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Transforming School Counseling Services through Digital Complaint Systems and Students' Social Attitudes

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Abstract

The digital transformation of guidance and counseling services requires accessible and responsive communication channels to address students' social and psychological concerns. This study examines the effect of implementing a digital complaint system within guidance and counseling management on the social attitudes of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 01 Kepahiang. A quantitative approach with an ex-post facto design was employed. The participants comprised 69 seventh-grade students selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using two Likert-scale questionnaires measuring students' perceptions of the digital complaint system and their social attitudes. Both instruments underwent validity and reliability testing before data collection. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression after the required assumption tests were fulfilled. The descriptive results showed that the implementation of the digital complaint system was categorized as high, while students' social attitudes were predominantly in the medium-to-high category. Regression analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between the digital complaint system and students' social attitudes ($R = 0.672$, $R^2 = 0.452$, $p < .001$). The coefficient of determination indicates that the digital complaint system statistically explained 45.2% of the variance in students' social attitudes, while the remaining 54.8% was associated with other factors. These findings indicate that digital complaint systems can function beyond administrative reporting by supporting student help-seeking, early identification of social problems, and timely counseling interventions. Integrating digital complaint mechanisms into guidance and counseling management can therefore strengthen preventive and responsive services and support the development of students' positive social attitudes.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid transformation of education in the Society 5.0 era has reshaped how schools organize and deliver student support services. This educational paradigm promotes the human-centered use of digital technologies to address not only teaching and learning needs but also students' psychological, social, and developmental concerns. Within this transformation, guidance and counseling services need to adapt by utilizing technology to provide more accessible, responsive, and preventive support. Digital platforms can also create alternative communication channels that enable students to express concerns that may be difficult to disclose through direct interpersonal communication. Such approaches are

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particularly relevant to adolescents, whose daily communication increasingly takes place through digital media. Recent studies indicate that digital interventions offer feasible and potentially scalable approaches to supporting the mental health of children and adolescents, although their effectiveness depends on appropriate implementation, professional guidance, and adaptation to specific educational contexts (Wright et al., 2023; Dülsen et al., 2025).

The digitalization of counseling services is therefore not merely a temporary response to the COVID-19 pandemic but part of a broader transformation in the accessibility and delivery of psychosocial support. Adolescents increasingly interact with digital environments to obtain information, communicate difficulties, and seek psychological assistance. These environments may provide a degree of flexibility and privacy that is not always available in conventional counseling settings. Pretorius et al. (2019) found that online environments can reduce barriers related to stigma, uncertainty, and reluctance to seek help directly. Similarly, research by Pretorius et al. (2019) indicates that young people actively explore online resources when experiencing mental health difficulties, demonstrating that digital platforms can function as an additional pathway to support. Earlier systematic evidence also suggests that online mental health services may facilitate young people's access to professional assistance, although their effectiveness varies according to intervention type, target population, and implementation context (Kauer et al., 2014).

This transformation has important implications for school guidance and counseling because counselors are increasingly expected to possess technological competencies while maintaining the relational and humanistic foundations of counseling. Technology-related competencies, including ethical practice, data management, digital communication, and service delivery, have become important components of contemporary counseling practice (Sabella et al., 2010). Earlier research also showed that school counselors had increasingly incorporated technology into professional activities, although technological development often progressed faster than its implementation in counseling practice (Carlson et al., 2006). This situation indicates that digital transformation requires more than providing technological facilities; it also requires counselors to develop the professional competencies necessary to use digital systems responsibly and effectively. Consequently, technology should be positioned as a means of strengthening counselor and student interaction rather than replacing the interpersonal relationship that remains central to counseling.

However, the central issue is not simply the availability of technology but its ability to reduce barriers to student help-seeking. Adolescents may hesitate to seek professional assistance because of stigma, limited mental health literacy, confidentiality concerns, uncertainty about available services, and fear that adults may not understand their problems. Identified individual, social, and service-related barriers that influence professional help-seeking among children and adolescents. O'Neill et al. (2023) similarly found that adolescents' perceptions of emotional difficulties influence their willingness to seek help and that the context in which support is provided shapes help-seeking decisions. These barriers are particularly important in school settings because students must often disclose sensitive interpersonal experiences directly to adults whom they may perceive as authority figures. Thus, counseling systems that rely exclusively on voluntary face-to-face disclosure may fail to identify problems experienced by students who are reluctant, anxious, or fearful of communicating directly.

This challenge is particularly relevant to bullying, peer conflict, social exclusion, harassment, and other interpersonal problems. Bullying is not merely an individual behavioral problem but a social phenomenon that can affect psychological well-being, school belonging, safety, and

students' social development. A positive school climate is associated with lower levels of bullying and victimization, while supportive relationships with teachers and school personnel can encourage students to seek help when experiencing bullying or threats (Acosta et al., 2019; Cornell et al., 2012). School connectedness is similarly associated with lower peer victimization and better youth well-being (Springer et al., 2016; Dow-Fleisner et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the existence of counseling personnel and formal reporting procedures does not automatically ensure that students will disclose their experiences. Blomqvist et al. (2020) found that disclosure among bullying victims remains limited, while Dowling and Carey (2013) showed that students may perceive informal sources of support as easier to approach than teachers. These findings demonstrate an important limitation of conventional face-to-face reporting mechanisms.

Delayed reporting may allow relatively minor social problems to develop into more serious conflicts. Gizzarelli et al. (2023) found that students may avoid reporting bullying because they lack confidence in school staff's ability to respond effectively. Therefore, reporting should not be understood merely as an administrative procedure but as part of a broader system of trust, protection, and institutional responsiveness. A digital complaint system can provide an accessible and structured channel for reporting bullying, peer conflict, social exclusion, harassment, and other social concerns without requiring immediate face-to-face interaction. Such a mechanism may reduce the initial psychological barrier to disclosure and enable counselors to receive information at an earlier stage. When reports are systematically recorded and followed up, the system can also function as an early-warning mechanism for identifying recurring or emerging social problems within the school environment.

Digital reporting should nevertheless be understood as more than a technological innovation. Its educational significance lies in its potential to strengthen preventive and data-informed counseling management. Earlier identification of complaints can help counselors recognize patterns of peer conflict, bullying, social exclusion, and other interpersonal difficulties and determine appropriate follow-up interventions. Evidence from digital mental health research suggests that online mechanisms can increase accessibility and provide additional pathways for adolescents to obtain support, although digital mechanisms should complement rather than replace professional and interpersonal services (Lehtimaki et al., 2021; Noh & Kim, 2022; Wright et al., 2023). In this model, digital reporting becomes the initial entry point, while professional assessment, counseling, referral, and face-to-face intervention remain necessary when problems require deeper intervention. Recent research on anonymous harm-reporting mechanisms further indicates the potential relevance of digital reporting in school contexts, although evidence regarding its broader effects on students' social and behavioral outcomes remains limited.

The importance of early reporting is closely related to students' social attitudes, including empathy, respect, cooperation, tolerance, responsibility, and responses to harmful interpersonal behavior. These attitudes are shaped not only through formal instruction but also through students' everyday experiences within the school social environment. Bullying and weak school connectedness can negatively influence social adjustment, whereas supportive school environments can encourage healthier interpersonal responses. Jin et al. (2026) demonstrated that bullying can influence adolescents' social adaptation through mechanisms involving self-disclosure and school connectedness, indicating that students' willingness to communicate and their social environment are closely interconnected. Nevertheless, the relationship between digital reporting and social attitudes remains insufficiently established. Existing digital intervention research has largely focused on mental health, anxiety,

depression, psychological well-being, and general help-seeking rather than school-based social attitudes and early detection of interpersonal problems (Noh & Kim, 2022; Dülsen et al., 2025; Abura-Meerdink & Albright, 2024). This gap is particularly relevant at the junior secondary level, where students are increasingly sensitive to peer acceptance, social evaluation, identity formation, and belonging. Recent evidence also links school connectedness with students' experiences of bullying (McCabe et al., 2026).

In Indonesia, empirical research examining digital complaint systems as an integrated component of school guidance and counseling management remains limited. Previous studies have generally focused on cyber counseling, digital counseling competencies, digital mental health interventions, or technology-assisted counseling rather than structured digital complaint mechanisms for the early identification of students' social problems. A digital complaint system differs from online counseling because it functions as an upstream preventive mechanism that provides an initial entry point for identifying problems before counselors conduct assessment, intervention, referral, or face-to-face counseling. The novelty of the present study therefore lies in positioning the digital complaint system as a preventive management instrument and examining its relationship with students' social attitudes. This approach connects three domains that are often investigated separately: digital technology adoption in counseling, early detection of social problems, and students' social development. By integrating these domains, the study seeks to provide empirical evidence regarding how a relatively simple digital mechanism can be incorporated into everyday counseling management to strengthen preventive intervention.

The empirical context of this study is SMP Negeri 01 Kepahiang, where preliminary observations indicate a gap between the occurrence of students' social problems and their early detection by counselors. Problems such as bullying, peer conflict, social exclusion, and interpersonal disputes may remain unnoticed until they become more serious because students may hesitate to use conventional face-to-face reporting procedures. From the perspective of Islamic Guidance and Counseling, a digital complaint system can function as a *wasilah* (means) for strengthening the preventive and humane dimensions of counseling services. Technology should complement rather than replace counselors' interpersonal roles while supporting dignity, confidentiality, justice, empathy, and the prevention of harm. Digitalization must therefore be accompanied by clear procedures for confidentiality, verification, counselor follow-up, and appropriate face-to-face intervention. Accordingly, this study aims to empirically examine the effect of implementing a digital complaint system within guidance and counseling management on the social attitudes of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 01 Kepahiang. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of safer, more responsive, inclusive, preventive, and student-centered school counseling practices.

METHODS

Research Approach and Design

This study employed a quantitative approach with an ex-post facto design and an associative orientation to examine the relationship between students' perceptions of the digital complaint system and their social attitudes. The design was selected because the study investigated naturally occurring conditions without manipulating or experimentally controlling the independent variable. In educational research, non-experimental designs are appropriate for examining relationships among variables based on existing conditions, particularly when

experimental manipulation is impractical or inappropriate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Accordingly, students' perceptions of the implementation of the digital complaint system were positioned as the independent variable (X), while students' social attitudes constituted the dependent variable (Y). The analysis focused on determining whether variations in students' perceptions of the digital complaint system were significantly associated with variations in their social attitudes, while recognizing that an ex-post facto design does not provide the same level of causal inference as a controlled experimental design.

Population and Sampling

The population comprised all seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 01 Kepahiang during the 2025/2026 academic year. The seventh-grade level was selected because students at this stage are undergoing important social and interpersonal development within the school environment. Simple Random Sampling was employed to give each student an equal opportunity to participate and minimize potential selection bias. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula to obtain an adequate representation of the population. Participants were selected from two classes, namely Class VII.I with 34 students and Class VII.J with 35 students, resulting in a total sample of 69 students. The selected participants were considered relevant to the study because they had direct experience with the guidance and counseling services examined.

Data Collection and Measurement

Data were obtained through non-test instruments consisting of closed-ended questionnaires distributed to the selected student respondents. The questionnaires were developed to gather quantitative information regarding students' perceptions of the digital complaint system and their social attitudes. A four-point Likert scale, with response scores ranging from 1 to 4, was employed to assess the respondents' degree of agreement with each statement. The absence of a neutral option was intended to encourage respondents to indicate a more definite position toward the statements presented. The questionnaire items were formulated according to the conceptual dimensions and indicators underlying each research variable to ensure adequate representation of the constructs under investigation. The same measurement procedures and response structure were applied uniformly to all respondents, thereby supporting consistent data collection and enabling the data to be analyzed systematically using appropriate statistical techniques.

Measurement of the Digital Complaint System

The instrument measuring students' perceptions of the implementation of the digital complaint system was developed based on three principal indicators: accessibility, anonymity, and system transparency. Accessibility refers to the extent to which students perceive the complaint system as easy to access and use when they need to communicate a social problem to the school. Anonymity refers to students' perceptions regarding the extent to which the system provides privacy and enables them to communicate problems without immediately revealing their identity to other students. System transparency refers to students' perceptions regarding the clarity of the reporting mechanism, information concerning the handling of complaints, and the responsiveness of the counseling service to submitted reports. These indicators were selected because a digital complaint mechanism is expected not merely to provide a technological reporting channel but also to reduce psychological and social barriers that may prevent students from communicating their problems.

Measurement of Social Attitudes

The instrument measuring students' social attitudes was constructed based on three principal indicators: honesty, empathy, and responsibility. Honesty refers to students' tendency to communicate information truthfully and avoid deceptive behavior in their interactions with others. Empathy refers to students' ability and willingness to understand, appreciate, and respond appropriately to the feelings and conditions of their peers. Responsibility refers to students' willingness to recognize the consequences of their actions, fulfill social obligations, and demonstrate concern for the well-being of others within the school environment. These indicators were selected because positive social attitudes are essential for establishing respectful interpersonal relationships, reducing harmful peer interactions, and supporting a safe and supportive school climate.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

Before the instruments were administered for the main data collection, validity and reliability testing were conducted to ensure the quality of the measurement instruments. Item validity was examined using the Product Moment correlation technique, in which the correlation between each questionnaire item and the total score was evaluated. An item was considered valid when the calculated correlation coefficient met the predetermined criterion and exceeded the critical value at the specified significance level. Following the validity assessment, instrument reliability was examined using Cronbach's Alpha to determine the internal consistency of the items within each scale. Reliability testing was necessary to establish whether the items consistently measured the intended constructs. Items that failed to meet the established validity criteria were excluded or revised before the final questionnaire was administered to the research participants.

Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data were analyzed using inferential statistical techniques to examine the relationship between students' perceptions of the digital complaint system and their social attitudes. Prior to hypothesis testing, prerequisite assumption tests were conducted to determine whether the data met the requirements for parametric analysis. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality test was used to assess whether the data or regression residuals followed an approximately normal distribution. A linearity test was then performed to determine whether the relationship between students' perceptions of the digital complaint system and their social attitudes could be appropriately modeled using a linear function. These tests were necessary to verify the suitability of the data for regression analysis and to ensure that the resulting statistical estimates were valid and interpretable. Subsequently, simple linear regression was applied to determine the direction, magnitude, and statistical significance of the relationship between the two variables.

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis was tested using Simple Linear Regression Analysis because the study involved one independent variable and one dependent variable. The analysis was used to determine the direction and magnitude of the effect of students' perceptions of the digital complaint system on their social attitudes. The regression coefficient was examined to determine whether the independent variable made a statistically significant contribution to the dependent variable. In addition, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was considered to

identify the proportion of variance in students' social attitudes that could be statistically explained by their perceptions of the digital complaint system. The interpretation of the regression results was based on the predetermined significance level and was subsequently discussed in relation to the objectives of guidance and counseling management.

Statistical Software

All statistical procedures, including descriptive analysis, prerequisite assumption testing, and hypothesis testing, were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26.0 for Windows. The use of statistical software facilitated systematic data processing and reduced the possibility of computational errors. The statistical results were subsequently interpreted not only in terms of statistical significance but also in relation to the theoretical framework of digital guidance and counseling services and the development of students' social attitudes in the school environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Descriptive Analysis of Research Variables

The descriptive analysis was conducted to provide an overall representation of the two variables examined in this study, namely students' perceptions of the implementation of the digital complaint system as the independent variable (X) and students' social attitudes as the dependent variable (Y). The analysis focused on the distribution and tendency of respondents' scores across the measurement indicators. A total of 69 seventh-grade students from SMP Negeri 01 Kepahiang participated in the study. Descriptive analysis was important because it provided an initial empirical picture of how students perceived the digital complaint system and how their social attitudes were manifested before examining the causal-associative relationship between the two variables.

Students' Perceptions of the Digital Complaint System

The descriptive findings indicate that students' perceptions of the implementation of the digital complaint system were generally classified in the high category. This result indicates that the majority of respondents perceived the digital complaint system as accessible, sufficiently private, and transparent in terms of its reporting procedures and follow-up mechanisms. The finding suggests that students were generally able to recognize the existence and function of the digital reporting mechanism as part of the guidance and counseling service system.

The high level of students' perceptions can be understood through three principal dimensions of the digital complaint system: accessibility, anonymity, and system transparency. From the accessibility dimension, the system provides students with an alternative communication channel that can be accessed without requiring them to immediately approach the counselor in person. This feature is particularly relevant for students who may experience hesitation, embarrassment, or anxiety when communicating sensitive social problems directly. Digital accessibility therefore potentially reduces the initial psychological barrier associated with face-to-face disclosure.

The anonymity dimension is also important because students may be more willing to communicate concerns when they perceive that their personal identity and submitted information are adequately protected. In the context of bullying, peer conflict, social exclusion, or other interpersonal problems, fear of being stigmatized or becoming the subject of peer attention may discourage students from reporting. The relatively high perception of anonymity suggests that the digital complaint system may provide students with a greater sense of psychological safety when initiating communication with the counseling service.

Meanwhile, the transparency dimension reflects students' perceptions of the clarity of the reporting procedures and the extent to which complaints are appropriately followed up by the school. A reporting system is unlikely to function effectively if students do not understand how to submit a complaint, what happens after a complaint is submitted, or whether the counselor will respond to the information provided. Therefore, the relatively high overall perception indicates that the digital complaint system has been recognized by students as a meaningful component of the school's guidance and counseling infrastructure rather than merely as an additional technological facility.

From a guidance and counseling management perspective, this finding is important because it indicates that digital technology can expand the entry points through which students access counseling services. Rather than replacing face-to-face counseling, the digital complaint system can function as an initial communication and early-detection mechanism. Students can communicate emerging problems through a relatively accessible channel, while counselors can subsequently assess the reported situation and determine whether further individual counseling, mediation, referral, or direct intervention is required.

Students' Social Attitudes

The descriptive analysis further indicates that students' social attitudes were generally distributed within the medium-to-high category, demonstrating that most respondents had relatively positive social orientations. These attitudes were reflected primarily in the dimensions of honesty, empathy, and responsibility. The finding suggests that the majority of seventh-grade students had developed basic positive social dispositions in their interactions with peers and within the school environment, although these attitudes still require continuous reinforcement through educational and counseling interventions.

The honesty dimension represents students' tendency to communicate information truthfully, avoid deceptive behavior, and maintain integrity in interpersonal relationships. The empathy dimension reflects students' ability to understand and respond appropriately to the feelings, needs, and difficulties of their peers. Meanwhile, responsibility represents students' willingness to recognize the consequences of their actions, fulfill obligations, and demonstrate concern for the consequences of their behavior toward others. Together, these dimensions provide an important representation of students' social functioning within the school context.

The medium-to-high classification of social attitudes also indicates that positive social behavior should not be interpreted as a fixed characteristic. Adolescents remain in a developmental period in which social attitudes can be strengthened or weakened by peer relationships, school climate, family influences, and the quality of interaction with teachers and counselors. Consequently, the relatively positive descriptive findings should be understood as an existing foundation that can be further developed through systematic guidance and counseling services.

This finding is consistent with the view that continuous guidance and value internalization play an important role in developing adolescents' social attitudes. Within school counseling, the development of social attitudes should therefore not be limited to addressing behavioral problems after they occur. Instead, counseling services should also emphasize preventive efforts that help students develop empathy, responsibility, honesty, respect, and constructive interpersonal communication.

Descriptive Relationship Between the Variables

Taken together, the descriptive findings provide an important preliminary picture of the research context. The digital complaint system was perceived by students at a relatively high level, while their social attitudes were generally positioned between the medium and high categories. This pattern suggests that the school had established a digital mechanism that was recognized and utilized as part of the guidance and counseling service environment, while the respondents also demonstrated relatively positive social characteristics in their interactions and attitudes toward others. The descriptive results therefore provide an initial indication that the digital complaint system and students' social attitudes represent relevant dimensions of the school counseling context.

However, descriptive categorization alone cannot establish whether the digital complaint system contributes significantly to students' social attitudes. A high level of student perception toward the system does not automatically demonstrate a predictive or causal relationship with social attitudes. The descriptive findings should therefore be interpreted as a representation of the characteristics of the observed sample rather than as evidence of an effect between variables. For this reason, inferential analysis was subsequently conducted to determine whether the relationship between the two variables was statistically significant and to estimate the magnitude of the contribution of the digital complaint system to variations in students' social attitudes.

Results of Assumption Tests

Normality Test

Before conducting the simple linear regression analysis, prerequisite assumption testing was performed to determine whether the data met the requirements for parametric statistical analysis. Normality was examined using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test to assess whether the distribution of the data or regression residuals deviated significantly from a normal distribution. This test was conducted as an initial diagnostic procedure to ensure that the statistical model could be applied appropriately to the collected data.

The results showed that the significance value of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was greater than 0.05, indicating that the normality assumption was satisfied. Therefore, there was insufficient statistical evidence to conclude that the data significantly deviated from a normal distribution. This finding supports the use of subsequent parametric analysis, particularly simple linear regression, to examine the relationship between students' perceptions of the digital complaint system and their social attitudes. The normality result is methodologically important because an appropriate distribution of regression residuals supports the validity of statistical inference in the regression model. Fulfillment of this assumption therefore provides a stronger basis for interpreting the regression coefficient, significance level, and estimated contribution of the independent variable to students' social attitudes.

Linearity Test

A linearity test was subsequently conducted to determine whether the relationship between students' perceptions of the digital complaint system and their social attitudes could appropriately be represented by a linear regression model. This assumption is important because simple linear regression estimates the extent to which changes in the independent variable are systematically associated with changes in the dependent variable through a linear function. The analysis indicated that the relationship between the digital complaint system and students' social attitudes met the required linearity criterion. Thus, the observed pattern between the two variables was sufficiently linear to support the application of simple linear regression.

The fulfillment of the linearity assumption, together with the previously established normality assumption, indicates that the dataset met the necessary prerequisites for the planned inferential analysis. Accordingly, the regression coefficient could be interpreted as the estimated change in students' social attitudes associated with changes in their perceptions of the digital complaint system. Based on these results, hypothesis testing was continued using simple linear regression to determine the statistical significance and magnitude of the relationship between the two variables.

Hypothesis Testing Results

Simple Linear Regression Analysis

Simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether students' perceptions of the implementation of the digital complaint system significantly predicted their social attitudes. The analysis involved one independent variable, namely students' perceptions of the digital complaint system (X), and one dependent variable, namely students' social attitudes (Y). The analysis was conducted after the data had met the prerequisite assumptions of normality and linearity. The regression analysis was intended to determine the direction and magnitude of the statistical relationship between the two variables and to identify the proportion of variance in students' social attitudes that could be explained by perceptions of the digital complaint system. The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Simple Linear Regression Analysis

Analysis component	Value
Number of respondents (N)	69
Correlation coefficient (R)	0.672
Coefficient of determination (R^2)	0.452
Explained variance	45.2%
Unexplained variance	54.8%
F-statistic	55.263
t-statistic	7.434
Significance (p-value)	< 0.001

The regression analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of R = 0.672, indicating a positive relationship between students' perceptions of the digital complaint system and their social attitudes. The positive direction of the relationship indicates that students who reported more favorable perceptions of the digital complaint system tended to demonstrate higher levels of

positive social attitudes. The magnitude of the correlation also indicates a relatively substantial association between the two variables within the present sample.

The regression model was statistically significant, with $F(1, 67) = 55.263$, $p < .001$. Because the obtained significance value was substantially lower than the conventional significance level of .05, the null hypothesis was rejected. The result indicates that students' perceptions of the implementation of the digital complaint system significantly predicted their social attitudes. In other words, variation in students' perceptions of the digital complaint system was statistically associated with variation in their social attitudes.

The coefficient of determination was $R^2 = 0.452$, indicating that students' perceptions of the digital complaint system statistically explained approximately 45.2% of the variance in students' social attitudes. The remaining 54.8% of the variance was associated with other factors that were not included in the present regression model. These factors may include family environment, peer relationships, school climate, teacher support, individual personality characteristics, moral and religious education, previous social experiences, and other psychological or contextual factors. Thus, although the digital complaint system demonstrated a substantial statistical contribution, students' social attitudes should be understood as a multidimensional construct influenced by multiple interacting factors.

The magnitude of the coefficient of determination is noteworthy because the present model included only one predictor variable. An R^2 value of .452 indicates that nearly half of the observed variation in students' social attitudes was statistically accounted for by perceptions of the digital complaint system. This finding suggests that the digital complaint system may represent an important component of the broader guidance and counseling service environment. Nevertheless, the R^2 value should not be interpreted as indicating that the digital complaint system is the sole determinant of students' social attitudes. Rather, it represents the proportion of variance statistically explained by the predictor included in the current model.

Interpretation of the Regression Effect

The positive and statistically significant regression result provides empirical support for the proposition that students' perceptions of the implementation of a digital complaint system are associated with more positive social attitudes among seventh-grade students. From a guidance and counseling perspective, this finding can be understood through the preventive function of digital reporting mechanisms. By providing an accessible communication channel, the system may facilitate students' willingness to communicate social difficulties that might otherwise remain undisclosed. Early communication allows counselors to identify emerging interpersonal problems and determine appropriate follow-up actions before such problems escalate into more serious conflicts.

The potential contribution of the digital complaint system can also be understood through its three principal characteristics: accessibility, anonymity, and transparency. Accessibility provides students with an alternative pathway for communicating concerns without requiring immediate face-to-face interaction. Anonymity may reduce students' concerns about embarrassment, stigma, retaliation, or negative peer reactions when reporting sensitive problems. Meanwhile, transparency may strengthen students' confidence that submitted complaints will be appropriately received, assessed, and followed up by the counseling service. The combination of these characteristics may create a more psychologically safe entry point for students seeking assistance.

In this context, the digital complaint system should not be viewed merely as an administrative or technological instrument. Its significance lies in its integration with the broader management of guidance and counseling services. A complaint submitted through the digital platform can serve as an initial signal that enables counselors to conduct further assessment, identify the nature and severity of the problem, and determine appropriate preventive or remedial interventions. Thus, digital reporting may strengthen the transition from a predominantly reactive counseling model toward a more preventive and early-detection-oriented model.

The finding also provides an important interpretation regarding students' social attitudes. When social problems can be communicated and addressed at an earlier stage, students may receive opportunities to reflect on their behavior, understand the perspectives of others, manage interpersonal conflicts, and develop more constructive responses to social situations. These processes are closely related to the development of honesty, empathy, and responsibility, which constitute the principal dimensions of social attitudes examined in this study.

However, the findings should be interpreted within the methodological limitations of the ex-post facto design. Because the study did not involve random assignment or experimental manipulation, the statistically significant regression result should not be interpreted as definitive evidence of causality in the same manner as a randomized experimental study. Instead, the findings demonstrate a statistically significant predictive relationship and a substantial explained variance between students' perceptions of the digital complaint system and their social attitudes. Future studies employing longitudinal, quasi-experimental, or experimental designs could provide stronger evidence regarding the causal mechanisms underlying this relationship.

Overall, the regression findings indicate that the digital complaint system constitutes a meaningful component of guidance and counseling management in the context of SMP Negeri 01 Kepahiang. The statistical contribution of 45.2% suggests that the implementation of a digital reporting mechanism is closely associated with students' social attitudes within the studied population. The finding therefore supports the broader proposition that digital transformation in school counseling can extend beyond service accessibility and communication efficiency to support preventive intervention, early problem detection, and the development of a more responsive and student-centered counseling environment.

Contribution of the Digital Complaint System to Social Attitudes

The coefficient of determination of 45.2% provides an important empirical contribution to understanding the potential role of digitalization in school counseling. This finding indicates that the digital complaint system makes a substantial statistical contribution to explaining differences in students' social attitudes within the context of the present study. The result suggests that digital complaint mechanisms can provide more than an alternative channel for communication, particularly when they enable students to report social concerns at an early stage and facilitate timely counselor responses. In this regard, digital transformation in guidance and counseling should not be limited to improving communication or administrative efficiency but should also be directed toward strengthening preventive, responsive, and developmental counseling functions. Such integration may enable counselors to identify emerging social problems more systematically and provide interventions that support students' positive social development.

The result is particularly relevant in situations where students are reluctant to report social problems through conventional mechanisms. A student experiencing bullying, peer exclusion, interpersonal conflict, or other social difficulties may not immediately approach a counselor because of fear of stigma, embarrassment, retaliation, or uncertainty about the response. A digital complaint mechanism can provide an initial bridge between the student and the counseling service. Once communication is established, counselors can determine the appropriate intervention based on the severity and nature of the reported problem. From this perspective, the digital complaint system may contribute indirectly to social attitude development by strengthening the responsiveness of the counseling environment. Students who perceive that their concerns can be communicated safely and addressed appropriately may develop greater trust in school support systems. At the same time, systematic counseling responses can reinforce values such as empathy, honesty, responsibility, respect, and constructive conflict resolution.

Statistical and Practical Significance

The findings should be interpreted by distinguishing between statistical significance and practical significance. The p-value of less than 0.001 indicates that the observed regression effect is statistically significant and that the probability of obtaining such a result under the null hypothesis is very small. Meanwhile, the R^2 value of 0.452 indicates that the predictor statistically accounts for 45.2% of the variance in students' social attitudes within the present sample. Thus, the findings are not only statistically significant but also indicate a meaningful explanatory contribution of the digital complaint system, although the remaining 54.8% of variance suggests that other individual, interpersonal, family, and school-related factors also contribute to students' social attitudes.

Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted within the scope of the research design. Because this study employed an ex-post facto design rather than a randomized controlled experiment, the statistical effect should be interpreted as evidence of a significant predictive or associative effect rather than definitive proof of causality in the experimental sense. Other variables that were not included in the model may also influence students' social attitudes. Future studies could therefore incorporate additional predictors, larger samples, longitudinal observations, or experimental and quasi-experimental designs to provide stronger evidence concerning causal mechanisms.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that students' perceptions of the implementation of a digital complaint system were positively and significantly associated with their social attitudes. The regression analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of $R = 0.672$, a coefficient of determination of $R^2 = 0.452$, and a significance value of $p < .001$. These results indicate that students' perceptions of the digital complaint system statistically accounted for 45.2% of the variance in their social attitudes. This finding provides empirical evidence that digital transformation in guidance and counseling (GC) management can extend beyond administrative efficiency and communication convenience. A digital complaint system can become part of a broader counseling mechanism through which students communicate social difficulties, psychological concerns, and interpersonal problems in a more accessible manner. This interpretation is consistent with the growing literature on digital mental health, which suggests that technology can expand access to psychological support and complement conventional services, particularly when digital interventions are appropriately integrated into

existing service systems (Agyapong et al., 2022; Hollis et al., 2017; Torous et al., 2021). Hollis et al. (2017), for example, found evidence supporting the potential of digital interventions to improve accessibility and delivery of mental health support for children and young people, although their effectiveness depends on the quality of implementation and the characteristics of the intervention.

The significant association found in this study can further be interpreted through the help-seeking process among adolescents. Students who experience bullying, peer conflict, social exclusion, intimidation, or other interpersonal difficulties do not always communicate these experiences directly to counselors. Psychological barriers, uncertainty about the consequences of disclosure, concerns about stigma, and reluctance to be identified as someone experiencing problems may discourage students from accessing conventional counseling services. Vogel et al. (2007) emphasized that psychological factors can inhibit individuals from seeking professional counseling, while Gulliver et al. (2010) identified stigma, embarrassment, confidentiality concerns, and difficulties recognizing the need for help as important barriers among young people. Rickwood et al. (2005) and Rickwood et al. (2007) likewise emphasized that young people's help-seeking behavior is influenced by their perception of the problem, available sources of support, and perceived accessibility of professional assistance. Consequently, the digital complaint system may reduce the initial threshold for help-seeking by providing an alternative communication pathway through which students can initiate contact without immediately engaging in face-to-face interaction. This mechanism is particularly relevant to junior secondary students, for whom direct disclosure to an adult may still be psychologically challenging.

The anonymity and privacy characteristics of a digital complaint mechanism may further strengthen students' willingness to disclose sensitive social problems. Burns et al. (2009) argued that Internet-based mental health resources have potential to reduce stigma and facilitate help-seeking among young people who might otherwise avoid conventional services. In the present study, the availability of a digital reporting channel may similarly provide students with greater psychological distance from the counselor during the initial disclosure stage. Such distance can be particularly important when complaints concern bullying, interpersonal conflict, or behavior that may generate fear of retaliation or social labeling. Nevertheless, anonymity should not be understood as a substitute for professional counseling. Rather, it should function as a protective entry mechanism that facilitates initial disclosure, followed by appropriate verification, assessment, confidentiality procedures, counseling intervention, and case follow-up. The evidence on technology-based mental health interventions also indicates that digital delivery is most meaningful when it is integrated with appropriate professional support rather than treated as a completely autonomous substitute for human interaction (Farrer et al., 2013; Lattie et al., 2019). Farrer et al. (2013), for instance, found that technology-based interventions show promise, but also emphasized the need for stronger methodological evidence and appropriate implementation.

The effectiveness of a digital complaint system, however, is not determined merely by its technological availability. Student engagement with the system is an important condition that determines whether digital reporting can actually contribute to counseling management. Borghouts et al. (2021), based on a systematic review of 208 empirical studies, found that engagement with digital mental health interventions is influenced by technical factors, personalization, usability, perceived control, social connectedness, and the implementation environment. This finding is directly relevant to the present study because a digital complaint system will have limited preventive value if students perceive it as complicated, inaccessible,

unsafe, or unlikely to receive an appropriate response. The relatively strong relationship identified in this study may therefore reflect not only the existence of digital technology but also students' perceptions that the reporting mechanism provides meaningful access to counseling services. Christensen et al. (2011) similarly emphasized the potential of electronically delivered psychological interventions while recognizing that technological delivery should remain connected to appropriate therapeutic principles. Thus, the digital complaint system should be designed as an integrated counseling service infrastructure, rather than simply as an online form for collecting complaints.

Another important interpretation concerns the preventive function of digital complaint systems. In conventional counseling management, counselors may become aware of social problems only after conflicts have escalated or after teachers, parents, or other students report them. Digital reporting can potentially shorten this information gap by enabling students to communicate emerging problems at an earlier stage. This early communication provides counselors with an opportunity to identify recurring cases, recognize patterns of interpersonal conflict, prioritize cases according to urgency, and initiate preventive interventions. Hollis et al. (2017) noted that digital health interventions can potentially increase accessibility and efficiency, while Torous et al. (2021) emphasized that digital technologies can augment traditional care and support early intervention when implementation is appropriately managed. Agyapong et al. (2022) similarly demonstrated the growing relevance of digital interventions for children and adolescents in mental health prevention and treatment. Therefore, within the context of SMP Negeri 01 Kepahiang, the digital complaint system can be interpreted as an early-warning mechanism within GC management, allowing counselors to shift from a predominantly reactive model toward a more preventive and data-informed service model.

The relationship between the digital complaint system and students' social attitudes can also be explained through the social risks associated with digital environments themselves. Adolescents increasingly interact through digital platforms, and these environments can facilitate both positive communication and negative social behaviors. Kowalski et al. (2014), through a meta-analysis of cyberbullying research, demonstrated that bullying has increasingly extended into digital environments, while Livingstone and Smith (2014) highlighted the range of aggressive and other risks experienced by children using online and mobile technologies. Mishna et al. (2009) similarly showed that online relationships can generate forms of cyber abuse that require appropriate adult awareness and intervention. These findings provide an important contextual explanation for the present research: if social problems can emerge or intensify through digital interaction, schools also need digital mechanisms capable of receiving information about those problems. The digital complaint system therefore has a dual preventive function: it provides a safer avenue for students to report interpersonal problems while simultaneously enabling counselors to respond to social risks that may originate in or extend into digital spaces.

Nevertheless, the R^2 value of 0.452 also demonstrates that the development of students' social attitudes cannot be attributed exclusively to the digital complaint system. Although the predictor statistically explained 45.2% of the variance in social attitudes, the remaining 54.8% indicates that other variables contribute to differences in students' honesty, empathy, responsibility, and interpersonal behavior. Odgers and Jensen (2020) emphasize that adolescents' psychological development in the digital age should not be interpreted through technology alone because digital experiences interact with family, peer, school, and developmental contexts. Naslund et al. (2017) likewise highlighted the importance of social

connectedness and peer support within digitally mediated mental health environments, while Sampasa-Kanyinga and Lewis (2015) demonstrated that patterns of social networking use can be associated with adolescents' psychological functioning. These perspectives reinforce the interpretation that the digital complaint system should be integrated with broader character education, teacher support, family involvement, peer relationships, school climate development, and systematic counseling interventions. The technology is therefore better understood as an enabling mechanism rather than as an independent determinant of students' social character.

Finally, these findings have important implications for developing blended and preventive guidance and counseling management in junior secondary schools. The digital complaint system should complement professional counseling by serving as an initial communication and early-detection channel, followed by appropriate assessment and intervention. Digital mental health research indicates that technology can improve accessibility, although its effectiveness depends on user engagement, implementation quality, human support, and contextual adaptation (Borghouts et al., 2021; Farrer et al., 2013; Lattie et al., 2019). However, the findings should be interpreted cautiously because the ex-post facto design does not establish experimental causality, the data relied on self-report questionnaires, and the sample was limited to 69 students from one school. Future research should employ longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs across multiple schools and incorporate qualitative data to examine students' experiences of anonymity, disclosure, counselor responsiveness, and problem resolution. Overall, the findings support the integration of digital complaint systems into responsive counseling infrastructure to strengthen early problem detection, facilitate help-seeking, and promote positive social attitudes among adolescents.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of a digital complaint system has a positive and statistically significant effect on students' social attitudes, demonstrating its potential beyond a technological reporting facility in school guidance and counseling management. By providing a secure, accessible, and responsive communication channel, the system can reduce barriers to help-seeking, facilitate early identification of social problems, and support the transition from digital reporting to professional counseling interventions. With an explanatory contribution of 45.2% ($R^2 = 0.452$), the system represents a meaningful component of students' social attitude development, although other individual, interpersonal, family, and school-contextual factors also contribute. The findings support the integration of digital complaint systems into blended and preventive counseling models, where technology complements rather than replaces counselors' professional roles. The study's originality lies in demonstrating at the junior secondary level that digital complaint systems can function as preventive counseling instruments that support social development and data-informed counseling management. Sustainable implementation should therefore be supported by counselor competence, digital literacy, confidentiality protection, systematic case follow-up, and a supportive school culture.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The primary author was responsible for the formulation of the research idea, research design, data collection, data analysis, and the preparation of the initial manuscript draft. The co-authors contributed to strengthening the theoretical framework, refining the research methodology, and critically reviewing and editing the manuscript. All authors participated in the discussion of the research findings, approved the final version of the manuscript, and take collective responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the published article.

COMPETING OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no competing interests, either financial or non-financial, that could have influenced the conduct of the research, the analysis of the data, or the publication of this article.

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