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Faith in the Digital Age: The Impact of Religious Influencers on Followers' Religious Engagement

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini meneliti bagaimana para pengikut memperoleh makna dari konten influencer keagamaan dan signifikansinya dalam kehidupan sehari-hari mereka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi peran influencer keagamaan dalam membentuk praktik keagamaan dan perilaku pengikut. Subjek penelitian ini adalah para pengikut influencer keagamaan di media sosial, dengan pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam dan analisis konten. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa influencer keagamaan, seperti Ustaz Hanan Attaki, berperan sebagai penyalur ajaran agama modern, yang mengarah pada pembentukan praktik keagamaan baru di antara para pengikutnya. Meskipun pengaruhnya besar, daya tarik barang dagangan yang dikaitkan dengan influencer ini masih terbatas. Dapat disimpulkan bahwa influencer keagamaan memiliki dampak yang signifikan dalam membentuk pemahaman dan praktik keagamaan di antara para pengikutnya.

Kata Kunci: *Religious Influencers, Social Media, Religious Practices, Followers' Behavior, Content Analysis*

Abstract

This study examines how followers derive meaning from religious influencer content and its significance in their daily lives. The research aims to identify the role of religious influencers in shaping religious practices and follower behavior. The subjects of this study are followers of religious influencers on social media, with data collection conducted through in-depth interviews and content analysis. The results indicate that religious influencers, such as Ustaz Hanan Attaki, serve as modern conduits for religious teachings, leading to the formation of new religious practices among their followers. Despite their substantial influence, the appeal of merchandise associated with these influencers remains limited. It can be concluded that religious influencers have a significant impact on shaping religious understanding and practices among their followers.

Keywords: Religious Influencers, Social Media, Religious Practices, Followers' Behavior, Content Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

In an age characterized by the omnipresence of smartphones and the profound impact of digital connectivity on daily life, social media has emerged as a significant influence in transforming the manner in which individuals engage with religion. This phenomenon is particularly prominent in Indonesia, the nation with the largest Muslim population in the world, where platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter have become dynamic arenas for religious expression, dialogue, and community building (Nisa, 2018; Zhang, 2025). These platforms have facilitated the emergence of a novel form of religious authority: the religious influencer. With millions of followers attentive to their every post, these influential figures are redefining the practice, sharing, and comprehension of faith within the context of the digital era (Febrian, 2024; Sheldon, 2024).

In Indonesia, religious influencers extend beyond the role of mere content creators; they serve as contemporary storytellers, spiritual guides, and community leaders who leverage social media to render religion accessible and relatable. Whether sharing poignant reflections on Quranic verses, providing practical advice for navigating life's challenges through a religious lens, or disseminating visually engaging snippets of their personal spiritual journeys, these influencers deeply resonate with their audiences (Febrian, 2024; Zaid et al., 2022). Their content frequently addresses younger generations who seek faith-oriented guidance that aligns with their fast-paced, digitally-saturated lives (Mashudi & Hilman, 2024). By integrating traditional teachings with contemporary aesthetics—such as

vibrant Instagram Reels or TikTok videos set to trending music—they establish a connection between enduring religious values and the practicalities of modern existence.

The compelling nature of these influencers lies in their capacity to cultivate personal connections with their followers. Unlike conventional religious scholars, who may appear distant or formal, influencers often provide glimpses into their personal lives—ranging from family moments to challenges related to their faith—thus fostering a sense of camaraderie as trusted friends or mentors (Zhang, 2025). This relatability enhances their credibility, transforming them into formidable agents of religious socialization. For numerous followers, engaging with a short video or reading a thoughtful caption can evoke a moment of spiritual renewal, igniting inspiration to pray, reflect, or engage more profoundly with their faith (Rahman, 2024).

The impact of these influencers extends far beyond mere likes and shares. Social media has evolved into a catalyst for tangible change, motivating followers to engage more actively in religious practices such as daily prayers, charitable endeavors, or community service (Rahman, 2024). For some individuals, interaction with religious influencers fosters a sense of belonging to a broader virtual ummah—a global Muslim community—where shared values and experiences forge connections that transcend geographical boundaries (Baker et al., 2020). This sense of connectivity holds particular significance in a nation as diverse as Indonesia, where regional and cultural differences may at times render unity a challenging pursuit.

The emergence of religious influencers presents a multifaceted landscape. As social media increasingly intermingles spirituality with commercial interests, numerous influencers engage in promoting various products, ranging from hijabs to prayer mats, or establishing personal brands that yield substantial financial gains (Nisa, 2018). This trend towards commercialization raises pressing inquiries regarding authenticity: are these individuals motivated by a sincere commitment to disseminate their faith, or are they exploiting religious sentiment for monetary gain? Critics assert that the amalgamation of spirituality and consumer culture threatens to undermine the core tenets of religious teachings, shifting the emphasis from divine instruction to polished marketing strategies (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). In Indonesia, where traditional Islamic values often exist in tension with the demands of modern consumerism, this dichotomy is particularly pronounced (Beta, 2019).

Furthermore, the widespread accessibility of social media platforms allows virtually anyone equipped with a smartphone and a message to assume religious authority, resulting in a crowded and at times contentious digital landscape. While certain influencers advocate

for inclusive and compassionate interpretations of Islam, others may disseminate divisive or overly rigid viewpoints, igniting debates over who possesses the authority to define "true" religion in the online domain (Sheldon, 2024). These complications underscore the necessity of critically analyzing the role of religious influencers and their influence in shaping not only individual beliefs but also broader societal values.

This study aims to investigate the core of this phenomenon, focusing on how religious influencers in Indonesia shape the spiritual lives of their followers. Utilizing qualitative methodologies, including in-depth interviews with followers and content analysis of influencer posts, this research intends to uncover the significances individuals derive from their digital interactions and how these engagements influence their daily practices and identities (Beta, 2019; Febrian, 2024). By illuminating these dynamics, the study aspires to enhance understanding of the intersection between religion and social media in contemporary Indonesian society, providing insights into the evolving nature of faith within an increasingly interconnected world (Rahman, 2024).

METHOD

This extensive study was undertaken over a period of twelve months to examine the complex effects of religious influencers on social media platforms in Indonesia, with a particular emphasis on the religious practices and personal lives of their followers. The research adopted a rigorous qualitative methodology, employing two primary data collection techniques: in-depth interviews and content analysis.

A total of thirty purposively selected followers, who actively engage with religious influencers on platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, participated in semi-structured interviews. These interviews explored participants' perceptions, emotional connections, and the impact of content on their spiritual and ethical frameworks. Concurrently, a systematic content analysis of one hundred posts from prominent influencers was conducted, utilizing a two-stage coding process to identify recurring themes, rhetorical strategies, and the integration of contemporary socio-religious issues. Data derived from both methods were analyzed through qualitative descriptive techniques, with thematic analysis to categorize emergent patterns related to spiritual guidance, community building, and ethical decision-making, thereby ensuring a nuanced understanding of the dynamics involved.

The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, with an average duration of 60 to 90 minutes, and followed by a thorough content analysis that scrutinized various post formats, including videos, captions, and live streams. The year-long duration of the study

was crucial in accounting for seasonal and cultural variations, while the employment of peer debriefing, member checking, and the maintenance of an audit trail significantly enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings. This dual-method approach elucidated how influencers successfully leverage accessibility, authenticity, and doctrinal relevance to shape the spiritual identities of their followers, while also revealing constraints in their commercial influence, particularly reflected in the modest appeal of branded merchandise. The culturally sensitive design and iterative analytical process underscored the study's commitment to contextual depth and analytical rigor.

The findings compellingly illustrate that religious influencers in Indonesia play a significant role in shaping the religious practices and personal narratives of their followers, by acting as behavioral exemplars and fostering vibrant discussions on contemporary socio-religious issues. Despite their considerable spiritual and social impact, the limited appeal of merchandise associated with these influencers highlights a boundary to their capacity to drive material consumption. This study, grounded in rigorous qualitative methodologies, affirms the transformative potential of religious influencers as agents of positive societal change, provided they consistently deliver accurate, ethically sound, and culturally relevant content. By navigating the complexities of digital platforms with integrity, these influencers have the capacity to cultivate a more informed, spiritually enriched, and ethically grounded community, thus addressing the evolving needs of their diverse follower base while contributing to broader societal well-being.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the significant impact of religious influencers on social media in shaping the spiritual understanding and practices of their followers. Through qualitative interviews and content analysis, the research illustrates that these influencers function as both educators and motivators, rendering religious teachings accessible and pertinent to contemporary audiences. Nevertheless, concerns regarding the commercialization and authenticity of this phenomenon highlight its complexities, thereby necessitating a critical examination of influencer content.

Enhancing Religious Engagement Through Relatable Content

Interviews with followers emphasize the distinctive capability of religious influencers to make religious teachings resonate with diverse demographics. Influencers such as Ustaz Hanan Attaki have attained prominence by employing a conversational style that bridges the gap between traditional theology and modern sensibilities. This method cultivates an

intimate virtual space, allowing followers to feel a personal connection to the teachings. Participants indicated that the influencers' utilization of storytelling, humor, and cultural references serves to transform abstract concepts into practical insights. For instance, an anecdote regarding overcoming doubt through prayer can inspire followers to engage in reflective contemplation of their own faith.

This relatability is further enhanced by the influencers' personal narratives, which encompass their spiritual journeys and the challenges they have encountered. Followers reported that these narratives foster an emotional bond, rendering influencers as trusted confidants. For example, a follower might derive solace from an influencer's account of navigating grief through faith, encouraging them to adopt similar practices. This emotional connection positions influencers as motivators, inspiring followers to incorporate values such as compassion and mindfulness into their daily lives. Many participants articulated a heightened sense of connectivity to their faith, with several noting increased engagement in practices such as prayer and charitable activities.

The interactive nature of social media amplifies this impact. Platforms such as Instagram and YouTube facilitate direct engagement between followers and influencers through comments and live streams. This two-way communication fosters a sense of community, wherein followers share their experiences and seek guidance. Such interactions augment the understanding of religious teachings and empower followers to assume an active role in their spiritual development. For many, this represents a transition from passive consumption to active participation within a dynamic, faith-based community.

Addressing Contemporary Issues with Religious Relevance

A pivotal strength of religious influencers lies in their capacity to contextualize teachings within the framework of modern challenges. Content analysis revealed that influencers frequently address pertinent issues such as mental health, interpersonal relationships, and societal expectations—topics that resonate particularly well with younger audiences. By framing these challenges through a religious lens, influencers render faith relevant to contemporary life. For example, discussions regarding mental health often incorporate Islamic concepts such as patience (*sabr*) and gratitude (*shukr*), thereby providing a spiritual framework for managing stress.

These discussions are typically complemented by practical advice, including mindfulness exercises or strategies aimed at achieving work-life balance, all grounded in religious principles. Followers expressed their appreciation for content that recognizes their struggles and offers actionable solutions. For instance, an influencer's video on managing

anxiety through prayer might inspire a follower to implement a daily meditation practice. By addressing such pertinent topics, influencers illustrate the enduring relevance of religious teachings, making them accessible to individuals who feel disconnected from traditional religious institutions.

This approach also enables followers to navigate complex social issues effectively. Influencers frequently address subjects such as social justice and environmental stewardship, integrating religious values into their discussions. For instance, an influencer may emphasize the Islamic principle of stewardship (khalifah) while advocating for sustainable living practices, framing eco-friendly habits as acts of worship. Such content expands followers' understanding of their faith and equips them with the tools necessary to confront challenges in a principled manner.

The Commercialization Dilemma

Notwithstanding their positive influence, concerns regarding the commercialization of spiritual content have arisen. Many followers have expressed discomfort with influencers promoting products such as books or online courses. While some acknowledge the validity of earning a living through such means, others fear that these activities may dilute the authenticity of religious messages. For example, followers have reported feeling compelled to purchase products, which sometimes detracts from their spiritual objectives. This creates a complex dynamic in which followers must reconcile their admiration for influencers' teachings with skepticism about their underlying motives.

This commercialization raises critical questions about the intersection of spirituality and consumerism. While numerous influencers maintain transparency regarding their endeavors, others risk alienating their followers by placing greater emphasis on profit. Participants have underscored the necessity for discernment, urging followers to critically assess the intentions behind the content they consume. The findings indicate that influencers must strive to balance the sustainability of their platforms with the preservation of their mission's integrity. Similarly, followers are encouraged to approach content with a critical eye, ensuring that their spiritual growth remains untainted by external pressures.

Fostering Dynamic Religious Communities

Religious influencers demonstrate exceptional skill in nurturing vibrant digital communities. Social media serves as a platform for followers to engage with influencers and with one another, fostering meaningful dialogue and mutual support. Followers have reported that participation in comment sections and online study groups cultivates a sense of belonging, particularly for those who may feel isolated in their offline environments. For

example, a young Muslim residing in a country with a non-Muslim majority might find solace and community within an influencer's virtual network.

The accessibility of digital platforms enables influencers to engage diverse audiences, transcending geographical limitations. This global reach democratizes access to religious knowledge, allowing individuals from various backgrounds to deepen their faith. Influencers often organize interactive initiatives, such as virtual workshops, which empower followers to take ownership of their spiritual journeys. The collaborative nature of social media encourages mutual inspiration among followers, thereby amplifying the impact of influencer-generated content.

Challenges and Opportunities in the Digital Era

While religious influencers have fundamentally transformed faith practices, several challenges persist. Issues such as misinformation and the oversimplification of theological concepts warrant further investigation. Some followers have highlighted that the brevity of social media content may lead to superficial interpretations, thereby obscuring the depth of religious teachings. Additionally, algorithmic structures can reinforce existing beliefs, potentially polarizing communities.

Nevertheless, the opportunities presented by this digital landscape significantly outweigh the challenges. Influencers' capacity to adapt religious teachings to the digital realm has revitalized engagement with faith, particularly among younger demographics. By harnessing storytelling and interactive techniques, they have established an inclusive paradigm for spiritual growth. The positive outcomes are evident, as followers report experiencing heightened fulfillment and strengthened community connections.

CONCLUSION

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the complex dynamics involved, it can be conclusively stated that religious influencers operating within the digital arenas of social media platforms exert a significant and extensive impact on the spiritual, behavioral, and personal aspects of their followers' lives. These influencers, through their meticulously curated content and public personas, serve as essential role models, providing sophisticated frameworks for religious practice, ethical decision-making, and lifestyle choices that resonate profoundly with their audiences. Furthermore, they act as catalysts for fostering dynamic and interactive discussions on a wide range of contemporary socio-religious issues, thereby shaping public opinion and promoting critical engagement with matters of faith in today's world.

Nevertheless, despite their considerable influence in these areas, the commercial viability of merchandise associated with these influencers—such as branded attire, devotionals, or various faith-based products—remains notably limited. This phenomenon suggests a possible disconnect between their spiritual authority and their capacity to drive consumer behavior in material contexts. This thorough study highlights the transformative potential of religious influencers as agents of positive societal change, contingent upon their commitment to offering content that is not only accurate and doctrinally sound but also socially beneficial and contextually relevant. By leveraging their platforms with responsibility, these influencers can significantly contribute to the development of a more informed, ethically grounded, and spiritually enriched global community, provided they navigate the complexities of digital influence with integrity and an unwavering dedication to the public good.

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