



TRANSFORMATION OF MILLENNIAL RELIGIOSITY IN THE DIGITAL ERA: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DA'WAH IN SHAPING INCLUSIVE AND EXCLUSIVE RELIGIOUS ORIENTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Da'wah in the digital age has undergone a fundamental shift, with social media becoming the primary channel for disseminating religious messages, particularly among millennials. With 191 million active social media users in Indonesia (We Are Social, 2022), this change has direct implications for the formation of religious attitudes that can be either inclusive or exclusive. This study employs a phenomenological approach to explore the subjective experiences of 10 millennial users of religious outreach platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok in consuming and disseminating religious content. Findings indicate that YouTube is chosen for its depth of content, while Instagram and TikTok are preferred for their concise, targeted duration. Positive impacts identified include improved religious literacy and strengthened tolerance values, while the main challenge is the proliferation of provocative content that fuels exclusivism. This study underscores the need for religious digital literacy to maximize the potential of digital da'wah in shaping an inclusive religious identity among millennials.

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Introduction

In the modern era, preaching can be done more effectively through social media, reaching millions of audiences in just seconds, even faster than conventional sermons in mosques. This change has not only impacted the methods of delivering religious messages, but also the way millennials build, express, and interpret their religiosity. Society is currently entering a third wave characterized by an era of sophistication in information and communication technology that astonishes the world, as expressed by futurologist Alvin Toffler¹. In the beginning, humans communicated by listening to sound, writing and then with visuals. The communication tools used at that time were telephones, computers and TV². Today, the world of communication is inseparable from the influence of social media

¹ Marwah Daud Ibrahim, *Teknologi Emansipasi Dan Transendensi* (Bandung: Mizan, 1994).

² Mutiah Tuty et al., "Etika Komunikasi Dalam Menggunakan Media Sosial," *Global Komunika* 1, no. 1 (2019).

which is undergoing a revolution along with the changing times. People's need for information encourages the development of media that are now available ³. Michael Haenlin and Andreas Kaplan define social media as a group of internet-based applications that build on Web 2.0 ideology and technology, and that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content ⁴.

Indonesia has 191 million active social media users, with WhatsApp (88.7%), Instagram (84.8%), Facebook (81.3%), TikTok (63.1%), and Telegram (62.8%) as the most popular platforms (We Are Social, 2022). The phenomenon of cyber religion, emerging from the intensity of social media use, has transformed religious interactions into a dynamic virtual space. However, this freedom also poses serious challenges in the form of the proliferation of unverified, provocative, and even radical religious content, which has the potential to foster exclusive and intolerant attitudes among millennials.

Social media, which is a virtual world of communication and information, has contributed to disseminating information widely and even quickly and can be accessed all over the world ⁵. Business of Apps said that by 2022 active users worldwide will reach 1.46 billion Monthly Active Users (MAU). This data shows the behavioral tendency of today's society which cannot be separated from new media called social media using internet network devices. ⁶. Social media has become an integral part of the millennial generation's daily life, bringing significant changes in various aspects of life, including religiosity and religious practices.

The development of social media or communication media is one of the media to increase religious insight ⁷. Nasrullah and Rustandi explained that the developments that occurred in internet technology were also felt by Muslim communities, the internet, especially social media, apart from being a communication medium, was also used as a medium for conveying Islamic messages⁸. Everyone can share and remind each other about the good things they can do anytime, anywhere. Because basically da'wah and communication have a relationship with one another. If da'wah is conveying a message that contains Islam, communication becomes the process of how the delivery of the message can take place ⁹. This is a hope to utilize the advancement of social media in order to disseminate various kinds of knowledge.

Previous studies Nasrullah & Rustandi, 2016 and Muslikhah & Taufik, 2022 have revealed that social media is effective for spreading religious messages. However, few have examined how these platforms influence religious orientation, whether toward inclusivity

³ Febri Palupi Muslikhah and Rachmi Fidhara Noer Taufik, "Penggunaan Media Sosial Tiktok Sebagai Media Dakwah Terhadap Wawasan Keagamaan Bagi Mahasiswa Di Institut Agama Islam Sahid Bogor," *Jurnal Sahid Da'watii* 1, no. 2 (2022): 17.

⁴ Muhammad Latip Kahpi, "The Role of Social Media in Building Religious Harmony," *HIKMAH* 2, no. 13 (2019).

⁵ Syintia Nurfitri and Arzam, "Urgensi Media Sosial Sebagai Sarana Dakwah Melalui Media Di Era Modern," *An-Nida'* 46, no. 1 (2022): 87.

⁶ Dudung Abdul Rohman, "Komunikasi Dakwah Melalui Media Sosial," *Tatar Pasundan-Jurnal Diklat Keagamaan* 8, no. 2 (2019): 123.

⁷ Muslikhah and Taufik, "Penggunaan Media Sosial Tiktok Sebagai Media Dakwah Terhadap Wawasan Keagamaan Bagi Mahasiswa Di Institut Agama Islam Sahid Bogor."

⁸ Nasrullah, Rulli, and Dudi Rustandi, "Meme Dan Islam: Simularka Bahasa Agama Di Media Sosial," *Ilmu Dakwah: Academi Journal for Homiletic Studies* 10, no. 1 (2016).

⁹ Muslikhah and Taufik, "Penggunaan Media Sosial Tiktok Sebagai Media Dakwah Terhadap Wawasan Keagamaan Bagi Mahasiswa Di Institut Agama Islam Sahid Bogor."

or exclusivity. This study addresses this gap by mapping millennials' interactions with digital religious content and its implications for the formation of religious attitudes.

Along with the times, da'wah has experienced significant development, starting from the number of followers, methods, and media used by the da'wah activists themselves¹⁰. This da'wah activity uses social media, such as Facebook, YouTube or WhatsApp for example¹¹. Da'i or da'wah activists must really be able to utilize social media, turning challenges into opportunities in carrying out their da'wah activities. This will open the widest possible opportunity for anyone to express their da'wah activities¹². So nowadays, many preachers or ustadz are suddenly popular thanks to their preaching activities through social media. So social media has become a new channel for expressing da'wah activities for certain groups¹³.

The digital era has brought significant changes in various aspects of life, including in terms of religiosity among millennials. Social media has become one of the main platforms used to preach and spread religious values¹⁴. This transformation of religiosity is a complex phenomenon, where millennials not only consume proselytizing content, but also actively participate in spreading religious teachings. This research is particularly relevant given that millennials are the dominant demographic group in the digital era. They are not only consumers of information, but also producers of content, including in the religious field. Information obtained from the use of social media leaves its own perception and meaning for a person.

A person's interpretation of their religion, in the context of interfaith relations, can push a religious person into two tendencies; to become a peaceful and friendly person or to become a person who harbors prejudice and hostility. This religious orientation can then lead individuals to two attitudes as well, the first being inclusive, moderate, and hostile¹⁵. Religious orientation determines morally relevant attitudes, for example in the form of prejudice towards others. This morally relevant attitude will in turn give birth to morally relevant social behavior¹⁶. This can be seen through their religious prejudices, as well as through their involvement in the social environment that surrounds them.

However, the use of social media in proselytizing is not free from challenges. One of the main issues is the proliferation of non-credible and even provocative religious content, which can reinforce exclusive and intolerant attitudes among users. The phenomenon of digital da'wah often deals with disinformation, reduction of religious teachings, and radicalization. In addition, the rapid consumption pattern of digital content can make millennials tend to contextualize religious teachings superficially without exploring their substantial meaning. This phenomenon requires a critical and wise approach in utilizing social media as a tool for religiosity transformation.

In this context, the transformation of millennials' religiosity is an interesting phenomenon to study, especially regarding how social media affects their religious

¹⁰ Ulfa Fauzia Zahra, Ahmad Sarbini, and Asep Shodiqin, "Media Sosial Instagram Sebagai Media Dakwah," *Tabligh: Jurnal Komunikasi Dan Penyiaran Islam* 1, no. 2 (2016): 61.

¹¹ Rohman, "Komunikasi Dakwah Melalui Media Sosial."

¹² RS Syamsudin, "Strategi Dan Etika Dakwah Rasulullah SAW.," *Ilmu Dakwah: Academic Journal for Homiletic Studies* 4, no. 14 (2009): 113.

¹³ Rohman, "Komunikasi Dakwah Melalui Media Sosial."

¹⁴ Rohman.

¹⁵ Sekar Ayu Aryani, "ORIENTASI, SIKAP DAN PERILAKU KEAGAMAAN (Studi Kasus Mahasiswa Salah Satu Perguruan Tinggi Negeri Di DIY)," *Religi* 11, no. 1 (2015): 59–80.

¹⁶ Raymond F. Paloutzian, *Invitation to Psychology of Religion* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1996).

orientation. This study aims to explore the role of social media in shaping millennial religiosity, including its impact on inclusive or exclusive attitudes in social and religious life.

Methods

This research uses a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is the study of knowledge derived from consciousness, or a way of understanding an object or event by experiencing it consciously¹⁷. This research aims to analyze how social media affects the transformation of religiosity and millennial religious life in the digital era. Using a phenomenological approach, this research explores the subjective experience of individuals in interacting with religious content on social media.

The data source sampling technique in this study used purposive sampling technique, which is a data sampling technique with certain considerations¹⁸. The research subjects in the study were 10 respondents. Informants who are selected based on characteristics are considered to be able to interpret the problem that is the object of research¹⁹. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with millennials who actively use social media for religious purposes.

Result and Discussion

A. Social Media Interaction and Participation in Da'wah

Social media interaction and participation play an important role in the transformation of millennial religiosity, especially in terms of how religion is understood, practiced, and expressed. According to the Uses and Gratifications theory²⁰, media is not only used as a source of information but also to fulfill specific needs, such as spiritual, identity, or social needs. The phenomenon of cyber religion (studying religion on the internet) is currently gaining popularity because da'wah through online media is growing²¹. In this context, millennials use social media such as YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp to access da'wah content that is relevant to their conditions and needs.

Based on data from 10 informants in this study, the majority of informants chose YouTube as the main platform for accessing lectures or da'wah, as it is considered more effective in presenting content with a long and in-depth duration as expressed by CA and RFN. UM and AN stated that Instagram is a more effective platform for listening to lectures because of its shorter duration, so the message is more to the point. As expressed by them, "I prefer IG because the lecture is shorter as long as the source is reliable". In addition, Interviewee AZ also stated that TikTok is also a social media that is quite effective for listening to preaching because the shows tend to be short and clear.

Most respondents chose YouTube as their primary platform for accessing lectures due to its long duration and in-depth discussions, in line with the findings of Muslikhah & Taufik

¹⁷ Stephen W Littlejohn, *Theories of Human Communication 7th Edition*. Belmont (USA: Thomson LearningAcademic Resource Center, 2002).

¹⁸ Mahmud, *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2011).

¹⁹ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, Dan R&D* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2019).

²⁰ J. G. Blumler and Katz, *The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research*. (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1974).

²¹ Mutiara Dwi Anggini and KN Jamiati, "Fenomena Cyber Religion Sebagai Ekspresi Keberagamaan Oleh Habib Jafar," *Jurnal Pendidikan Tambusai* 7, no. 2 (2023): 4140.

(2022), which showed students' preference for long-form content for in-depth religious studies. Instagram and TikTok are more popular for short, concise content that gets straight to the point, supporting the findings of Anggini & Jamiati (2023) on the effectiveness of short-form videos in reaching younger audiences. This is in line with the Diffusion of Innovations theory, which states that the adoption of new technologies, including social media, is influenced by the perceived benefits ²². The longer content duration allows for comprehensive delivery of religious material, providing space for exploration of complex topics such as philosophy, creed, and Qur'anic exegesis.

Other social media platforms, such as Instagram and WhatsApp, are used as complements that facilitate interactive communication through comment features, group discussions or live broadcasts. This enables active discussions, answers to questions, responses to concerns, and a deeper understanding of Islam. This is in line with the views of Salsabila and Muslim, who mention that social media strengthens the interactive dimension of da'wah, enabling a more active dialog between da'i and audience ²³.

Analysis of the findings shows a diversity of preferences in the consumption of religious content. Interviewees tend to access self-reflection content more often, which is considered relevant for introspection and spiritual development. On the other hand, some interviewees such as VN and IF were more interested in Quranic tafsir and fiqh, indicating a deep need for more technical and substantial religious knowledge. This diversity of preferences reflects different spiritual and religious needs, influenced by each individual's situation and conditions. Nonetheless, the main focus of the interviewees remained on self-reflection and understanding Islamic law, confirming the importance of both aspects in their religious lives.

The diversity of content preferences, ranging from self-reflection to interpretations of the Qur'an and fiqh, shows that the religious needs of millennials are dynamic and contextual. This reinforces Paloutzian's (1996) view that religious motivation is influenced by personal background, life experiences, and current issues.

This diversity shows that millennials' religiosity needs are dynamic and contextual, influenced by personal backgrounds, experiences and issues. Dawah content that is relevant to their living conditions is perceived to have a positive influence, as expressed by RFN and IF, who felt the significant impact of the lectures in overcoming their personal problems. This is supported by RFN's statement, "very influential, I was at one point, in trouble with a friend who made myself hurt because of his words. I listened to Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus's lecture about not hoping in humans, I felt hit and realized until I really cried. The message I remember, Don't depend on other than Allah. Because that creature has the potential to hurt".

The level of exploration and participation in sharing religious content among the interviewees also varied. Most interviewees felt that the talks they accessed through social media had a significant impact on both their spiritual and social lives. Those who were more active in sharing content were often inspired by memorable personal experiences, such as how da'wah helped them face life's challenges.

B. Challenges of Social Media Utilization in Da'wah

²² E.M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 3rd Editio (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

²³ F. Salsabila and I. F. Muslim, "Pemanfaatan WhatsApp Sebagai Media Literasi Digital Untuk Dakwah Di Kalangan Mahasiswa," *INTELEKTUUM* 3, no. 1 (2022): 79–88.

The use of social media for da'wah has great potential in spreading da'wah messages to a wider audience ²⁴. However, it needs to be recognized that the use of social media also has a negative side that must be considered. One of the negative impacts that needs to be watched out for is the existence of content that has not been fully accounted for its truth and credibility ²⁵. As WF and AU have stated, they emphasize the importance of filtering provocative da'wah content. This view reflects their awareness of the potential negative impact of uncontrolled content, as well as the need to keep da'wah on social media constructive and in line with moderate religious values. So we can conclude that the challenges faced in the digital age, where religious information is easily accessible but requires critical understanding to sort out appropriate content.

Although social media opens up vast opportunities for preaching, the issue of content credibility is a major challenge. Some respondents admitted to being exposed to provocative material that fosters a sense of self-righteousness. This finding aligns with Aryani's (2015) study, which identified a link between exclusivism and limited interfaith interaction. Nurcholish Madjid cautioned that exclusivism can hinder the achievement of social harmony. As expressed by the informants, although the da'wah content on social media has a positive impact on them, because it provides new knowledge and strengthens religious values. However, VN, AM and AZ are also aware of its negative potential, such as feeling the most righteous if the content is not addressed wisely. "However, if we are not wise enough, religious content can make us feel the most righteous," said AM.

This can have a negative impact on the minds of people who may not have sufficient understanding of religious teachings. One step that can be taken is to improve digital literacy. With a good understanding of social media and digital literacy, audiences can critically analyze the content they encounter, sort out reliable information, and understand the context and values of actual religious teachings. In addition, they can also play an active role in spreading the right da'wah messages through social media.

This study also identified various challenges in using social media for da'wah. One of them is the existence of content that is not credible or provocative. This requires good filtering skills so that users are not influenced by narratives that can reinforce exclusive attitudes. Some interviewees, such as AM and AZ, revealed that unwise exploration of da'wah content can lead to a self-righteous attitude. This attitude, according to Nurcholish Madjid, is a form of exclusivism that can limit one's view of diversity ²⁶.

There are phenomena such as some informants who state that they only want to be friends with friends of the same religion, and tend to stay away from those who are different, which is a clear example of the challenges of using social media, "Looking at different religious ways, I live in a religious environment, so from childhood I was not introduced to various differences, I found out like that since MA. Even at MA, I was still indoctrinated that we should stay away from differences in terms of religion to maintain our faith, entering college I began to understand that different perspectives are a necessity in this world, I consider them as unique, Islam is like this, other religions are like this. I am also surprised by the reasoning of non-believers who worship their God, but *wallahu alam* because people's faith is different, what is clear is that I am grateful to be Muslim," said IF.

IF and AZ stated, "Although my friends on campus are quite a lot at odds, for example different in terms of understanding tawhid, fiqh, but yes I often separate myself". The

²⁴ Rohman, "Komunikasi Dakwah Melalui Media Sosial."

²⁵ Nurul Hidayatul Ummah, "PEMANFAATAN SOSIAL MEDIA DALAM MENINGKATKAN EFEKTIVITAS DAKWAH DI ERA DIGITAL," *Jurnal Manajemen Dakwah* 10, no. 1 (2023).

²⁶ Komaruddin Hidayat, *Interpreting God's Will* (Bandung: Mizan, 2003).

perceptions conveyed by some of these informants mean that they have a typology of exclusive attitudes. As according to Nurcholish Madjid, for this exclusive religious attitude, other religions are the wrong way, which is misleading for its adherents. This paradigm is the dominant view from time to time and continues to be embraced today: “Religion alone is the most correct, others are wrong”²⁷. This phenomenon reflects the urgent need to build a culture of religious tolerance through inclusive and educative da'wah content.

Platforms in social media are able to influence people's social and religious behavior in a faster and wider way. In this case, religious behavior can be shaped through various factors, one of which is from how a person responds to content. In the context of online da'wah, a person's emotions can be influenced by the content presented on social media. Positive and inspiring content can lead a person to good religious behavior. Critical Media Literacy Theory is relevant in this context, as it emphasizes the importance of critical analysis skills for content consumed on digital media²⁸. Without proper filtering, users can be exposed to information that reinforces exclusive attitudes or prejudices against other groups.

Most of the interviewees, such as CA, VN, AM and SG, showed a more open view towards different religious practices. They regard diversity as a natural part of social and religious dynamics. This attitude is in line with inclusivism, which emphasizes that other religions also have elements of truth even if they do not fully conform to their own beliefs²⁹.

This narrative of tolerance is supported by several interviewees such as WF, UM, AU, and AZ, who emphasized the importance of respecting differences as long as no harm is caused to others. This view shows the potential of social media in facilitating interfaith interactions and strengthening social harmony.

This research explores the interviewees' views on different religious ways and how they apply the concept of tolerance in their daily lives. In general, the interviewees showed a fairly open attitude towards differences in religious practice. CA, VN, AM, IF, and SG, for example, tend to be relaxed and accept these differences as part of the natural dynamics of religion. Meanwhile, WF, UM, AU, and AZ emphasized the importance of tolerance in that differences do not cause harm or disadvantage to other parties. The perceptions conveyed by these informants mean that they have a typology of inclusive attitudes. Inclusivism refers to a person's religious attitude and view that outside the religion he adheres to there is also truth, even though it is not as complete or perfect as his religion³⁰.

This research provides important insights into the transformation of millennial religiosity in the digital era, as well as providing recommendations for further research and religious practices on social media. The transformation of millennial religiosity in the digital age shows that social media has become an important space for the expression and exploration of religious identity. This phenomenon reflects a fundamental change in the way millennials understand and live religious life. It is therefore important to choose positive, credible and relevant proselytization sources in this digital era so that millennials can deepen their religious understanding and avoid the negative impact of misleading information.

²⁷ Hidayat.

²⁸ Craig Hight, “Review: Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice,” *Media International Australia* 98, no. 1 (2001), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878x0109800119>.

²⁹ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane* (New York, 1959).

³⁰ Eliade.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm and expand on previous findings regarding the role of social media in shaping millennial religiosity. Respondents' preference for YouTube as a platform for religious preaching that provides in-depth material is in line with the research by Muslikhah and Taufik, which shows that long-form content facilitates a more comprehensive internalization of religious values. However, our study found that while YouTube offers space for exploring complex content, the platform also poses risks of exposure to provocative content, an aspect rarely highlighted in previous studies. This underscores the need for digital literacy as a buffer³¹, an aspect also emphasized by Salsabila & Muslim, though their focus was more on WhatsApp as a discussion platform.

Meanwhile, the preference for Instagram and TikTok for short religious content supports the findings of Anggini and Jamiati, who highlight the effectiveness of short-form videos in attracting the interest of the younger generation³². However, unlike their study, which emphasizes audience reach, this research finds that the short format actually creates limitations in terms of depth of content, potentially leading to superficial understanding. This difference highlights the tension between accessibility and depth in digital religious content.

In terms of religious orientation, the findings of this study related to the typology of inclusive and exclusive attitudes enrich the discussion initiated by Aryani. Aryani found that exclusivism often emerges among students in homogeneous environments³³. This study confirms this, but adds a new dimension: exclusivism is not only influenced by the offline environment but also by selective consumption patterns of online religious content. On the other hand, the presence of respondents exhibiting inclusive attitudes supports Nurcholish Madjid's perspective on the importance of recognizing truth within other religious traditions. However, this study highlights that such attitudes are often influenced by cross-group digital interaction experiences, not just formal education.

The issue of the credibility of religious content on social media is also a point of academic debate. Previous research Nurfitria and Arzam tends to view social media as an effective means of spreading religious messages without highlighting the risks of misinformation³⁴. Conversely, this study emphasizes that without adequate media literacy skills, audiences are vulnerable to confirmation bias and narratives that reinforce intolerant attitudes. These findings align with the framework of Critical Media Literacy Theory, which emphasizes the need for critical analysis skills in consuming digital content, while also expanding its application in the context of religious preaching.³⁵

Thus, this study not only supports previous findings but also introduces new nuances to the academic debate on digital da'wah: how to achieve a balance between the depth and accessibility of content, how digital literacy should be integrated into da'wah strategies, and to what extent cross-group interactions in the digital space can shift religious orientation from exclusive to inclusive. These three points open up space for further research focused on designing moderate and inclusive da'wah content within the social media ecosystem.

³¹ Salsabila and Muslim, "Pemanfaatan WhatsApp Sebagai Media Literasi Digital Untuk Dakwah Di Kalangan Mahasiswa."

³² Anggini and Jamiati, "Fenomena Cyber Religion Sebagai Ekspresi Keberagamaan Oleh Habib Jafar."
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³⁴ Nurfitria and Arzam, "Urgensi Media Sosial Sebagai Sarana Dakwah Melalui Media Di Era Modern."

³⁵ Hight, "Review: Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice."

Conclusion

This research shows that social media plays an important role in the transformation of millennial religiosity, both as a medium for delivering religious information and as a space for interactive participation. Da'wah on social media is not only seen as a process of passive reception, but also involves active participation from millennials in disseminating and interpreting religious teachings. Social media has changed the way millennials carry out their religious practices, from accessing religious information to participating in online religious communities. These experiences of religiosity are often characterized by a dynamic between tradition and innovation, where millennials integrate religious values with social norms evolving in the digital world. However, the study also found negative impacts, such as the spread of inaccurate information and the potential for radicalization.

The preference for platforms such as YouTube highlights the importance of delivering in-depth and relevant content, while the diversity of spiritual needs points to the need for variety in digital proselytization approaches. Social media also provides space for inclusive religious dialog, which can strengthen religious understanding and practice among millennials. Although social media allows for challenges in dealing with non-credible content. With good media literacy and proper content selection, social media can be a positive space for building an inclusive, tolerant and deep religious identity.

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