

TRANSFORMATION OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AMONG GEN Z: BETWEEN PHYSICAL SPACE AND THE VIRTUAL WORLD

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Abstract

This research discusses the transformation of juvenile delinquency among Generation Z from physical spaces to digital environments. Modernization and technological advancements have shifted delinquent behavior from traditional acts such as street brawls to virtual actions like cyberbullying, dissemination of harmful content, and identity manipulation. Data indicates a 65% increase in digital-based juvenile delinquency cases over the past five years, with 92% of teenagers accessing the internet for an average of 7 hours per day. Contributing factors include low digital literacy, lack of parental supervision, social media algorithm influence, and weak regulatory frameworks. This study analyzes the distinct characteristics of delinquency in both physical and digital domains and proposes comprehensive strategies for prevention, such as integrating character education, enhancing digital literacy, and fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration. The phenomenon calls for a redefinition of the roles of educational institutions and increased parental involvement in shaping resilient digital character. A cross-sectoral approach is essential to develop a generation that is both technologically adept and morally grounded.

Keywords: Digital Juvenile Delinquency, Generation Z, Digital Literacy

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of juvenile delinquency has undergone significant changes along with the rapid development of technology and the social transformations affecting global society. Generation Z, who were born and raised in the digital era, face different dynamics of delinquency compared to previous generations. Juvenile delinquency is no longer confined solely to physical spaces, but has now expanded into the boundless virtual world. Deviant behavior among adolescents has experienced a complex paradigm shift, in which the boundaries between physical and virtual realities are increasingly blurred, creating new challenges for parents, educators, and society in fostering the character development of the younger generation. Forms of juvenile delinquency in the digital era are no longer limited to conventional behaviors such as street fights, vandalism, or violations of school regulations. Digital transformation has given rise to new, more sophisticated, and harder-to-detect forms of delinquency, including cyberbullying, the dissemination of pornographic content, digital identity theft, and involvement in virtual communities that promote destructive behavior. What is particularly concerning is that many Gen Z adolescents are often unaware that their actions in cyberspace have real consequences, both legally and socially. This phenomenon indicates a gap in digital literacy that must be addressed through comprehensive education on internet ethics.

Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) show a 65% increase in cases of technology-based juvenile delinquency over the past five years, with cyberbullying accounting for 41% of total reports. According to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology in 2023, approximately 70% of Indonesian adolescents have either been victims or perpetrators of verbal harassment on social media. Meanwhile, the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) reports that 92% of adolescents access the internet daily, with an average usage of up to 7 hours per day, far exceeding the time spent in face-to-face social interactions. These figures illustrate how the virtual world has become a new arena for adolescent identity experimentation, including in the form of delinquent behavior. This shift in patterns of juvenile delinquency does not occur in a vacuum, but rather reflects fundamental changes in the social structure of society. Modernization and globalization have eroded traditional values and replaced them with values of individualism and consumerism, which often conflict with prevailing social norms. Looser parental supervision due to economic demands, the lack of safe public spaces for adolescents to socialize, and the weakening of community social control have all contributed to the

rise of juvenile delinquency in both physical and virtual spaces. At the same time, the entertainment industry and social media platforms, with algorithms designed to maximize engagement, indirectly encourage extreme and sensational behavior among adolescents in order to gain social validation in the form of likes and followers. Based on these phenomena, this paper aims to analyze the transformation of juvenile delinquency among Generation Z in the context of the shift from physical space to the virtual world. The research questions addressed in this study include: (1) How do the characteristics of juvenile delinquency among Generation Z differ from those of previous generations? (2) What factors contribute to the transformation of forms of juvenile delinquency in the digital era? (3) What strategies are effective in addressing juvenile delinquency across both physical and virtual dimensions? This study employs a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach, relying on secondary data from various credible sources such as academic journals, government institution reports, and verified media coverage. It also conducts a comprehensive literature review of sociological theories, developmental psychology, and new media studies in order to produce a holistic analysis of the contemporary phenomenon of juvenile delinquency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1 Differences in the Characteristics of Youth Delinquency between Generation Z and Previous Generations

Youth delinquency has undergone a significant transformation along with technological advancements and social change. In earlier eras, youth delinquency tended to be conventional in nature and occurred directly in physical spaces. Examples included fights between students, wall scribbling (vandalism), smoking within the school environment, and violations of school regulations. In contrast, Generation Z adolescents, who live in an almost boundless digital interconnectedness, have extended the manifestation of delinquent behavior into cyberspace, giving it markedly different characteristics.

Based on the study by Zahra & Suhendi (2023), the characteristics of youth delinquency among Generation Z show several distinctive features that differentiate it from previous generations:

- a. Digital anonymity, Delinquent behavior often occurs anonymously and is hidden behind virtual identities, causing perpetrators to feel safe from consequences and adult supervision. According to Ramadhani & Susanto (2022), 78% of cyberbullying cases are carried out through anonymous or fake accounts.
- b. Diverse spaces of manifestation, Delinquency is no longer confined to physical spaces such as schools or residential environments, but emerges across various digital platforms, including social media, online games, chat applications, and virtual discussion forums (Kumalasari & Wijaya, 2023).
- c. Identity experimentation, Generation Z tends to experiment with identity through the creation of fake accounts, alternative personas, or trolling behavior, which allows them to act differently from their real-life identities. Fadila & Nurwati (2023) report that 42% of adolescents admit to having created fake accounts to engage in actions they would not dare to perform using their real identities.
- d. Orientation toward digital existence, Delinquent behavior is often driven by the desire to gain social existence in the form of likes, followers, or becoming trending. Rini & Kurniawan (2023) note that social media algorithms indirectly promote extreme content because it attracts more attention and generates higher engagement.
- e. Broader reach and impact, Deviant behavior in the virtual world can spread rapidly and have a wider impact than conventional forms of delinquency, as shown in viral cases that cause prolonged psychological trauma for victims (Abidin & Lestari, 2023).

2.2 Transformation of Forms of Delinquency: From Physical to Virtual

The following is a comprehensive comparison between conventional (physical) and contemporary (virtual) forms of youth delinquency, based on data analysis from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI, 2024) and the study by Mahmudah (2022):

Table 1. Comparison of Conventional and Digital-Era Forms of Youth Delinquency

Aspect	Conventional Youth Delinquency (Physical Space)	Modern Youth Delinquency (Virtual Space)
General Forms	Street fights, vandalism, truancy, smoking, alcohol consumption, violations of school rules	Cyberbullying, sexting, spreading hoaxes, data theft, identity manipulation, involvement in hate speech
Media / Setting	Schools, streets, public spaces, social environments	Social media, video-sharing platforms, online games, digital forums, group chats
Objectives	Emotional release, gaining recognition within the environment, rebellion against authority	Digital existence, social validation, popularity, manipulation of opinions
Detection / Supervision	Easily observed directly, usually known by authorities	Difficult to detect, hidden in personal or anonymous accounts, can occur anytime and anywhere
Consequences	School warnings, physical punishment, social sanctions, minor legal consequences	Violations of the ITE Law, psychological trauma, long-term impacts, permanent digital footprint
Evidence of Incidents	Temporary in nature, limited by space and time	Permanent digital evidence, can be stored and widely disseminated
Interaction Pattern	Direct interaction (face-to-face), involving physical contact	Indirect interaction, often without awareness of emotional impact in the long term

Yulianto & Hartono (2022) emphasize that this transformation does not occur in isolation, but rather in an interconnected manner. Delinquent behavior in physical spaces is often documented and shared in the virtual world to gain recognition, while conflicts that originate online can escalate into physical confrontations.

2.3 Factors Driving Youth Delinquency among Generation Z in the Digital Era

Based on the analysis of data from various studies, several key factors drive youth delinquency among Generation Z in the digital era, including:

- Low digital literacy, A study by Hidayati & Purnama (2022) shows that 65% of Indonesian adolescents have low to moderate levels of digital literacy. Many adolescents do not fully understand digital ethics, legal consequences, and the long-term impacts of their behavior in cyberspace. This lack of understanding often becomes the root cause of deviant behavior in the virtual space.

- b. Lack of parental supervision, Research by Karini & Lestari (2022) reveals that 72% of parents admit having difficulty monitoring their children's digital activities due to the technological knowledge gap (digital divide). Parents with limited technological competence are often unable to keep pace with their children's digital skills, creating an unsupervised environment.
- c. Online social environment, According to Hakim (2023), online communities and closed groups on social media can form echo chambers that reinforce deviant behavior through normalization and group validation. Adolescents who join high-risk communities are 3.5 times more likely to engage in digital delinquent behavior.
- d. Influence of media and algorithms, Rini & Kurniawan (2023) examine how social media platform algorithms indirectly promote sensational content and extreme behavior because such content generates higher engagement. Content that frames deviant behavior as "viral" or "trending" creates incentives for adolescents to replicate such actions.
- e. Psychosocial factors, Amrullah (2022) highlights that the identity crisis experienced during adolescence, combined with pressure for social acceptance, encourages attention-seeking behavior that often exceeds normative boundaries. In the virtual world, social validation in the form of likes, comments, and followers becomes a primary indicator of social acceptance.
- f. Regulatory gaps, Sutanto (2024) notes that the slow pace of regulatory development in keeping up with technological advancements creates grey areas that are exploited for deviant behavior without clear consequences.

2.4 Strategies for Addressing Youth Delinquency in Both Physical and Virtual Spaces

Based on data from various interventions that have been implemented, the following are comprehensive strategies that encompass both physical and virtual dimensions:

- a. Strategies in the Physical Space

The prevention and reduction of youth delinquency in physical spaces can be carried out through several proven approaches. Character education integrated into the curriculum has been shown to reduce cases of youth delinquency by up to 47% by instilling moral values, empathy, and social responsibility (Putri & Hamid, 2023). In addition, community-based rehabilitation and counseling programs involving community leaders, psychologists, and social workers have successfully reduced recidivism rates by 62% (Santoso & Wibowo, 2022).

Strengthening adolescent involvement in positive activities such as extracurricular programs, religious guidance, and youth community organizations has also demonstrated significant outcomes, with a 70% reduction in the risk of delinquency (Kumalasari & Wijaya, 2023). Equally important is the creation of safe and accessible public spaces that allow adolescents to express themselves and socialize positively, serving as an effective alternative to prevent deviant behavior (Fadila & Nurwati, 2023).

- b. Strategies in the Virtual Space

In the virtual sphere, strategies to address youth delinquency involve both technological approaches and digital education. School-based digital literacy models have been shown to increase understanding of digital ethics by 86% and reduce cyberbullying cases by 53% within one year (Zahra & Suhendi, 2023). Cyber law education, particularly related to the ITE Law, has made 78% of adolescents more cautious in their online activities after understanding the legal consequences (Sutanto, 2024).

Furthermore, collaboration among the government, digital platforms, non-governmental organizations, and educational institutions has contributed to a 45% reduction in the spread of harmful content (Kominfo, 2023). Digital mentoring through counseling interventions for social media addiction has been implemented in 12 schools, achieving a success rate of 76% (Widyastuti & Nursalim, 2023).

Finally, an ethical monitoring approach by parents that emphasizes open, non-judgmental communication is key to fostering healthy and responsible digital awareness among adolescents (Karini & Lestari, 2022).

Table 2. Prevention Strategies in Two Spatial Dimensions

Space	Prevention Strategy	Program Example	Effectiveness
Physical	Character education	“Sekolah Harmoni” program by the Ministry of Education and Culture	Reduction in youth delinquency cases by 47% (Putri & Hamid, 2023)
	Community empowerment	Youth Care Forum at the sub-district level	Increase in positive youth participation by 58% (Santoso & Wibowo, 2022)
	Safe spaces for self-expression	Youth Centers and Creative Parks	Channeling youth energy into positive activities by 63% (Fadila & Nurwati, 2023)
Virtual	Digital literacy	“Smart and Ethical Social Media” curriculum	Increase in understanding of digital ethics by 86% (Zahra & Suhendi, 2023)
	Internet ethics education	Webinars and workshops on “Healthy Internet Use”	Reduction in cyberbullying cases by 53% (Hidayati & Purnama, 2022)
	Social media monitoring	AI-based parental monitoring applications	Early detection of risky behavior by 67% (Karini & Lestari, 2022)

2.5 Social and Educational Implications

The transformation of youth delinquency in the digital era has had significant impacts on social structures and the education system. Socially, the increase in virtual-based youth delinquency has created new forms of social dysfunction, such as declining empathy among adolescents, rising conflicts originating in online spaces, and the weakening of conventional social control within families and local communities. Public spaces that once served as arenas for socialization are increasingly being replaced by virtual environments that offer fewer opportunities for genuine and meaningful social interaction. This shift affects adolescents' patterns of social interaction, which tend to become more individualistic and fragmented. In addition, unequal access to technology has generated a digital divide that potentially widens social gaps between urban and rural youth.

In the educational context, this phenomenon calls for a redefinition of the role of educational institutions. Schools should no longer function solely as centers for knowledge transmission, but also as key agents in shaping digital character. The curriculum must comprehensively integrate technology-based character education and digital literacy so that students are not only academically competent but also wise and responsible internet users. Teachers are required to possess strong digital competencies in order to guide students in facing the challenges of the online world and to serve as role models in healthy and ethical technology use. Active parental involvement in the educational process has also become increasingly crucial, as supervision of children's online activities requires close synergy between home and school. These implications indicate that addressing youth delinquency cannot be undertaken through a sectoral approach alone, but instead requires a holistic and collaborative strategy involving all elements of society. Collective awareness of the importance of strengthening adolescent character, both in the physical and virtual worlds, is essential to shaping a Generation Z that is not only technologically literate but also grounded in strong moral integrity.

CONCLUSION

Based on the writing and the results of the discussion, juvenile delinquency in the digital era, particularly among Generation Z, has undergone a significant transformation. Deviant behavior is no longer limited to physical spaces such as street fights or vandalism, but has expanded into the digital sphere in the form of cyberbullying, the spread of hoaxes, sexting, and hate speech. Cyberspace has become a new arena for adolescents to express themselves, experiment, and seek recognition, while at the same time becoming fertile ground for deviant behavior due to limited digital literacy, weak parental supervision, and the influence of algorithms and the digital social environment.

In responding to this phenomenon, a holistic and cross-sectoral approach is required. Mitigation strategies should not be limited to supervision alone, but must also include strengthening digital competence, character education, collaboration among stakeholders, and the development of adaptive regulations. In this way, adolescents in the digital era can become not only active users of technology, but also individuals who possess moral awareness, social responsibility, and resilience against the negative influences of the online world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussion and conclusions presented, the author proposes the following recommendations:

1. Educational institutions are expected to integrate digital literacy and internet ethics into the curriculum from an early stage and to enhance teachers' capacities as guides in the digital environment. Strengthening guidance and counseling systems, as well as early detection of deviant behavior, is also an important step.
2. Parents need to improve their understanding of their children's digital world and establish open communication. Supervision of online activities should be carried out ethically, accompanied by mutually agreed and educational limitations on gadget use.
3. The government and policymakers are advised to strengthen regulations on child protection in cyberspace, provide safe public spaces for adolescents, and encourage cross-sector collaboration in digital literacy campaigns and reporting mechanisms related to juvenile delinquency.
4. Communities and civil society groups should form youth care groups, involve local leaders in digital moral education, and create social interaction spaces that balance virtual activities.
5. Digital platforms and technology providers are expected to enhance safety measures for adolescent users, review algorithms so they do not promote harmful content, and provide more educational content along with effective reporting systems.

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