitations maintains the reliability of the discussion. The findings of Lashire and Ringmu⁴³ show that excessive social media use has a negative relationship with moral values, while the school environment is the strongest positive predictor. The perfect R^2

⁴¹ Aufa, "Influence of TikTok."

⁴² Silas and Mwila, "Effects of Technology Adaptation."

⁴³ Lashire and Ringmu, "Impact of Social Media."

value reported in their research model is an indicator that needs to be read critically because it is highly unusual in social research. The substantive findings are still included as part of the corpus, but the weight of the evidence should not be equated with that of longitudinal studies or experiments. Reliance on a cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw firm causal conclusions among variables. Placing the findings in a proportionate position ensures the integrity of the review while inviting verification through more rigorous designs.

The quality of perception of digital communication figures is the key that turns public attention into meaningful action for others. The fit between a virtual character and perceived authenticity fosters trust that leads to real participation. Quach et al.⁴⁴ showed that virtual influencers perceived as authentic can increase the desire to donate, to visit social organizations' pages, and the willingness to buy fundraising merchandise. This finding indicates that the design of digital messages can mobilize caring responses when the audience considers the figure sincere and relevant. This principle opens opportunities to use technological means to strengthen mutual helping attitudes in society. Careful selection and construction of narratives enable the virtual world to contribute to real kindness in real life.

Patterns of digital activity are closely related to a person's views and attitudes, although the direction of influence requires further examination. Results obtained from certain groups are a valuable reference, while also reminding us of the need for caution when transferring them to other contexts. Shawareb⁴⁵ found that the level of social media use was able to predict cognitive, moral, and social values among students at Amman Arab University. Its population consisted of advanced-level learners, so its relevance to school students is contextual, but the findings help show that moral and social values can be related to patterns of digital activity. This study did not distinguish content that supports others, so its results cannot be used as direct evidence of the impact of particular content. Observation of overall duration has not separated the good and bad influences arising from the variety of materials consumed. Future investigations need to distinguish content

⁴⁴ Quach, Cheah, and Thaichon, "Power of Flattery."

⁴⁵ Shawareb, "Predictive Ability of Social Media."

types so that it becomes clear which parts strengthen character and which weaken it.

Hermanto et al.⁴⁶ produced a different pattern. Social media use had no significant effect on the character building of cadets at PIP Semarang, whereas the nurturing program and the boarding school had a significant influence. The restriction of devices and internet access was one of the explanations given by the researchers. This finding confirms that the opportunity of exposure determines the strength of the relationship between media and character. When access is heavily restricted, media loses intensity as a source of socialization.

Ichsan et al.⁴⁷ reported a positive relationship between social media use and moral formation with a relatively high R^2 of 0.842. This high value needs to be understood within the limits of the sample size and the cross-sectional design. The relationship does not prove that the frequency of media use itself forms morals. It is possible that the type of activity, respondent characteristics, and instrument constructs also help explain the results.

Rusman et al.⁴⁸ found that TikTok use was partially negatively related to students' moral conduct, while peer association had a positive relationship; the joint model explained 97.6 percent of the variation in the outcome. A very high coefficient of determination requires caution and should not be interpreted as the magnitude of a causal effect. The study remains useful for showing that the impact of media lies within a network of social relationships with peers.

Reysa et al.⁴⁹ found a positive relationship between social media use and the morals of students at MAN 3 Tabalong, with a contribution of 21.8 percent. The study measured overall media use. A positive finding may indicate constructive use, but it does not prove that all types of media exposure have the same moral benefits.

Two additional studies provide a more direct foundation. Prot et al.⁵⁰ found that prosocial-media use was related to helping behavior in a cross-national

⁴⁶ Hermanto et al., "Effect of Nurturing Program."

⁴⁷ Ichsan et al., "Influence of Social Media."

⁴⁸ Rusman, Rapi, and Maulana, "Influence of Social Media."

⁴⁹ Reysa, Susanti, and Washfiah, "Influence of Social Media Use."

⁵⁰ Prot et al., "Long-Term Relations."

sample and that empathy explained part of this relationship. In their longitudinal study, changes in prosocial game consumption predicted changes in helping through empathy. Greitemeyer and Mügge,⁵¹ through a meta-analysis, also found that prosocial content in digital games was related to more positive social outcomes. These two studies help explain why the results of studies on general media use can conflict: the direction of effects depends strongly on content valence.

Media exposure can strengthen character building when its content consistently presents helping behavior, empathy, cooperation, and social responsibility and when students process these messages reflectively. The most direct evidence supports a pathway from prosocial content to empathy/prosocial cognition and then to prosocial behavior. Studies of general media use show mixed results, so frequency of use cannot be treated as an indicator of character without knowing the content and how it is used.

B. Parental Behavioral Control and Students' Character Building

The evidence base on parental control shows a more complex pattern. Behavioral control can serve as a regulatory structure that helps students develop discipline and avoid risk behavior. However, control that is too broad or mixed with psychological control can be related to less adaptive social outcomes. Distinguishing definitions is the main requirement so that results across studies are not forced into a single conclusion.

Table 2. Synthesis of Parental Behavioral Control Studies

No.	Study	Sample/design	Main focus	Key Findings
1	Wang et al. ⁵²	909 adolescents; survey	Behavioral control → future planning	Positive, directly and through personal growth
2	Ma et al. ⁵³	120 students; multi-source	Parental control → school adjustment	Some negative relationships; moderated by grit and identity

⁵¹ Greitemeyer and Mügge, "Video Games Do Affect."

⁵² Wang et al., "Different Impacts."

⁵³ Ma, Ma, and Lan, "Moderating Role of Social Identity."

No.	Study	Sample/design	Main focus	Key Findings
3	Temtmie and Tefera ⁵⁴	392 students; correlational	Parenting → prosocial behavior	Permissive and authoritative significant
4	Monda et al. ⁵⁵	374 students; ex post facto	Nurturing/control → adjustment	Model explains 53% of variation
5	Mabunde et al. ⁵⁶	681 respondents	Parenting behavior → discipline	Positive/significant; adjusted R ² = 0.423
6	Mustapha et al. ⁵⁷	±400 adolescents; cross-sectional	Parental factors → bullying	Parental factors predict perpetration/victimization
7	Mbochi and Keya ⁵⁸	373 students; cross-sectional	Conflict style → social development	Validating positive; hostile negative
8	Kazaara and Audrey ⁵⁹	480 respondents; mixed methods	Father involvement → discipline	Involvement positive; absence negative
9	Mnyamana and Aloka ⁶⁰	80 students; correlational	Behavioral control → drug abuse	Significant predictor; F = 9.757; p = .003
10	Faidah et al. ⁶¹	126 students; PLS-SEM	Parent support → religious character	Influence through self-control significant

⁵⁴ Z. Temtmie and D. Tefera, "The Role of Parenting Style in Instilling Adolescents Pro-Social Behavior: The Case of Adolescent Students in Arba-Minch, Konso, and Jinka, Southern Ethiopia," *American Journal of Applied Psychology* 9, no. 1 (2020).

⁵⁵ E. A. Monda, P. J. O. Aloka, and B. Mwebi, "Parental Nurturing Practices and Behavioral Adjustment among Kenyan Learners," *The Journal of Behavioral Science* 16, no. 2 (2021): 28–41.

⁵⁶ I. Mabunde, J. Barasa, and S. Likoko, "Parenting Behaviour and Student Discipline in Public Boarding Secondary Schools in Western Region of Kenya," *International Journal of Science and Research Archive* 13, no. 1 (2024): 1961–71, <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2024.13.1.1849>.

⁵⁷ M. L. A. Mustapha et al., "Parental Factors as Predictors of In-School Adolescents' Bullying Behaviors in Kwara State, Nigeria," *Különleges Bánásmód* 9, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.18458/kb.2023.1.73>.

⁵⁸ C. Mbochi and A. A. Keya, "Relationship between Parental Conflict Styles and Social Development of Adolescents in Selected Public Secondary Schools in Kiambu Township, Kenya," *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Analysis* 8, no. 9 (2025): 5268–79, <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijmra/v8-i09-40>.

⁵⁹ A. I. Kazaara and A. Audrey, "Reclaiming Fatherhood: Strategies to Reintegrate Absent Fathers in Uganda for Enhanced Child Discipline and Future Productivity," *Metropolitan Journal of Academic and Applied Research* 4, no. 10 (2025).

⁶⁰ N. Mnyamana and P. J. O. Aloka, "Effect of Parental Behavioral Control on Drug Abuse among Learners in Selected Secondary Schools in Soweto, South Africa," *Mizoram University Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences* 9, no. 2 (2023).

⁶¹ N. Faidah, S. R. Ratnawati, and R. W. Daryono, "Self-Control Mediation: The Influence of Islamic Learning and Parent's Support on Student's Religious Character," *Edureligia: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 8, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.33650/edureligia.v8i1.8472>.

No.	Study	Sample/design	Main focus	Key Findings
11	Barber et al. ^{*62}	473 students	Behavioral vs psychological control	Behavioral control more strongly related to externalizing
12	Padilla-Walker et al. ^{*63}	681 adolescents; longitudinal	Media monitoring → prosocial/externalizing	Active monitoring more adaptive through sympathy/self-regulation

Wang et al.⁶⁴ provide the most direct evidence on behavioral control. Among 909 Chinese adolescents, parental behavioral control had a positive relationship with future planning and also worked through personal growth initiative and meaning in life. These results indicate that providing structure and behavioral boundaries can help adolescents develop a future orientation when control is not directed at manipulating psychological states. Future planning is not character building directly, but it is related to responsibility, self-regulation, and the ability to set goals.

Ma, Ma, and Lan⁶⁵ found a different pattern. Parental control had a negative relationship with academic grades and, in certain configurations of social identity and grit, was also negatively related to social competence and peer acceptance. This difference serves as a warning that the label parental control can encompass different practices. When students experience control as an overly strong restriction of autonomy, structure intended as supervision can turn into an experience that suppresses social development.

Temtmie and Tefera⁶⁶ found that several parenting styles were related to prosocial behavior among adolescents in Ethiopia. This study is supporting evidence, not a specific measurement of behavioral control. Authoritative parenting typically combines warmth and behavioral boundaries, whereas permissive parenting provides a different kind of structure. The finding that these two particular styles are related to

⁶² Barber, Olsen, and Shagle, "Psychological and Behavioral Control."

⁶³ Padilla-Walker, Coyne, and Collier, "Longitudinal Relations."

⁶⁴ Wang et al., "Different Impacts."

⁶⁵ Ma, Ma, and Lan, "Moderating Role of Social Identity."

⁶⁶ Temtmie and Tefera, "Role of Parenting Style."

prosocial behavior indicates that behavioral regulation needs to be read together with relational quality.

Monda et al.⁶⁷ found that parental nurturing practices explained about 53 percent of the variation in behavioral adjustment. Parental warmth made the largest contribution, while parental control remained one of the significant components. This study is very useful for showing that control is not a single mechanism. Behavioral regulation works together with warmth, responsiveness, and acceptance. A structure of rules unaccompanied by relational support may produce different effects.

Mabunde et al.⁶⁸ found that parenting behavior was significantly related to student discipline in boarding secondary schools in Kenya. The study's adjusted R^2 was about 0.423 and the standardized coefficient for parenting behavior was 0.4235. Discipline is a highly relevant outcome for character building because it reflects consistency in complying with norms and regulating behavior.

Mustapha et al.⁶⁹ found that several parental factors predicted bullying perpetration and victimization. Family violence, non-involvement, violent support, discipline, attachment, and parental mental health show that problem behavior cannot be explained solely by the strength or weakness of control. The content and quality of family regulatory patterns help determine whether control is protective or becomes part of a risk environment.

Mbochi and Keya⁷⁰ examined parental conflict styles and social development. A validating conflict style had a positive relationship, whereas a hostile style showed a negative relationship with social development. This study did not measure behavioral control directly, but it is contextually relevant because students learn social regulation from the way parents manage conflict. Social character is formed not only from explicit rules, but also from the experience of seeing how differences are resolved.

⁶⁷ Monda, Aloka, and Mwebi, "Parental Nurturing Practices."

⁶⁸ Mabunde, Barasa, and Likoko, "Parenting Behaviour and Student Discipline."

⁶⁹ Mustapha et al., "Parental Factors."

⁷⁰ Mbochi and Keya, "Parental Conflict Styles."

Kazaara and Audrey⁷¹ showed that father absence was negatively related to child discipline, whereas father involvement was one of the strong predictors of discipline. This finding emphasizes the availability of supervision. Behavioral control requires relational presence and sufficient information about the child's activities. Control that is not based on involvement can turn into sporadic, inconsistent instructions.

Mnyamana and Aloka⁷² provide direct evidence that parental behavioral control predicts learner drug abuse among students in Soweto, with $F(1,76) = 9.757$ and $p = 0.003$. Substance abuse is a form of externalizing risk that is relevant to the capacity for self-regulation and compliance with norms. This finding is consistent with the theoretical argument that behavioral control works primarily in the domain of concrete, observable behavior that can be given boundaries.

Faidah et al.⁷³ provide a mechanism that is closer to character building. Parent support had no significant direct influence on religious character, but showed an indirect influence through self-control. This finding indicates that character building can occur when parental influence develops into internal regulation. The long-term goal of parental control is not to maintain dependence on supervision, but to help children build self-control.

Barber et al.⁷⁴ clarify the conceptual foundation through the distinction between behavioral and psychological control. Behavioral control is more strongly related to externalized behavior, whereas psychological control is more closely related to internalized problems. This classic finding prevents the common error of equating all forms of control with negative practices. Behavioral control that is clear, proportionate, and tied to actions differs substantively from guilt manipulation, withdrawal of affection, or psychological intrusion.

Padilla-Walker et al.⁷⁵ link parents' regulation with the world of media. In a longitudinal study, active and restrictive media monitoring showed different patterns in relation to prosocial behavior, aggression, and externalizing problems,

⁷¹ Kazaara and Audrey, "Reclaiming Fatherhood."

⁷² Mnyamana and Aloka, "Parental Behavioral Control."

⁷³ Faidah, Ratnawati, and Daryono, "Self-Control Mediation."

⁷⁴ Barber, Olsen, and Shagle, "Psychological and Behavioral Control."

⁷⁵ Padilla-Walker, Coyne, and Collier, "Longitudinal Relations."

partly through sympathy and self-regulation. This finding carries an important implication: behavioral control that is dialogical and helps children understand media content is more likely to build internal regulation than restrictions that focus only on prohibitions.

Parental behavioral control can support character building when it takes the form of monitoring, clear rules, involvement, and proportionate supervision. Its influence is most visible in discipline, avoidance of risk behavior, future planning, and self-regulation. Effects can turn negative when control is too intrusive, mixed with psychological control, or reduces the need for the development of autonomy. Character building requires a transition from external control toward self-control.

C. Interaction of Exposure to Prosocial Media and Parental Behavioral Control

The synthesis of the two groups shows that media and parental behavioral control work at two different but interrelated levels. Media provides models, messages, and social symbols, whereas the family regulates how students access, understand, and respond to these stimuli. Prosocial media can provide positive learning opportunities, but students' ability to turn exposure into character requires a process of internalization. Parental behavioral control can help provide boundaries and patterns of use that leave room for this internalization.

Table 3. Synthesis of Combined Mechanisms

Mechanism	Prosocial media	Parental role	Character implications
Modeling	Displays helping and cooperation	Guides content selection	Positive models are observed more often
Empathy	Prosocial narratives activate social perspective	Discussion helps reflection	Empathy develops into behavior
Monitoring	Diverse digital exposure	Regulates access and duration	Risky exposure can be reduced
Self-regulation	Media provides opportunities for choice	Gradual and consistent boundaries	External control moves toward self-control
Moral reasoning	Content raises dilemmas/values	Active mediation provides interpretation	Moral judgment becomes more reflective

Mechanism	Prosocial media	Parental role	Character implications
Protection	Prosocial content provides alternative models	Supervision reduces risky content	Protective factors become layered
Autonomy	Users choose and evaluate content	Proportionate control	Literacy and responsibility develop

The findings of Prot et al.⁷⁶ show empathy as an important mediator between prosocial-media use and helping. Meanwhile, Padilla-Walker et al.⁷⁷ found sympathy and self-regulation to be mechanisms that partly explain the relationship between parental media monitoring and adolescent behavior. These two studies share a clear point of convergence. Media exposure can provide prosocial stimuli, whereas parental involvement influences how those stimuli are translated into regulation and behavior. This interaction makes the quality of parental mediation more important than absolute prohibition. Restrictive monitoring can reduce opportunities for exposure to problematic content, but if it is too strict it can limit the formation of selection skills. Active mediation gives parents the opportunity to discuss why a behavior in the media is considered good or problematic. This approach develops moral reasoning as well as media literacy. Children then learn to evaluate content when their parents are not present.

Data from Hermanto et al.⁷⁸ show that when media access is heavily restricted, media use makes no significant contribution to character building. In contrast, studies showing high media use produce varied relationships, from positive to negative. This indicates that controlling exposure can indeed change the strength of effects, but restriction alone does not guarantee character development. The content of the exposure and the process of its interpretation remain decisive.

The study by Lashire and Ringmu⁷⁹ also included parental involvement, peer influence, school environment, and social media in a single model. Although

⁷⁶ Prot et al., "Long-Term Relations."

⁷⁷ Padilla-Walker, Coyne, and Collier, "Longitudinal Relations."

⁷⁸ Hermanto et al., "Effect of Nurturing Program."

⁷⁹ Lashire and Ringmu, "Impact of Social Media."

the statistical quality of that study needs to be considered critically, the structure of its model shows that media effects occur simultaneously with the influence of the family and school environments. Character building is multi-source. A student can receive different messages from TikTok, peers, parents, and teachers on the same day.

From the perspective of behavioral control, rules on media use can function as scaffolding. In the early stages of development, parents set clearer boundaries regarding time, platforms, types of content, and online interactions. As self-control capacity increases, rules can move toward negotiation and independent responsibility. This approach is consistent with the finding of Faidah et al.⁸⁰ that self-control is an important mechanism between parental support and religious character.

Control that is too strong can produce new problems. Ma et al.⁸¹ showed that certain parental control was related to less adaptive school adjustment outcomes, particularly in combination with certain student characteristics. This indicates that the goal of digital supervision is not to create absolute compliance. Students need opportunities to make decisions and learn from consequences so that values develop into character that can be maintained without supervision.

Prosocial exposure should also not be understood as an automatic guarantee that character will form. Users may like charity content, follow influencers who promote social causes, or play prosocial games without stably changing their behavior in the real world. Quach et al.⁸² showed that authenticity is a mechanism that influences prosocial responses. This indicates that the credibility of media models and users' emotional engagement determine whether a message has influence.

Parents can strengthen the transfer from media to real behavior through behavioral reinforcement. When students see sharing content and then gain the opportunity to perform similar actions in the family or at school, the connection between media representation and real experience becomes stronger. Parent-child

⁸⁰ Faidah, Ratnawati, and Daryono, "Self-Control Mediation."

⁸¹ Ma, Ma, and Lan, "Moderating Role of Social Identity."

⁸² Quach, Cheah, and Thaichon, "Power of Flattery."

discussion can link digital stories with concrete situations, such as helping a friend, resolving conflict, or participating in social activities. At this point, parental control and prosocial media should be understood as two different mechanisms. Media provides material for moral learning, whereas control provides a structure for selection and use. The two meet through empathy, sympathy, self-regulation, and moral evaluation. This model is stronger than the assumption that character forms only because a child watches good content or only because parents set rules.

Direct evidence on the interaction effect of the two variables remains limited. Most media studies measure general media use, whereas some family studies use parenting style or parental support. The important finding of this systematic literature review lies precisely in this gap. The empirical basis is strong enough to build a proposition of a complementary relationship, but not yet sufficient to claim a particular moderation or mediation effect without direct research.

Exposure to prosocial media content and parental behavioral control show a complementary relationship in supporting students' character building. Media content that displays helping behavior, cooperation, empathy, and social care can provide behavioral models that help students understand concrete forms of prosocial action. At the same time, parental behavioral control through supervision, boundary setting, and guidance in media use can help students manage their content choices and build self-regulation capacity. The relationship between the two becomes more meaningful when parents not only restrict media use, but are also involved in providing explanations, discussing the values contained in the content, and giving children opportunities to make decisions gradually. This pattern indicates that character building is more likely to develop when exposure to prosocial content is accompanied by proportionate parental guidance, so that external supervision can gradually develop into students' ability to assess, choose, and control their own behavior independently.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review of 24 publications shows that media exposure and parental behavioral control are related to various components of character

building, but the direction of the relationship depends on the quality of the stimulus and the form of control. Evidence that specifically addresses prosocial media shows a positive relationship with empathy, helping, and prosocial behavior. In contrast, studies of general media use produce mixed patterns because they do not distinguish the content. Parental behavioral control can support discipline, future planning, reduced risk behavior, and self-regulation when implemented as proportionate monitoring and boundaries. Its effects may weaken or turn negative when control reduces autonomy or is mixed with psychological control. The two factors probably work in a complementary manner through empathy, sympathy, self-regulation, and moral reasoning, but evidence of their direct interaction remains limited.

Theoretically, the results of this review indicate the need to separate media exposure from prosocial media exposure and to distinguish behavioral control from psychological control. Oversimplifying either construct can lead to erroneous conclusions about students' character. Academically, studies of character building need to include the quality of media content, forms of parental mediation, self-control, and empathy in the same model. Practically, parents can move from a pattern of prohibition toward active mediation through content discussion, boundary setting, giving reasons, and gradually increasing students' responsibility. Schools can also use prosocial digital content as a source of character education as long as media activities are connected to reflection and real social action.

Future research needs to develop longitudinal or experimental designs that explicitly measure exposure to prosocial media, parental behavioral control, and character building among the same students. Structural equation models can test empathy and self-control as mediators, while parental behavioral control can be tested as a moderator of the relationship between prosocial-media exposure and character. Media measurement should not stop at duration of use, but should include content type, platform, frequency of exposure, engagement, and message perception. Parental behavioral control also needs to be measured separately from psychological control. Cross-age and cross-cultural research is needed to determine when behavioral boundaries remain supportive and when they begin to reduce students' autonomy.

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