

Social Media and Aqidah Understanding among Generation Z: A Study of Ushuluddin Students at UIN North Sumatra

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Abstrak

Latar belakang penelitian ini didasarkan pada kenyataan bahwa media sosial sering menjadi ruang penyebaran narasi keagamaan yang ekstrem dan berpotensi mendorong terjadinya kesalahpahaman aqidah di kalangan Generasi Z. Rumusan masalah dalam penelitian ini adalah bagaimana media sosial dan aqidah dipahami dalam perspektif mahasiswa dalam pembentukan pemahaman aqidah. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif yang melibatkan mahasiswa stambuk 2021 Fakultas Ushuluddin dan Studi Islam UIN Sumatera Utara yang menggunakan media sosial. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa media sosial seperti TikTok, YouTube, dan Instagram telah menjadi sarana efektif untuk meningkatkan pemahaman aqidah, menghubungkan konsep-konsep keagamaan dengan persoalan modern, serta menginspirasi penerapan nilai-nilai spiritual dalam kehidupan sehari-hari melalui konten dari tokoh-tokoh agama seperti Ustadz Adi Hidayat, Prof. Syahrin Harahap, Ustadz Hanan Attaki, dan Ustadz Felix Siau. Namun demikian, diperlukan sikap kritis dalam menyaring informasi karena adanya potensi konten yang terdistorsi, penyederhanaan berlebihan, dan narasi provokatif.

Kata Kunci: *Media Sosial; Aqidah; Mahasiswa UIN Sumatera Utara*

Abstract

The background of this research is based on the fact that social media often serves as a space for the dissemination of extreme religious narratives, which has the potential to create misunderstandings of aqidah among Generation Z. The main research question is how social media and aqidah are understood from the perspective of students in the formation of aqidah comprehension. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method involving 2021 cohort students of the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies at UIN North Sumatra who actively use social media. The findings indicate that platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram have become effective tools to enhance the understanding of aqidah, connect religious concepts with contemporary issues, and inspire the application of spiritual values in daily life through content delivered by religious figures such as Ustadz Adi Hidayat, Prof. Syahrin Harahap, Ustadz Hanan Attaki, and Ustadz Felix Siau. Nevertheless, a critical attitude is required in filtering information due to the potential presence of distorted content, oversimplification, and provocative narratives

Keywords: *Social Media; Aqidah; UIN North Sumatra Students*

Introduction

Social media has become the main platform for the younger generation to discuss and share views on various issues, including aqidah. Social media plays an important role in shaping the understanding of aqidah among the younger

generation by providing a platform to share knowledge, experiences, and perspectives related to Islam globally (Ahmed et al. 2022). It affects an individual's sense of belonging, constructs his or her identity, and contributes to the formation of personal preferences and cultural identity. In addition, social media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok are highly relied upon by the younger generation in news consumption and viewing, thus impacting their perception of trust and engagement with the content they watch. Social media has evolved to become the main platform for communicating and interacting in today's digital era, especially among the younger generation. They are used not only for entertainment, but also to talk about a variety of serious issues, such as religion and aqidah.

In addition, the use of social media for religious content, such as video lectures on YouTube and short lectures on TikTok, facilitates the understanding of Islamic principles among students, thus leading to an increase in their behavioral values related to worship, morals, and personal beliefs. Overall, social media serves as a powerful tool in fostering religious understanding and practice among Generation Z in the digital era. In an increasingly complex life, on the one hand, the development of science and technology brings the progress of life that provides convenience and well-being. However, on the other hand, the side effects of technological advances in the era of globalization and information have brought society to be colored by various social pathologies. Incidents of misdirection, blasphemy and deviation are vulnerable to occur on social media. Looking at the current conditions, the development of science, technology and information is increasingly rapid and society cannot be separated from the use of the internet. Along with the development of the internet, the development of social media has also spread widely in society.

The rapid development of the internet and social media has had a significant impact on all people in all parts of the world, including students. The Internet is a loose network of thousands of computer networks that reach millions of people around the world. Its initial mission was to provide a means for researchers to access data from a number of computers (Evita 2020). But now the internet has developed into a very effective place of communication, so it has deviated far from its original mission. Thus, the Internet is a computer network that allows interactive communication to occur in it, where millions of people in the world can be connected into a new community in the multimedia network without being limited by time and space (Celuch, Goodwin, and Taylor 2007).

Social media allows for the widespread dissemination of content without verification, which can distort user morale. Logically, when misinformation about aqidah such as monotheism or the pillars of faith spreads quickly through the platform's algorithms, it can lead to ideological confusion and social conflict. For example, material that deviates from Islamic teachings for political purposes or sensationalism has the potential to undermine the basis of beliefs that should be purely based on the Quran and Hadith. Because of this, people lose their religious holdings, which ultimately disrupts the balance of a multicultural society like in Indonesia.

This research will examine how social media affects the understanding of aqidah among generation Z, especially students of the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies UIN North Sumatra, as well as how this platform can be used as a tool for education and the dissemination of religious values. Using survey methods and content analysis, this study will explore the relationship between the use of social media and the formation of aqidah understanding. The student in question is a person who is studying at university. In the context of this research, what is meant by students is Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies students of UIN North Sumatra who come from the departments of Al-Quran and Tafsir, Hadith Science, Aqidah and Islamic Philosophy, Islamic Political Thought and Religious Studies with a total of five people from each department in the 2021 stambuk.

Method

This type of research is descriptive qualitative research, which is data collected in the form of words, images, not numbers. According to Bogdan and Taylor, as cited by Lexy J. Moleong, qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behaviors. (Moleong Lexy. J. 2000) The object of research is related to certain phenomena or is typical of the total personality. In this case study approach, the subjects of this study are students of the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies of UIN North Sumatra. The research approach used by the researcher is the Theology Approach research method. The theological approach is translated as an effort to understand or research religion using the framework of Divine Science which departs from a belief that the empirical form of a religion is considered to be the most correct compared to others. According to Bogdan and Taylor, as cited by Lexy J. Moleong, qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behaviors (Moleong and Surjaman 2014).

A theological approach can be defined as an attempt to understand religion through the framework of Divine Science, with a starting point in the belief that a particular teaching or form of religion is considered absolute true. In other words, this approach is not neutral in the position of faith, but rather departs from a researcher's internal belief in the religious truth they are seeking. The research subject is very strategic because it has data about the variables to be studied. The subject of the study is what is being researched, whether it is a person, thing, or organization, and the place of the data for the research variable. Basically, the subject of the research is what is researched. (Suharsimi Arikunto, 2010).

The research subject is a student of the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies of UIN North Sumatra with a sample students in stambuk 2021. Data collection techniques use interview, observation and documentation techniques. This study will use a guided interview technique by preparing questions in advance. Then the researcher will determine students who come from generation Z who are considered to represent the research object with a *purposive sampling* scheme. Guided interview: questions are asked according to the questions that have been

prepared. Guided interviews, also known as structured interviews, are qualitative data collection techniques in which interviewers ask pre-arranged questions systematically (Rivaldi, Feriawan, and Nur 2023). In this interview, the interviewer sticks to a pre-arranged list of questions, without much change or improvisation.

Result and Discussion

The Use of Social Media Among University Students

The findings obtained through interviews with students of the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies, UIN Sumatera Utara, reveal that social media has become an essential part of the daily lives of Generation Z students in seeking and shaping their understanding of *aqidah*. The majority of respondents reported using platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp intensively, spending between one to three hours per day. Social media is perceived as a practical and fast medium to access religious content, including sermons, Qur'anic exegesis, and brief explanations of *aqidah* concepts. Its easy accessibility and simplified content formats make students feel closer to religious issues relevant to their modern context.

In practice, students utilize social media to deepen their understanding of *aqidah* by following popular religious figures such as Ustadz Adi Hidayat, Prof. Syahrin Harahap, Ustadz Hanan Attaki, Ustadz Felix Siauww, and Buya Arrazy Hasyim. These figures are considered capable of presenting *aqidah* material in a concise, contextual, and relatable manner for younger audiences. Several students admitted that they found it easier to grasp key concepts such as *tawakkul*, *qada* and *qadar*, as well as the attributes of Allah through simplified explanations available on TikTok and YouTube. Inspirational content was also seen as a motivation to embody spiritual values in everyday life.

Nevertheless, the study also uncovers the negative side of relying on social media as a source of *aqidah* learning. Some students pointed out the abundance of provocative, sensational, and even misleading content that lacks clear foundations in the Qur'an and Hadith. A number of respondents admitted encountering extreme narratives, religious hoaxes, and inter-sectarian debates that generated confusion. For this reason, students emphasized the importance of adopting a critical and selective stance, while verifying information through credible sources such as classical texts, academic literature, or direct consultation with lecturers and religious scholars.

Furthermore, students perceive social media more as a complementary tool that reinforces formal learning rather than serving as the primary source of *aqidah* knowledge. They acknowledged that campus-based education offers greater advantages in terms of validity, systematic structure, and depth of material, supported by discussions, assignments, and academic evaluations. In contrast, social media content tends to be brief, superficial, and at times driven merely by visual appeal. Consequently, students rely more on classroom instruction and academic literature as their main references, while using social media as an auxiliary medium to recall, motivate, and strengthen what has already been learned.

Overall, social media is perceived as a double-edged sword in shaping the understanding of *aqidah*. On the one hand, it effectively provides quick access to

religious materials that resonate with the needs of younger generations. On the other hand, it may weaken *aqidah* comprehension when consumed without proper religious literacy and critical awareness. Students recognize the importance of selecting credible sources, verifying information, and upholding formal education as the primary foundation. Thus, social media is better positioned as a supporting medium for *dakwah* and the reinforcement of *aqidah*, rather than as the sole reference for understanding Islamic teachings

Influential Figures

Research conducted on five students of the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies at UIN North Sumatra showed that they used social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram to access and share religious content, including lectures, discussions, and informative posts from prominent scholars and the Islamic community. They watched ustad or religious leaders who were familiar in the community such as Ustad Abdul Somad, Ustad Adi Hidayat, Felix Siau and Buya Arrazy Hasyim. Furthermore, they also watched a video managed by the Professor of UIN North Sumatra, Prof. Syahrin Harahap.

That religious figures on social media play an important role in helping the younger generation understand the concept of *aqidah* practically and relevant to daily life. Through platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, figures such as Ustadz Adi Hidayat, Prof. Syahrin Harahap, Ustadz Hanan Attaki, Ustadz Felix Siau, and Buya Arrazy Hasyim provide explanations that are easily accessible and understandable. However, even though social media makes it easier to spread religious values, users must still be critical, verify information, and seek deepening through other sources to avoid deviations and misunderstandings in understanding *aqidah*.

Internet websites such as YouTube and TikTok have become effective tools for spreading religious knowledge, especially through figures such as Ustadz Adi Hidayat who can convey the teachings of *aqidah* in an easy-to-understand way and use the postulates of the Qur'an and hadith. This method utilizes a way of speaking that is engaging and appealing to contemporary audiences, especially the younger generation who are used to social media. Concepts such as *tawakal*, which is often misunderstood as resignation without effort, become easier to understand through contextual explanations that are appropriate to certain situations. This suggests that influential people in religion have the ability to reconcile the differences between official religious texts and how they are applied in everyday life, which makes religious learning more inclusive and dynamic.

With religious content on social media, such as Prof. Syahrin Harahap's video on TikTok, it helps strengthen *aqidah* and inspires the application of religious principles in daily life. Social media has many benefits, but these short-lived, in-depth benefits must be balanced by the awareness that it only serves as an introduction or reminder, not as a substitute for deep learning from more formal religious sources. Religious content in digital media can be an effective tool to defend beliefs and encourage concrete actions that reflect spiritual values,

especially for the younger generation who have limited time. A brief but in-depth explanation of Sifatiiyyah monotheism by Prof. Syahrin Harahap shows the power of social media in conveying complex religious concepts effectively. Short videos on TikTok allow college students who have busy schedules to stay engaged with religious principles without spending a lot of time. This shows that the delivery of religious teachings has been adapted to meet the needs of contemporary audiences, where relevance and efficiency are essential. However, the short video duration can also make it too simple. This can reduce comprehension if it is not balanced with other broader sources.

That digital platforms can increase aqidah and encourage real actions that reflect religious values through interaction with religious content on social media, such as Prof. Syahrin Harahap's video. To ensure that the understanding gained is not superficial or distorted due to the limitations of the short format, a critical approach is required. Individuals can leverage technology to enhance their faith and make faith a practical guide in daily life by combining inspiration from social media with learning from formal sources.

Religious figures such as Ustadz Hanan Attaki, who conveyed moral and aqidah messages in a relaxed and engaging way to the younger generation, played an important role in spreading the message through social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. This engaging and accessible content has the ability to simplify complex religious concepts so that they are relevant and grounded to younger audiences. However, given the limitations of social media content that is too simplistic, it shows that a critical approach is needed by complementing information from deeper sources.

Therefore, social media can serve as an effective tool for strengthening beliefs and ethics, provided it is combined with proactive efforts to gain better understanding through more authoritative sources. In a relaxed and relevant way, Ustadz Hanan Attaki makes religious content on Instagram and TikTok very attractive to teenagers. Concepts such as aqidah or qada and qadar can feel closer to young audiences with a non-rigid approach and using everyday language in fast-paced modern life. For example, understanding the qada and qadar described in the video helps people be more patient when they fail exams, which suggests that contextual delivery can change perspectives and behaviors. This shows that religious figures on social media have the ability to fill the gap between religious demands and the feelings and practical needs of the younger generation.

Through platforms such as X and YouTube, Ustadz Felix Siauw helps connect aqidah with contemporary issues, making religion relevant to today's world. However, experience with uploads that raise questions about interreligious tolerance shows that the influence of religious figures on social media can also be misleading if not critically studied. After understanding the importance of ukhuwah Islamiyah, the awareness of selectively choosing religious figures shows that social media can be a powerful tool to strengthen aqidah and promote positive values such as brotherhood. However, social media can only function if users have enough digital and religious literacy to filter information.

Religious content from figures such as Ustadz Felix Siauw on X and YouTube offers relevant ways to connect aqidah to modern issues, strengthen religious understanding, and encourage values such as ukhuwah Islamiyah that promote unity. However, the dangers of misleading or divisive content, such as posts that raise doubts about tolerance, suggest that social media must be balanced with a critical attitude and selectivity in choosing sources. Individuals can leverage technology to deepen their beliefs while building a more peaceful and inclusive society by integrating inspiration from social media with verification through authoritative sources.

The power of authoritative religious content on social media is shown by Buya Arrazy Hasyim's explanation of the Sufism faith supported by the postulates of the Qur'an and hadith. The postulate-based approach provides a solid foundation for understanding complex concepts of Sufism, such as tawadhu, on TikTok, where content is often short and focused on appeal. By using original religious sources, Buya Arrazy not only made the Sufism creed easier to understand, but he also affirmed that the teachings were true. This is especially important in the midst of a lot of unclear religious content. This shows that religious leaders who believe can use social media to promote the understanding of true religion. The statement that religious leaders help understand the beliefs of Sufism in the midst of a lot of distorted content shows one of the main challenges in the social media ecosystem: the spread of false or inaccurate information. TikTok often creates religious content to attract attention, which can simplify or even deviate from true religious teachings.

Figures such as Buya Arrazy Hasyim function as a counterbalance by delivering explanations based on postulates, helping the audience distinguish between the correct practice of Sufism and the practice that has no religious basis. This shows that trusted religious figures are very important as a filter of truth in the flood of digital information. The experience of watching tawadhu videos shows that religious content on social media has a practical effect on a person's spiritual life. The understanding that tawadhu is part of the aqidah that protects the heart from pride encourages real behavioral changes, such as increasing humility in daily interactions. This confirms that the material of Sufism that is well conveyed can make aqidah more than just an abstract belief and incorporate a spiritual dimension into daily life. Social media is becoming a relevant tool for contemporary religious education because they can connect the concept of Sufism with real-world applications.

College students spend varying amounts of time on social media, focusing on platforms like TikTok and YouTube for religious information, and they actively share helpful content with their WhatsApp groups. According to this statement, there is a difference in the amount of time students spend on social media. Academic needs, personal interests, and personal preferences can influence these variations. For example, some students can spend just a few minutes each day, while others can spend hours. Thus, there is no consistent pattern of social media use among students, which indicates various digital habits. It was found that students use platforms such as TikTok and YouTube to search for religious information.

This suggests that both platforms are relevant for educational or inspirational religious content. While YouTube offers more in-depth content, such as religious lectures or discussions, TikTok has short videos that are interesting due to their simple format. This selection shows how the younger generation is using technology to meet the needs of their religion.

The Impact of Social Media on Aqidah Understanding

The impact of social media on their understanding of aqidah is both positive and negative. While providing access to credible religious content and educational materials, social media also risks exposing misleading information and provocative debates that can undermine their beliefs if not handled wisely. Social media such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok allow students to access religious content from reliable sources, such as scholarly lectures, Qur'an interpretations, or religious discourse by authoritative people. For example, the official YouTube channel of a religious organization or preacher offers organized and trustworthy aqidah content. This opens up access to religious knowledge, which was previously limited to direct teaching or books. Social media helps the younger generation better understand religion because it provides interesting religious educational content such as short videos or infographics (Faizah 2024).

When viewed from the negative side, sometimes social media is often a source of false information, including religious content that deviates from true religious teachings. Certain individuals or groups may spread misinterpretations or heretical teachings to mislead less critical users. Additionally, social media algorithms often recommend content based on popularity rather than accuracy, so sensational but incorrect content often goes viral. Social media often gives radical or distorted religious narratives and its appearance often appears on social media platforms, which, if not filtered properly, can affect the religious understanding of the younger generation. (Achmad Muhibin Zuhri, 2021).

Undirected interactions on social media, such as debates on social media pages about the issue of faith, can cause confusion and instability of beliefs, especially for people who are new to religion (M Taufiq Rahman, 2020). Social media is often a hotbed of religious debate, where provocative debates or sheep fights can cast doubt on one's beliefs. For example, conversations in online forums or comment columns often turn into unproductive debates, attacking personal opinions, or polarizing views. Social media has a double effect on the understanding of aqidah. On the one hand, they support interactive learning and offer access to credible religious content, but they also risk spreading misleading information and provoking debates that undermine faith. Wise handling through digital and religious literacy is essential to maximize profits and reduce risk.

The students emphasized the importance of verifying information from reliable sources such as classical texts, credible scholars, and academic materials, and seeking clarification from their lecturers to avoid the spread of unverified content. This statement shows that students must be aware of the dangers of getting misinformation, especially in the modern era where social media is widespread. Students show a critical attitude towards information by emphasizing verification;

This is an important component of digital and religious literacy. It is very important to maintain the integrity of understanding, especially in religious matters such as aqidah, information verification is the process of checking the truth and validity of a content before believing it or spreading it. That the younger generation who do not verify information on social media is vulnerable to distorted teachings, such as radical narratives or misinterpretations. Therefore, it is strategic to encourage students to verify information to keep their understanding of religion pure. (Kholili 2025) This perspective reflects a proactive attitude towards the challenges of digital information, where religious content is often combined with misleading or sensational stories. The focus on verification shows that students are not only passive consumers but also active agents in filtering information. It also shows their awareness of social responsibility because the dissemination of unverified content can negatively affect others, such as reinforcing stereotypes or triggering religious conflicts.

This statement reflects students' critical and responsible attitude in dealing with the flood of information in the digital age, by emphasizing the importance of consulting lecturers and using authoritative sources such as classical literature, credible scholars, and academic materials. However, this method relies on digital literacy, resource availability, and the ability to cope with social media pressure. Students can become agents of change in creating more accurate and constructive religious discourse with the support of formal education and literacy training.

They adopted a cautious approach to consuming social media, highlighting the importance of relying on academic sources and direct interaction with lecturers in shaping their beliefs, while acknowledging the potential to expand their knowledge through online interactions. New studies show that you should exercise caution when using social media content due to the spread of inaccurate information, the often unverified nature of the virality, and the risk of manipulation of public opinion. To maintain the user's honesty and mental health, a selective approach in choosing sources of information is highly recommended (Chowdhury 2024).

Misinformation or manipulation can influence public opinion unobjectively, triggering panic, hatred, or even social polarization. Additionally, constant exposure to negative or misleading content can affect mental health, causing anxiety, stress, or feelings of insecurity. Therefore, it is crucial for users to use a critical and selective approach when receiving information on social media, which includes checking sources, comparing data, and avoiding providing information without clarity directly. Confidence formation is increased by prioritizing academic references and consulting with teachers. This involves exposure to evidence-based sources and opportunities to provide immediate clarification in case of misperception. There is evidence that direct interaction with teachers can help students gain critical and analytical thinking skills. (Mofreh and Ghafar 2019) Online interaction can still help broaden horizons, reach a wider range of sources and speakers, and support collaborative learning across geographies.

Carefully choosing sources in online discussions allows one to balance formal and informal knowledge.

Online interaction not only broadens insight but also allows access to more diverse sources and religious sources. Digital libraries, such as collections of hadith and Qur'anic commentary, can be accessed at any time through various digital platforms. Additionally, social media allows people to interact directly with clerics, religious scholars, or religious communities from around the world. However, it is crucial to choose sources carefully to ensure that the sources have the appropriate expertise and credibility. By using a selective approach, people can gain original and reliable knowledge to understand formal teachings and everyday religious practices.

Conslusions

A study conducted among students of the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies at UIN North Sumatra indicates that social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram have become effective tools for enhancing the understanding of *aqidah*, linking religious concepts to contemporary issues, and inspiring the application of spiritual values in daily life through content delivered by prominent religious figures such as Ustadz Adi Hidayat, Prof. Syahrin Harahap, Ustadz Hanan Attaki, and Ustadz Felix Siauw. Nevertheless, a critical stance is required when engaging with such content due to the prevalence of distorted information, oversimplified interpretations, and provocative narratives. While social media can support *aqidah* comprehension and foster positive values such as *tawakkul*, *tawadhu'*, and *ukhuwah Islamiyah*, this potential is realized only when accompanied by validation from authoritative sources, including classical literature, credible scholars, and formal academic instruction. Thus, adopting selective and critical approaches enables younger generations to utilize social media as a bridge between informal exposure and formal knowledge, fostering a more authentic, inclusive, and contextually relevant religious discourse.

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