

Research Article

# Professionalism and Popularity in the Digital Age: A Netnographic Study of Teachers' Ethics and Self-Aesthetics as Educational Content Creators on TikTok

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**Abstract:** This study examines the phenomenon of creator teachers on TikTok as a form of digital professionalism that represents the integration of ethical values, aesthetics, and educational philosophy. The focus of the research lies in how teachers negotiate moral responsibility and creative expression in the algorithmic culture of social media. The aim of this research is to analyze the philosophical meaning behind teachers' digital representations as well as interpret how moral and aesthetic values are reflected in their pedagogical practices. The method used is digital netnography with four stages: online observation, digital documentation, audience interaction analysis, and researcher reflection. A total of eight teacher accounts were analyzed with a total of 80 videos using a categorization of themes that focused on ethics, aesthetics, and professionalism. The results showed that 62.5% of the content was educational and featured learning innovations, while the other 37.5% contained elements of entertainment and social interaction. High audience interaction shows public appreciation for the creativity and integrity of teachers. Popularity is not solely generated by algorithms, but by the appreciation of moral values and pedagogical beauty in the actions of teachers. Based on the framework of arete and phronesis from Aristotle and the concept of aesthetic experience from Dewey (1934), this study concludes that the digital professionalism of teachers is a form of reflective praxis that combines ethical responsibility and creative expression. This research makes a theoretical contribution by integrating digital netnography and educational philosophy, and shows that teachers in the digital era play the role of moral and creative agents who maintain the dignity of their profession in the algorithmic space.

**Keywords:** Aesthetics; Digital Professionalism; Educational Philosophy; Ethics; TikTok.

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## 1. Introduction

Global changes triggered by advances in artificial intelligence and digital technology have shifted the knowledge order from the conventional space to the algorithmic space. Of course, this has changed the way humans learn and interact with knowledge. In the view of the philosophy of education, this change raises fundamental questions about the nature of teachers as moral subjects who maintain the sustainability of human values in the midst of an increasingly mechanistic algorithmic culture. Short video platforms such as TikTok, with monthly active users reaching around 1.12 billion in the fourth quarter of 2023 (Backlinko 2024) are a symbol of the paradigm shift in learning knowledge to appear in visual, concise, and aesthetic forms. In such a space, teachers face moral tests to uphold the values of truth, beauty and virtue that are the three pillars of classical education philosophy (Chen 2020; Hitz 2013). The phenomenon of the emergence of "influencer teachers" on TikTok shows a new form of relationship between ethics, aesthetics, and professionalism. According to (Vizcaíno-Verdú and Abidin 2023), educators on social media combine the roles of educators and public communicators with creative, performative, and visual expressions. In an axiological perspective, this phenomenon contains a dilemma: how do teachers channel educational value in a medium driven by popularity algorithms? The teacher no longer plays a single role as a

transmitter of knowledge, but also as a creator of meaning who is faced with the demands of speed, entertainment, and exposure. Global studies show that teacher professionalism is undergoing a reconstruction. (OECD 2025) and the UNESCO Global Report on Teachers (2024) affirm that digital transformation opens up opportunities for innovation while demanding ethical responsibility.

In Indonesia, this shift is also felt strongly according to (Mubarok et al. 2025) emphasizing that educators are faced with the demand to adapt to the digital ecosystem and play the role of communicators who are able to inspire. In terms of the philosophy of education, the phenomenon of creator teachers on TikTok reflects a shift from a knowledge transfer paradigm to a communicative reflective paradigm. Teachers are cultural drivers who link intellect and morality in an aesthetically charged digital landscape. The purpose of this research is to explain the philosophical meaning behind the representation of teachers in the digital space, trace the forms of moral responsibility manifested in communicative actions, and elaborate on its axiological implications for educational professionalism in the era of artificial intelligence. This research contributes to: (1) strengthening the conceptual framework of digital professionalism based on educational philosophy; (2) mapping ethical and aesthetic values in teachers' communication practices; and (3) recommendations for digital ethical literacy for educators to be able to maintain the dignity of the profession in the midst of algorithmic culture. The structure of this paper consists of an introduction, a study of theories, methods, results and discussions, as well as conclusions and recommendations.

## 2. Literature Review

This research is based on empirical and theoretical studies that discuss the phenomenon of teachers as creators of educational content on social media, especially TikTok. The existing literature shows that these platforms have become a new space for teachers to build professional identities, develop creativity, and negotiate ethical values. However, studies from the perspective of educational philosophy are still limited, especially those that relate aspects of ethics, aesthetics, and teacher professionalism as a form of moral praxis in the algorithmic space.

### 2.1 Professionalisme Guru di Era Digital

Teacher professionalism in the digital era represents the ability of educators to adapt to changes in learning paradigms influenced by technology and artificial intelligence. Recent research confirms that teachers are now required to be communicators and innovators who are able to integrate values, pedagogy, and technology in a single unit of reflective practice (Mubarok et al. 2025). This transformation affirms the position of teachers as epistemological subjects who build and disseminate knowledge through participatory digital spaces. According to (Hasnah, Nur Afina 2025) explained that mastery of digital competencies and professional ethics are the main elements in maintaining the credibility of teachers in the midst of a rapidly changing flow of information. Meanwhile (Haliza 2024; Mahanal 2017) adds that the professionalism of teachers in the digital context depends on their ability to maintain moral integrity under the pressure of popularity and public exposure. The biggest challenge in realizing digital professionalism is the gap in teachers' understanding of digital systems and the limitations of training that discusses the ethical dimension of its application in the classroom (Harsh Vashistha 2023; Zhang et al. 2025). Furthermore (Govindarajoo et al. 2025) show that technology can be a pedagogic tool that increases the effectiveness of learning, but its use requires moral reflection so as not to reduce the meaning of education as a humanization process. Therefore, the professionalism of teachers in the digital era serves as an axiological foundation for technology management that is in line with humanistic educational values.

### 2.2 Professional Ethics and Moral Responsibility

The ethics of the teaching profession are rooted in the moral responsibility to uphold truth, goodness, and virtue in every educational practice. Aristotle's view of phronesis or practical wisdom illustrates that ethical action is born from good habits and rational considerations accompanied by moral goals (Chen 2020). With the existence of the digital world, this wisdom is realized through the ability of teachers to sort information, manage expression, and maintain the dignity of the profession in virtual public spaces.

(Fahman 2024) emphasized that digital transformation has changed the form of teachers' moral responsibility from just teachers to guardians of social integrity. This includes the safe and ethical use of digital media, including the use of artificial intelligence technology to

support transparent and equitable learning (Brandão, Pedro, and Zagalo 2024; Swindell et al. 2024) added that the ethical role of teachers has now expanded to be a facilitator of social awareness of the impact of technology on humanity and educational politics. Philosophically, the ethics of the teaching profession are not just a set of rules, but a moral expression that affirms the existence of human beings as rational and moral beings. Through ethical reflection, teachers instill moral awareness in digital interactions, building learning communities that value honesty, responsibility, and empathy.

### 2.3 Personal Aesthetics and Personal Branding

Aesthetics in the context of teacher professionalism is not limited to visual appearance, but encompasses the entire way teachers articulate educational values through digital expression. According to (Haroen 2014) explained that personal branding is formed from three main elements: identity, differentiation, and consistency. The three form a professional image that is able to build emotional closeness to the audience while maintaining scientific authority. Then (Meletiou-Mavrotheris et al. 2025) assert that teachers who are active on short-video platforms such as TikTok build dynamic relationships with students through narrative communication, humorous styles, and visual creativity that evoke learning engagement. From the perspective of the philosophy of education, (Dewey 1934) views aesthetics as an expression of reflective experience that connects knowledge and feeling. Teachers who are creative in the digital space realize the value of beauty in education through communicative actions that inspire and touch the emotional side of students. Of course, self-aesthetics function as a bridge between truth and beauty. Aesthetics composed with ethical responsibility reinforce the teacher's presence as an authentic, reflective, and inspirational public figure.

### 2.4 Educational Axiology: Integration of Ethics and Aesthetics

The axiology of education views the teaching profession as a manifestation of the values of truth, beauty, and virtue. Aristotle asserted that true virtue arises when rationality is combined with controlled emotions, while (Dewey 1934) sees education as an aesthetic experience that connects thoughts and actions. According to (Mustapa et al. 2025), it is emphasized that the ethical and aesthetic dimensions need to be synergized so that digital transformation does not obscure the moral goals of education. The use of technology and digital media is a vehicle to affirm the humanistic value of education, not replace it. The integration of ethics and aesthetics produces teachers who are able to balance rationality, creativity, and spirituality in modern educational practices. This study places teachers as the main actors in value formation who not only master technology, but also interpret it in the framework of the virtue and beauty of education.

## 3. Materials and Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with the netnography method, namely ethnographic adaptation applied in the context of digital space to understand online social and cultural behavior (Kozinets, Scaraboto, and Parmentier 2018). This approach allows for an in-depth analysis of how teachers represent themselves as professionals and creators of educational content on TikTok, as well as how ethical and aesthetic values are reflected in their digital practices. Netnography was chosen for its ability to trace social interactions in new media that are dynamic and multimodal (Sánchez-López, Roig-Vila, and Salcedo 2023). The researcher acts as a passive participatory observer, systematically observing teachers' activities in the creation of educational and entertainment content, so that they can interpret the forms of professionalism, moral responsibility, and aesthetic strategies that appear in each upload (Anggawirya 2025). This approach also pays attention to philosophical reflective aspects, taking into account the axiological values of education that emphasize the balance between ethics, aesthetics, and professionalism in the actions of teachers in the digital public space.

The research was carried out on the TikTok platform as a digital field site. This platform was chosen because it is a virtual public space where teachers interact and express themselves through a short video format that highlights visual, performative, and communicative elements (Sánchez-López et al. 2023). TikTok serves as a social laboratory that shows how teachers' professionalism adapts to algorithmic logic and digital popular culture. The study subjects included eight teacher accounts that were purposively identified based on their activities as educational content creators. This amount is considered proportional to

qualitative studies because it allows for an in-depth analysis of communication patterns, presentation styles, and professionalization strategies digital (Sarfo 2017).

The selection of research subjects was carried out by purposive sampling by considering several main criteria relevant to the focus of the study. The subject must be an active teacher at a formal educational institution that has a public TikTok account with a high level of upload activity and content related to the world of education. The criteria also include aspects of content relevance, audience interaction intensity, and diversity of representation based on education level and communication style. These entire criteria are designed to ensure that the observed accounts truly reflect the teacher's professional practice in a digital context. Full details of each criterion are presented in table 1. next.

**Table 1.** Criteria for Selecting Research Subjects.

Aspects	Operational Criteria	Purpose of Determination
Profession Status	Active teachers who list their professional identity on TikTok profiles	Ensuring a direct connection with the teaching profession
Online Activities	Minimum 10 uploads in the last 3 months	Assess the consistency of digital engagement
Content Type	Educational, motivating, or educational-themed entertainment	Ensure thematic relevance to the research objectives
Accessibility	Ethically observable public accounts	Maintaining compliance with online research ethics
User Interaction	Significant comments, likes, and views	Measure social acceptance of teacher content
Representation Variations	Different levels, genders, and communication styles	Providing a diversity of empirical data

The data in this study was collected through four main stages that complement each other. The first stage is netnographic online observation, where researchers conduct non-interventional observations of video uploads, captions, hashtags, and comments on teachers' accounts to identify communication patterns, presentation styles, and digitally constructed self-representation strategies. The second stage, digital documentation, is carried out by recording each content observed in the form of links, screenshots, and metadata that contains the number of views, comments, and upload time as the basis for quantitative-descriptive analysis. Furthermore, the third stage involves analyzing comments and audience interaction to assess public perception of professionalism, ethics, and digital image of teachers in online social spaces. The fourth stage is in the form of reflective notes of researchers, namely recording the results of conceptual interpretations that highlight the ethical and aesthetic values of each finding based on the educational axiological framework (Tamrin 2019).

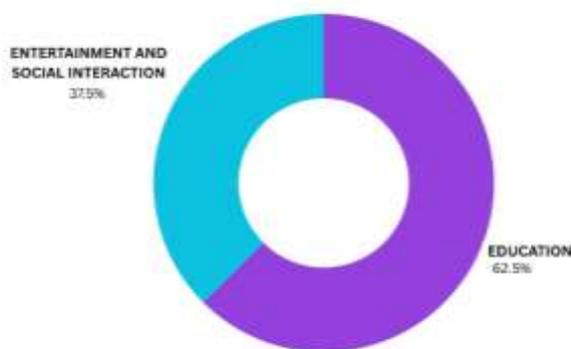
Data analysis was carried out using a model (Miles Matthew, Michael, and Johnny 2014) which includes three systematic stages. The first stage is data reduction, which is the process of filtering and grouping content based on the themes of ethics, aesthetics, and professionalism. The second stage, data presentation, displays the results of observations in the form of descriptive narratives and categorization tables that make it easier for researchers to understand the relationships between elements. The last stage, drawing conclusions, is carried out through a reflective-philosophical approach to interpret the ethical and aesthetic values of the teacher profession in the digital space. The analysis focused on how teachers' actions, styles, and self-representations as content creators reflect the balance between professionalism and popularity in the context of algorithmic culture. This approach is based on Aristotle's (4 BC) view of arete or moral virtue as the basis for the formation of professional character, as well as the idea (Dewey 1934) of aesthetic experience as a form of self-expression with educational value. With this educational philosophy framework, this study interprets the digital practice of teachers not just as a creative activity, but as a process of ethical and aesthetic reflection that shows the dignity of the educator profession in the era of interactive technology. The validity of the data is maintained through various verification techniques, including triangulation of sources and methods (involving data from videos, captions, comments, and reflections of researchers), member checking with participants to ensure interpretation accuracy, and trail audits that document the entire research decision-making process. In addition, peer debriefing was conducted with digital education experts to

evaluate the consistency of analysis and the credibility of the findings (Maghfiroh and Mustofa 2023)

All stages of research are carried out by paying attention to the ethical principles of online research, where observations are only made on public content without intervention or modification. Researchers respect user privacy and uphold the principles of anonymity, informed ethics, and context integrity, according to the guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers (2023), in order to maintain moral responsibility and academic integrity in the entire research process (Amsrud 2023).

#### 4. Results and Discussion

This study analyzed eight teachers' TikTok accounts that met purposive criteria based on upload activity, content relevance, and audience interaction. From a total of 80 videos analyzed (an average of 10 uploads per account for three months), it was found that 62.5% of the content was education-oriented, including the creation of learning media, ice breaking, and creative teaching tips. While the other 37.5% of content focuses on entertainment and social interaction, such as viral challenges, dances, or days in my life. This distribution shows that teachers active in TikTok content integrate the two axiological values of ethical and aesthetic education into their digital practices. Ethics is reflected in a commitment to the dissemination of meaningful knowledge, while aesthetics appear in an effort to make learning more interesting, inspiring, and visually beautiful.



**Figure 1.** Distribution of Teacher Content Types on TikTok.

The dominance of educational content confirms that teachers' professionalism remains the main orientation in digital activities, showing moral responsibility in maintaining the authority of knowledge and the dignity of the profession in the public sphere. Meanwhile, the presence of entertainment content reflects the teacher's aesthetic awareness in building emotional closeness with the audience through humane creative expression. From the perspective of educational philosophy, the balance between ethics and aesthetics is the foundation for the formation of teachers' professional identities in the digital era, ethics presents moral direction in educational actions, while aesthetics give meaning and beauty in the interactive learning process. As Dewey (1934) viewed, aesthetic experience in education is a unity between thoughts, feelings, and actions that foster moral and humanitarian awareness. Content creator teachers on TikTok practice these values through the presentation of knowledge accompanied by emotional touches and visual beauty, making the teaching process an experience that combines the values of virtue, truth, and beauty. This phenomenon confirms that professionalism and popularity can coexist in a harmony of values, when teachers' digital actions are based on moral awareness and educational goals that glorify human beings.

The average number of views of educational content reaches 300–500 thousand views, showing a high public attraction to digital learning creativity. However, among all the content analyzed, there are three videos with the highest views that philosophically reflect the combination of professional ethics, presentation aesthetics, and the value of virtue (arete) in the teaching profession in the digital space.

**Table 2.** Three Videos with the Highest Views.

No.	Content Title/Description	Account	Category	Number of Views	Likes	Commentary
1	Ice Breaking Triangle Equals	@pak_renz	Educational (ice breaking mathematics)	<b>9.4 million</b>	148.3 thousand	1.136
2	A Day in My Life Guru SD	@rapundel	Education & Social	<b>887,6 thousand</b>	49,4K	267
3	Math Fraction Games	@bugururia	Education (interactive learning media)	<b>170,5 thousand</b>	5.975	635

The three videos show that the popularity of teachers on TikTok is supported by moral and aesthetic values that are seen in their professional actions. Creativity, patience, and politeness in interacting with students reflect the practice of *arete* moral virtue according to Aristotle where fame is born as a result of virtue consistency.

The results of the analysis in the comment column show that the audience that interacts with creator teacher content on TikTok consists of three main groups, namely other teachers, students or former students, and the general public. All three gave a generally positive response to the teachers' creativity, professionalism, and communication style. The comment pattern shows that the audience is not only passively watching, but also engaging in the form of appreciation, questions and answers, and replication of uploaded learning ideas. Most of the comments appear on videos with educational themes such as ice breaking and learning media innovation. For example:

*"Be happy with teachers like this, is it done every time you enter the class?"*  
*"That's a really cool idea, ma'am. Can you give me the media files?"*

Such comments indicate the transfer of values and knowledge between teachers in the digital space. Other teachers see the video as a source of inspiration and practical reference in learning. Meanwhile, comments from students and the general public showed emotional appreciation for the teacher, who was considered creative, patient, and close to students. This strengthens TikTok's social function as a space for appreciation of the educator profession in an increasingly digital society.

However, in content with entertainment or personal nuances, comments that are lighter and more personal, such as praise for the teacher's appearance or style of expression. This pattern shows a shift in public perception, where some audiences begin to see teachers as entertainment personas in addition to educational figures. However, this tendency also opens up space for teachers to display the humanization of the profession, making them closer and more receptive to the digital generation.

Philosophically, audience interaction in commentary illustrates the dynamics between professional ethics and social aesthetics. On the one hand, teachers maintain ethics by still displaying educational and polite content; On the other hand, aesthetics arise from the way teachers package learning into a fun and relevant experience for the digital public. The combination of the two forms the image of teachers as moral and creative agents, who are able to maintain the dignity of their profession while adapting to algorithmic cultural logic. Based on Dewey's (1934) view, the aesthetics of learning are realized through aesthetic experiences when teachers and students are actively involved in meaningful learning activities. *The Ice Breaking Triangle Ice Breaker* video is a concrete example of how simple games foster a sense of admiration, laughter, and understanding as a form of functional beauty in education. Teachers' digital professionalism appears as a reflective praxis that combines ethics (moral responsibility) and aesthetics (creativity), making teachers creators of meaning in a digital public space controlled by algorithms.

The highest popularity, such as the 9.4 million *views* on the video, shows the success of teachers turning pedagogical actions into inspiring moral and aesthetic experiences. TikTok acts as a reflective praxis space where teachers balance the ethical obligations of the profession and the aesthetic needs of digital communication. This phenomenon confirms that the dignity

of the teaching profession in the algorithmic era is maintained when digital creativity is based on *arete* (virtue), *phronesis* (practical wisdom), and *aesthetic experience* (aesthetic experience).

Based on the results of the analysis using the digital netnography method, the activities of creator teachers on TikTok seem to develop into a pedagogical and reflective praxis space. Of the 80 videos analyzed, three main categories emerged that reflect the professionalism of teachers in the algorithmic space, namely educational content, contextual entertainment, and mixed. Its distribution and philosophical meaning can be seen in table 2. next.

**Table 3.** Distribution and Meaning of Educational Philosophy in TikTok Teacher Content Types.

Content Type	Frequency (%)	Example Elements	Pedagogical Function	Values of Philosophy of Education (Ethics – Aesthetics)
Educational (media, ice breaking, study tips)	62.5	Interactive media, LKPD, learning ideas	Increase student creativity and engagement	Ethics: reflects the moral responsibility of teachers in disseminating knowledge in a constructive and beneficial way. Aesthetics: bringing beauty of thought and harmony in a fun learning process.
Contextual entertainment (dance, humor, POV)	25	Tren viral, challenge	Building teacher-student social relationships	Ethics: fostering closeness without ignoring moral boundaries and professionalism. Aesthetics: displaying the beauty of human expression, making teachers a living and communicative figure.
Mix (education and entertainment)	12.5	“A day in my life”, vlog guru	Showing the humanist side of teachers	Ethics: showing honesty and self-authenticity in the educator profession. Aesthetics: bringing together elements of knowledge and taste in the form of an engaging narrative.

The three show how teachers balance moral responsibility, creativity, and human expression in digital practice. Educational content highlights a commitment to the dissemination of knowledge and learning innovation, contextual entertainment content depicts the social closeness of teachers to students, while mixed content displays a balance between intellectual and emotional aspects in everyday narratives. The three forms of content reflect the integration of ethical, aesthetic, and axiological values as the basis of educational philosophy in the digital era.

### 5. Comparison

The results of this study show that the practice of creator teachers on TikTok reflects a blend of professional ethics, learning aesthetics, and reflective professionalism. The findings show that teachers' popularity is not solely influenced by the platform's algorithms, but by the moral and aesthetic values embodied through pedagogical actions. Of the 80 videos analyzed netnographically, as many as 62.5% of the content was educational, displaying creativity in learning media, ice breaking, and teaching tips. While the remaining 37.5% is entertainment or mixed content that still highlights the social relationship between teachers and students. This phenomenon shows that teachers are able to combine elements of knowledge, expression, and human values in a competitive algorithmic space. When compared to previous research, these results show an expansion of perspective on teachers' digital practices. Studies (Vizcaíno-Verdú and Abidin 2023) and (Sánchez-López et al. 2023) found that teachers' involvement on social media serves as a strategy for building professional identity, but their focus is limited to the communication and self-image dimensions. This research goes further by examining the values of educational philosophy that accompany teachers' digital actions, especially how content becomes a means of ethical and aesthetic reflection in education. Meanwhile, (Haliza 2024) highlights the ethical dilemma between professionalism and entertainment on social media, but has not discussed how teachers negotiate those boundaries philosophically. In this study, the findings show that teachers are actually able to maintain moral integrity in the midst of popularity logic. The audience's comments reinforce this, where the public appreciates the creativity, politeness, and

dedication of teachers. For example, responses such as "That's a cool idea, ma'am, can you ask for the media files?" show that educational content is seen as a form of example, not just entertainment.

This finding also expands the view (Haliza 2024) that creator teachers build professional identities through aesthetic expression. In this study, the concept is expanded to an aesthetic-moral practice, which is a combination of beauty in the presentation of learning and ethical responsibility as an educator. Videos such as Ice Breaking the Same Triangle with 9.4 million views are concrete evidence that aesthetic experiences (Dewey, 1934) can be a source of both engaging and moral learning.

Theoretically, this research also adds the dimension of phronesis (practical wisdom) as proposed by Aristotle, namely the ability to act wisely in complex situations. Teachers on TikTok show digital phronesis the ability to choose creative but still ethical forms of communication, making the platform not just an entertainment medium but a space for professional reflective praxis. Thus, the results of this study confirm that teacher professionalism in the algorithmic era can be understood as a form of balance between ethics (moral responsibility) and aesthetics (beautiful experiences in learning).

Compared to previous research, the study's main contribution lies in the integration between digital netnography and the philosophy of education. This approach allows researchers not only to photograph social phenomena, but also to interpret the values of moral virtue (arete) and aesthetic experience in the real context of teacher practice. Thus, this research expands the understanding of how teachers on TikTok transform into moral and creative agents who maintain the dignity of the profession while utilizing digital culture as a humanistic learning space.

## 6. Conclusion

This research confirms that the practice of creator teachers on TikTok represents a form of transformation of educator professionalism in the context of digital culture based on ethical values, aesthetics, and educational philosophy. Based on a netnographic analysis of 80 videos, teachers' activities on the platform show a strong pedagogical orientation. As much as 62.5% of the content is educational with a focus on learning innovation and strengthening learning interactions, while the other 37.5% of content functions as a social medium that shows the closeness of teachers to students in a frame that remains professional. These findings show that professional ethics are reflected through the moral responsibility of teachers in disseminating knowledge constructively, the use of polite language, and commitment to professional integrity. The aesthetic dimension appears in the ability of teachers to present interesting learning and aesthetic experiences to the audience, as explained by Dewey (1934) that beauty in education emerges through meaningful learning experiences. The integration between ethics and aesthetics strengthens the image of teachers as reflective figures who are able to maintain a balance between moral obligations and creative expression in algorithmic spaces. Conceptually, the results of this study expand the study of teachers' digital professionalism by integrating Aristotle's educational philosophy of arete and phronesis into netnography analysis. This approach provides an understanding that the social media space functions as an arena of moral and aesthetic praxis that shows the practical virtues of teachers in adjusting to technological dynamics. This research has implications for the importance of strengthening digital ethical literacy and pedagogical aesthetics in the development of teacher competencies. Mastery of these two aspects can support the creation of educational practices that are reflective, humanistic, and adaptive to the development of the digital era.

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