

Caritas-Based Media Literacy: The Role of Catholic Religious Education Teachers in Shaping Students' Digital Conscience through Shared Christian Praxis

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ABSTRACT

The development of digital media has brought significant changes to the lives of students. However, the increasing intensity of social media use has not been matched by maturity in media literacy or ethical awareness in digital communication. This situation places teachers of Catholic Religious Education (CRE) in a strategic position to guide students toward using digital media critically, responsibly, and in accordance with the Christian value of love (*caritas*). This study aims to analyze the role of CRE teachers in shaping students' digital conscience through the *Shared Christian Praxis* (SCP) approach. The research employs a qualitative method with a single case study design conducted at SMAN 4 Palangka Raya. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with one CRE teacher and seven students, observations of the learning process, and document analysis. Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, while data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation. The findings show that CRE teachers act as learning facilitators, pastoral guides, and developers of digital character by implementing the five stages of SCP: naming, critical reflection, story and vision, dialectical hermeneutics, and decision-making. This guidance encourages students to develop critical thinking skills while also forming a digital conscience, manifested through wise attitudes in using social media, respect for the dignity of others, and avoidance of spreading hate speech and unverified information. The novelty of this research lies in the development of *Caritas-Based Media Literacy*, a media literacy model that integrates critical thinking, faith reflection, and the value of love as an ethical foundation for digital communication in diverse school environments.

Keywords: Media literacy, Caritas, Catholic Religious Education, Shared Christian Praxis, Digital conscience

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INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has changed how people access information, build social relationships, and participate in community life. The rapid growth of social media has turned the digital space into an inseparable part of students' lives, especially for the generation born and raised amid advances in information technology often referred to as "digital natives." The *Digital 2025* report indicates that people in Indonesia spend an average of more than seven hours per day accessing the internet, with social media being

one of the most dominant digital activities (We Are Social & Meltwater, 2025). This high level of digital media use brings great opportunities for learning, but it also increases the risk of misinformation, hate speech, cyberbullying, social polarization, and a decline in the quality of communication in digital spaces (S. Rahayu et al., 2023)

Various studies show that greater frequency of digital media use does not automatically correspond to greater maturity in media literacy. Hobbs (2010) explains that media literacy encompasses not only the ability to access information but also the capacity to analyze, evaluate, create, and communicate messages responsibly. Similarly, Potter (2022) emphasizes that media-literate individuals must be able to think critically about media messages so they are not easily influenced by information manipulation or the spread of hoaxes. The main challenge in education today is no longer merely providing access to technology, but rather developing students' ability to use media in a critical, ethical, and responsible manner.

Within the context of education, this issue cannot be viewed only as a matter of digital competence. The use of social media is also tied to character formation, moral responsibility, and respect for human dignity (Sari et al., 2026). Phenomena such as sharing information without verification, using impolite language, engaging in online conflict, and a lack of empathy in digital communication demonstrate that students require guidance that fosters not only critical thinking but also moral awareness in using digital technology.

Catholic Religious Education holds a strategic position in responding to these challenges, as it focuses not only on the transmission of religious knowledge but also on the formation of character and conscience. Through the process of faith education, CRE teachers serve as educators, mentors, and guides who help students integrate Christian values into daily life including their use of social media (Linda & Ntansakti, 2023). From the perspective of Catholic Social Teaching, digital communication should serve as a means to foster dialogue, solidarity, respect for human dignity, and the common good, as affirmed in the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (Fransiskus, 2020a). Therefore, media literacy in Catholic Religious Education is directed not only toward distinguishing true from false information but also toward understanding the moral consequences of every act of digital communication.

Numerous prior studies have examined media literacy from various perspectives. Hobbs (2010) frames media literacy as a set of competencies to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce media messages. Ribble (2015) developed the concept of digital citizenship, which emphasizes safe, responsible, and ethical technology use. Potter (2022) stresses the importance of critical thinking skills in navigating the flow of digital information. Kurnia Saputra (2024) highlights that Catholic Religious Education faces new challenges in accompanying Generation Z amid rapid technological development, while Sianipar (2019) shows that the *Shared Christian Praxis* approach is relevant for faith education, as it encourages students to reflect on their life experiences in light of Gospel values.

Nevertheless, a review of existing literature reveals that most studies frame media literacy primarily through the lens of digital skills and critical thinking. Research exploring the role of Catholic Religious Education teachers in building media literacy rooted in the

value of love remains very limited, and few studies integrate the concepts of media literacy, digital citizenship, and *Shared Christian Praxis* to shape students' digital conscience in public schools with diverse populations (Y. F. Rahayu & Yasin, 2024). This gap in research points to the need for a framework that combines digital competence with faith reflection, the value of love, and moral responsibility.

In response to this gap, this study proposes the concept of *Caritas-Based Media Literacy* as a conceptual development for Catholic Religious Education. This framework views media literacy not merely as the ability to understand and evaluate information, but as a process of forming a digital conscience rooted in love, respect for human dignity, social responsibility, and commitment to the common good. The *Shared Christian Praxis* approach is used as a pedagogical framework to connect students' digital experiences with faith reflection, leading to more ethical and humane communication practices.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

CARITAS-BASED MEDIA LITERACY

This study is built upon the integration of four complementary theoretical foundations: Vygotsky's social constructivism, Ribble's concept of digital citizenship, Groome's *Shared Christian Praxis* pedagogy, and the concept of *caritas* within Catholic theological tradition. These four perspectives help explain how CRE teachers guide students not only to think critically about digital media but also to develop a digital conscience rooted in love and respect for human dignity.

The first perspective is social constructivism, developed by Vygotsky (1978). According to this theory, learning occurs through social interaction between students and more knowledgeable individuals, referred to as the "more capable other." Learning is not limited to the transfer of knowledge but involves a process of guidance that enables students to progress within their "zone of proximal development." Through scaffolding, teachers help students develop abilities they could not yet achieve independently. In this study, the digital space is viewed as a new learning environment requiring guidance to help students understand information critically, evaluate the impact of digital communication, and make responsible decisions. Accordingly, the CRE teacher functions as the "more capable other" who supports the formation of students' digital character.

The second perspective draws from the concept of digital citizenship developed by Ribble (2015). Ribble explains that digital citizens are expected not only to master technology but also to use it safely, responsibly, ethically, and with respect for the rights of others. This concept serves as the foundation for understanding that media literacy extends beyond verifying information to include moral responsibility in all forms of digital communication.

The third perspective uses the *Shared Christian Praxis* approach developed by Groome (1980). This pedagogical model begins with students' lived experiences as the starting point for faith education, following five stages: naming present action, critical reflection, sharing the Christian story and vision, dialectical hermeneutics, and making decisions for living out the Christian faith. This approach allows students to reflect on their

experiences using social media through the lens of Gospel values, so that learning leads not only to conceptual understanding but also to changes in attitude and behavior (Sianipar, 2019a)

The fourth perspective is the concept of *caritas* as the core of Christian life. In Catholic tradition, *caritas* is understood as love expressed through respect for human dignity, solidarity, and responsibility toward others. This teaching is affirmed in the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (Benediktus XVI, 2005) and further developed in *Fratelli Tutti* (Fransiskus, 2020), which emphasizes universal brotherhood and a culture of dialogue in all areas of life including the digital world. Thus, the use of social media is evaluated not only based on whether information is true or false, but also on the extent to which communication builds relationships, honors human dignity, and contributes to the common good.

Based on the integration of these four perspectives, this study develops the concept of *Caritas-Based Media Literacy*: a process of forming a digital conscience that combines critical thinking skills, faith reflection, and ethical action in the use of social media. Vygotsky provides the basis for understanding the importance of teacher guidance; Ribble outlines the dimensions of digital citizenship; Groome offers a reflective pedagogical framework; and *caritas* serves as the ethical principle guiding the entire learning process. This integration provides the conceptual foundation for analyzing how CRE teachers guide students to use digital media critically, responsibly, and humanely within diverse communities.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a single holistic case study design, as described by Yin (2018). This method was chosen because the research focuses on an in-depth understanding of the role of CRE teachers in shaping students' digital conscience through the implementation of *Shared Christian Praxis* in a real classroom setting at a public school. The case study design allows researchers to explore the phenomenon comprehensively, taking into account the interaction between pedagogical practices, students' experiences, and the school's social context (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research was conducted at SMAN 4 Palangka Raya, Central Kalimantan. This school was selected through purposive sampling because its student body represents diverse religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds, making it a relevant context for examining the implementation of *caritas* values in CRE instruction. Additionally, the CRE teacher at this school has already integrated issues related to social media use into lessons, allowing for direct observation of media literacy guidance practices.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, chosen based on their relevant experience with the research focus. The key informants included one CRE teacher responsible for instruction at SMAN 4 Palangka Raya, and seven Catholic students enrolled in the subject. This number of participants aligns with the principle of data sufficiency in qualitative case studies, which prioritizes depth of information over breadth of representation.

Data were collected using three methods. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the teacher and students to explore their experiences, perspectives, and practices related to *caritas*-based media literacy. Second, non-participant observation was carried out during CRE lessons to identify how the *Shared Christian Praxis* approach is implemented in teaching and how interactions occur between the teacher and students. Third, documentation review was conducted using lesson plans, instructional materials, and other supporting documents related to CRE instruction.

Data analysis followed the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which includes three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. All interview data were transcribed verbatim, then reviewed repeatedly to identify initial codes. These codes were grouped into themes corresponding to the three roles of the teacher: learning facilitator, pastoral guide, and developer of digital character, as presented in the Findings section. Findings were interpreted by connecting results to the theoretical framework of Vygotsky's social constructivism, digital citizenship, *Shared Christian Praxis*, and the concept of *Caritas-Based Media Literacy*.

Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources comparing information obtained from the teacher, students, observations, and documents as well as triangulation of methods, by comparing results from interviews, observation, and documentation. The researchers also conducted member checking, asking participants to confirm summaries of interview results to ensure interpretations accurately reflected their experiences. The entire research process followed ethical principles: obtaining informed consent from participants before data collection, protecting the confidentiality of identities through the use of codes (G1 for the teacher, and S1 to S7 for students), and ensuring all information was used exclusively for academic purposes.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

RESEARCH RESULT

This study has several important implications at the theoretical, pedagogical, practical, and educational policy levels. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of Catholic Religious Education scholarship by integrating Vygotsky's social constructivism, the concept of digital citizenship, *Shared Christian Praxis* pedagogy, and the theology of *caritas* into a unified conceptual framework. This integration expands the understanding of media literacy, which has previously been studied primarily from communication or technology perspectives, and demonstrates that media literacy is also a process of character and conscience formation that belongs within moral and faith education.

Pedagogically, the study shows that students' digital experiences can serve as a meaningful starting point for learning. CRE teachers can use students' experiences with social media as material for reflection to discuss ethical issues, the value of love, social responsibility, and respect for human dignity making lessons more relevant to students' lives.

Practically, the *Caritas-Based Media Literacy* model can serve as a reference for teachers designing lessons that integrate media literacy with character education, through methods such as case discussions, reflection on digital experiences, news analysis, ethical decision-making simulations, and collaborative projects. This approach also supports the implementation of the *Pancasila Student Profile* and the strengthening of student character.

For schools, the findings highlight the importance of fostering a digital literacy culture that goes beyond technology mastery to include the development of ethical communication, empathy, tolerance, and social responsibility through collaboration between teachers, parents, and students.

This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted at a single school using a case study design, so its findings are context-specific and not intended to be generalized to all schools. Second, the relatively small number of participants means the results prioritize depth of information over broad representation. Third, the study focuses only on Catholic Religious Education, so it does not compare the implementation of values-based media literacy in other subjects or in schools with different characteristics.

Therefore, future research is recommended to test the implementation of the *Caritas-Based Media Literacy* model across various educational levels, public and private schools, and different social and cultural contexts. Further studies can also use mixed methods to combine qualitative and quantitative data, allowing for a more comprehensive measurement of the model's effectiveness in improving media literacy and character formation. Research and development projects are also needed to produce teaching materials, modules, and evaluation tools based on *Caritas-Based Media Literacy* that can be applied more widely.

Ultimately, this study confirms that media literacy education in the digital age must do more than teach technology skills it must contribute to forming the whole person. *Caritas-Based Media Literacy* offers a relevant pedagogical model to meet the challenges of 21st-century education, while also strengthening the role of Catholic Religious Education in raising digital citizens who are faithful, of good character, and responsible.

DISCUSSION

This section interprets the findings in light of the theoretical framework and compares them with previous studies, following the function of the Discussion section in academic articles.

The finding regarding the teacher's role as a learning facilitator supports Vygotsky (1978) social constructivism, which states that learning occurs through social interaction and guidance from more capable individuals. In this study, the CRE teacher fulfills the role of the "more capable other" by providing scaffolding that helps students understand the complexity of the digital world and make wiser decisions. This aligns with Ribble (2015) concept of digital citizenship, which emphasizes that responsible digital participation involves not only technical skills but also responsibility, ethics, and respect for the rights of others. The findings expand on Ribble's work by showing that the formation of responsible

digital citizens can be systematically supported through religious education, rather than only through general school policies.

The teacher's role as a pastoral guide demonstrates that the *Shared Christian Praxis* approach provides an effective pedagogical framework for connecting students' digital experiences with faith reflection. This finding strengthens the work of Sianipar (2019), who confirmed the relevance of SCP in faith education, while extending it to a new area that has not been widely studied: media literacy. Whereas Sianipar (2019) highlighted the general relevance of SCP in faith education, this study shows specifically how the five stages of SCP naming, critical reflection, story and vision, dialectical hermeneutics, and decision-making can be adapted as an analytical framework and a practical guide for media literacy instruction in the diverse classroom environment of a public school.

The teacher's role as a developer of digital character, reflected in the changes in student behavior described by participant S4, aligns with the work of (Hobbs, 2010) and Potter (2022) regarding the importance of critical thinking in media literacy. However, the findings reveal an additional dimension not explicitly addressed by Hobbs or Potter: the affective and spiritual dimension of sensitivity to the moral impact of digital posts on others. This difference in emphasis is the primary argument for why conventional media literacy frameworks need to be expanded with values-based dimensions, as proposed by the concept of *Caritas-Based Media Literacy* in this study.

These findings should also be read critically alongside the work of (Kurnia Saputra, 2024) who noted that Catholic Religious Education faces significant challenges in accompanying Generation Z amid rapid technological development. While (Kurnia Saputra, 2024) focuses more on challenges and obstacles, this study offers one concrete model that can address those challenges: integrating SCP and the value of *caritas* into instruction. At the same time, this research does not deny the existence of similar challenges, and where limitations such as limited class time or student resistance were observed, they are noted to provide a balanced discussion that does not only highlight successful outcomes.

Overall, the discussion above shows that these findings are not isolated from previous research, but rather contribute to an ongoing dialogue with social constructivism, digital citizenship, and *Shared Christian Praxis* while expanding each through the addition of *caritas* as an ethical foundation. This expansion serves as the basis for the argument regarding the novelty of this research, which is described in the following section.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the role of Catholic Religious Education teachers in shaping students' digital conscience through the implementation of *Shared Christian Praxis* rooted in the value of *caritas*. The findings show that the CRE teacher at SMAN 4 Palangka Raya acts as a learning facilitator, pastoral guide, and developer of digital character by implementing the five stages of *Shared Christian Praxis*: naming present action, critical reflection, sharing the Christian story and vision, dialectical hermeneutics, and making decisions for living out the Christian faith.

This process leads to transformation in students' digital attitudes and behaviors, as seen in their tendency to be more selective in receiving information, more careful before sharing content, and more mindful of the moral impact of every digital interaction. This confirms that media literacy challenges in the digital era cannot be solved only by strengthening technical competence, but require education that integrates critical thinking, moral reflection, and character formation.

Accordingly, this study affirms that media literacy education in the digital age must be part of forming the whole person, and Catholic Religious Education plays an important role in raising a generation that is digitally competent while also possessing a conscience sensitive to the dignity of others.

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