



Construction of Self-Identity of teenagers Using Instagram Social Media : Phenomenological Study at Islamic University of North Sumatera (UINSU)

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ABSTRACT

The research explores how Instagram plays a role in strengthening the religious identity of teenagers, specifically focusing on UINSU students from the Class of 2020. Utilizing a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study involved 7 informants from the Department of Communication Science and Islamic Counseling Guidance. The findings reveal that Instagram is a crucial platform for teenagers to reflect upon and reinforce their religious identity, particularly through sharing religious content such as preaching clips. An inclusive campus environment positively impacts this identity formation, encouraging students to express and solidify their religious beliefs. The motivations behind sharing religious content include providing knowledge, offering motivation, and conveying da'wah. However, the use of Instagram can also lead to identity conflicts between religious values and the desire for personal expression. This study provides a new perspective on how social media influences the formation of teenagers' religious identity and highlights the complexity of maintaining this identity in both the digital world and everyday life.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Community activities are now closely related to the use of social media. According to research by the Ministry of Communication and Information (2021), internet users increased by 11%, reaching 202.6 million users from 175.4 million the previous year. Social media acts as a place to produce various forms of communication and convey various information to all levels of (Mustomi, 2020). Social media is the dominant type of online media for interacting and disseminating information (Nur, 2021). According to (Maharani, 2020), social media acts as a tool to facilitate interaction between users with two-way communication capabilities. In addition, it is often used to create an online identity or profile, and can be used by businesses as a source of news and information.

(Bledsoe, 2022) explained that in the era of advanced technology, social media is very popular, especially among young people. As a platform, social media allows users to present themselves, communicate, and form a virtual social environment. In the last decade, the number of posts on social media and active youth has increased rapidly (al, 2020) However, the discussion focuses more on the impact on well-being and negative consequences such as problematic social media use, depressive symptoms, and risk behavior rather than identity (Shankleman, 2021). Social media among students has eliminated privacy with them actively sharing personal

activities through visual photos on platforms such as Instagram. Identities formed through social media include information such as physical characteristics, race, skin color, language, and psychological factors. Instagram is now the most popular social media among teenagers with a GWI survey showing the popularity of YouTube, WhatsApp and Instagram in Indonesia in 2020-2021 (Yudo, 2021). Because it is a means of getting information, including lessons, culinary, fashion and religion. Apart from providing entertainment content, Instagram is also rich in positive material that can be used as inspiration in everyday life, although there is still negative content.

Adolescence is an important stage in identity development (Branje, 2021) which is influenced by the environment, individuals and social contexts throughout life. On Instagram social media, especially teenagers often share various personal activities, stories, photos and videos to express their identity to many people. Recent research shows that teenagers use social media to build identity and socialize (Lajnef, 2021). Identity is an aspect of ourselves that is recognized by others and an important way to explore identity is through interactions with peers. Adolescent identity is a characteristic that makes them different from others and reflects their personality. Analysis from research by (Fitri, 2020) states that identity theory can be an initial basis for assessing whether Instagram users use their true identities. Identity on the internet has become significant because it creates a different form of identity in the real world. Instagram functions as a platform for immediately uploading and sharing photos (Sari, 2020). Apart from being able to upload and watch video clips for free, Instagram also allows users to do instant messaging. Additional features such as advertisements in the timeline and stories also increase interaction with users, making them closer (Junawan, 2020).

Instagram has succeeded in attracting users' attention by not only emphasizing photos, but also being a video and animation platform. According to Instagram has a unique appeal with the concept of sharing photos and videos that differentiates it from other social media (Yulianto, 2023). The recently added live feature further overcomes the barriers of time and space. The ease of communication on Instagram provides opportunities for teenagers who may not pay attention to behavior and actions in online interactions. Additionally, tools on Instagram allow users to create virtual identities that are very different from their reality, including manipulation of their name, profile photo, physical appearance, gender identity, social profile, and even marital status. Excessive use of social media by teenagers, combined with developments in technology, has brought about changes in the way they express themselves and form identities. Instagram is often used inappropriately by users, where some of them can be influenced by negative content that can trigger divisions between religious communities (Setyaningsih, 2021).

Based on data released by Napoleon Cat from January to May 2020, it can be seen that many students actively use Instagram. More than a quarter of Instagram's total users, around 25 million people are between the ages of 18 and 24. Apart from that, there are also around 21 million users aged between 25 and 34 years who predominantly use the platform (Iman, 2020). Instagram, through innovation and easy access, provides opportunities for students to represent a self-image that is considered ideal. Research by (Nukha, 2021) shows that Instagram is a forum for users to present themselves, especially in promoting self-image or personal branding. As Instagram users, students express and identify themselves through the application. Even though it is tied to social values and rules in everyday life, Instagram provides a gap for identity construction because social rules are more flexible.

The existing literature highlights a significant gap in understanding the specific ways Instagram influences the construction of religious and personal identities among teenagers. Previous studies primarily focus on the general impact of social media on well-being, privacy concerns, and negative behaviors, with less emphasis on the nuanced role of social media in religious identity formation. While research has explored how platforms like Instagram facilitate self-expression and interaction, there is limited insight into how these platforms help teenagers, particularly students, navigate and reinforce their religious beliefs. The rise of Instagram's popularity, combined with its unique features such as photo and video sharing, live broadcasts, and interactive tools, creates a dynamic environment for exploring identity. This research aims to fill the gap by examining how UINSU Class of 2020 students use Instagram to reflect on and strengthen their religious identity, considering both the positive influences and potential conflicts between

personal expression and religious values. By focusing on this intersection, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the processes through which teenagers construct and negotiate their identities in the digital age.

From the results I found, the presence of Instagram among UINSU Class of 2020 students shows that they use this platform as a forum to reflect on their religious identity. They post about how the religious values they learned in college influenced the way they see themselves and explain how that is reflected in their daily lives. They also use this platform to strengthen their religious identity and how to interact with their peers through comments, direct messages or tags. The role of Instagram brings a new focus to research on how the social construction of self-identity is formed among social media users, especially among UINSU students Class of 2020. This has attracted researchers' interest in researching "Construction of Self-Identity of Adolescents Using Instagram Social Media: A Phenomenological Study at the State Islamic University North Sumatra" which can influence their self-identity. The aim of this research is to explain the process of how UINSU teenagers form their identities and how religious values and the campus environment influence the way they interpret themselves through the use of Instagram.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

In this research, a qualitative approach was utilized, specifically employing a phenomenological study type. The goal of this approach is to understand the meanings and experiences from the perspective of the individuals who experience them, allowing an in-depth exploration of personal life experiences related to a particular concept or phenomenon, including outlook on life and self-concept (Sugiyono, 2021).

For this study, the researcher used a purposive sampling technique. This method involved selecting informants who met specific criteria established at the outset of the research. The chosen informants were students from the UINSU Class of 2020, majoring in Communication Sciences and Islamic Counseling Guidance. To ensure the depth and relevance of the data, the researcher selected informants who were already familiar.

Data collection was conducted online using a survey method. The researcher distributed questionnaires via Google Forms, which included 24 questions designed to gather information on Islamic content usage on Instagram. The questionnaire aimed to evaluate respondents' perceptions and experiences with Islamic content on this social media platform. The questions addressed various aspects, including the types of Islamic content shared, the respondents' interactions with this content, and their assessment of its benefits. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how Islamic content on Instagram impacts the respondents and their engagement with it.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Research result

The research findings underscore the significant role of social media, particularly Instagram, in spreading Islamic teachings. As highlighted by Fauzi (2021), social media platforms enable the dissemination of Islamic information to a global audience, providing access to religious content anytime and anywhere. This rapid and accessible exchange of information facilitates meaningful interactions among users. To investigate this further, the research utilized an online survey distributed through Google Forms, focusing on several key aspects. The collected data includes the types of Islamic content shared on Instagram, how respondents interact with this content—such as through likes, shares, or comments and their assessments of the content's benefits. The results, detailed in the accompanying table, offer a comprehensive view of how Islamic teachings are represented and engaged with on social media, reflecting both the reach and impact of these digital interactions on individuals' religious practices and understanding.

The following is a table regarding the information that researchers have carried out by distributing questionnaires to respondents online on Google Form:

Table 1. Information regarding informants

No	Name	Instagram account	Major
1.	Iin Mestika	mustika.yn604	Islamic Counseling Guidance
2.	Nur Sahdiah Siregar	nursahdiah18	Islamic Counseling Guidance
3.	Nia Ramadana	niarhmdn_	Communication Studies
4.	Annisa Utami	Annisaaaut	Communication Studies
5.	Alvi Zakiyah Putri	zakiyah549	Communication Studies
6.	Nur Safitri	nsfitr100	Communication Studies
7.	Annisa Hutagalung	annisa_hutagalung99	Communication Studies

Source: results of a questionnaire for Uinsu students class of 2020

After distributing an online questionnaire to 7 informants, 4 of the 7 UINSU student informants Class of 2020 actively share Islamic content on Instagram. From the research results and answers from respondents, the author found that the type of religious content most often shared on Instagram is pieces of preaching or lectures. The delivery of da'wah messages must prioritize dialogue, discussion and friendship with the audience while avoiding provocation, slander or hate speech that could trigger hostility or conflict. By providing good and inspiring examples and carrying out regular evaluation and development, the da'wah message will be accepted by the audience (Ash-Shidiq and Pratama, 2019). Informants felt that sharing religious content was a moment of reflection and spiritual growth for their religious identity. Their peers' perception of religious content shared on Instagram is that they are less interested, but respect religious freedom and are not disruptive. Informants are also actively involved in activities on campus, while others are not. Even though they rarely interact through comments, direct messages or tags in posts related to religious values, they feel that Instagram facilitates the exchange of useful information and experiences among fellow members of the religious community.

Most informants chose sharing experiences and discussions as the most common types of interaction in religious contexts on Instagram. The influence of an inclusive campus environment encourages informants to be more open in sharing religious content. In an Instagram post, the informant explained that the religious values learned on campus influenced their self-view, through personal experiences that reflected religious values in their daily actions and attitudes. The informants saw patterns or trends in the types of interactions that occurred via Instagram related to religious activities on campus. These interaction trends show support and solidarity for religious content, such as liking or sharing posts that reflect religious values.

The informants at UINSU experienced the influence of interactions via Instagram which strengthened the sense of togetherness and support between teenagers in a religious context. By conveying thoughts, experiences and messages with their religious beliefs, they can build solidarity and mutual understanding within their religious communities. Within the UINSU campus, there are certain factors that encourage students to actively share religious content on Instagram, such as the existence of a student community that is active in religious activities and supports each other in sharing religious content. Informants feel free to post content about their religion on Instagram without any pressure.

In fact, each individual has a different main motivation for sharing religious content on Instagram. As stated by account users @annisahutagalung99 and @zakiyah549, their main motivation for sharing religious content is so that their followers on Instagram can gain knowledge and advice that can be taken from the religious content posted. Meanwhile, account users @niarhmdn_, @mustika.yn604, @nursahdiah18 aim to provide motivation, spread messages of goodness, share religious knowledge with those who don't know and inspire others by sharing their healthy, productive or positive routines. By sharing regular content, they hope to give others ideas or motivation to live a better lifestyle. In contrast to the @nsfitr100 account, its motivation is to invite people to the truth in everyday life based on Islamic principles. The @annisaaaut account has the main motivation of conveying da'wah which is considered an obligation for every Muslim. Even

though he is not perfect, he still tries to convey his da'wah because he believes his message might open doors to his own or someone else's heart that have been closed.

Instagram serves as the main communication channel for teenagers in their religious community UINSU. They interact through comments, direct messages or tags in posts related to religious values and religious activities on campus. Some gave positive comments such as the sentences *subhanallah*, *masyallah* and *tabarakallah* as well as showing support and appreciation by liking the post. This was also expressed by the account user @niarhmdn_ after he posted about his religious identity on Instagram, interactions or discussions often occurred in comments or direct messages. The forms of interaction can vary, from questions about Islam, providing support, to discussions about religious values or practices. The essence of this interaction is dialogue and mutual enrichment of understanding about the Islamic religion. The religious identity presented by UINSU teenagers on Instagram is different from the religious identity they experience in everyday life, as agreed by most informants in this study. They share content according to their understanding and beliefs and adjust their daily actions accordingly. Everyone has their own unique reasons and goals.

When sharing religious content on Instagram, it is based on meaning for yourself and others. Although the image of religious identity presented on Instagram may be different in everyday life, this is because they may choose to display certain aspects that are attractive or give a certain impression to their followers. However, in everyday life religious identity is more complex with community interactions and deeper questions about their beliefs. Differences in the image of religious identity do not arise if the content shared is in accordance with religious teachings, but the existence of heretical religious news being disseminated on Instagram is certainly not in accordance with religious teachings, especially Islam. Some respondents did not find it difficult to express aspects of themselves that might conflict with religious values on campus. Religious experiences on campus influence the way they share religious content on Instagram as well as sensitivity to norms in the campus environment. This may influence the choice of content shared, whether it aligns with the religious values taught on campus or reflects an individual's religious identity. When taking part in the study, you are expected to share the messages you get and then share them in the form of religious content on Instagram. Religious experiences on campus also influence decisions to repost content. Some may feel uncomfortable with liberal thinking that goes against Islamic law on campus. This encourages you to be more careful in posting and also encourages you to be better and motivate each other with existing content.

The difference between religious values taught on campus and expectations in the digital world can cause discomfort and internal conflict for informants. Meanwhile, some account users such as @annisaaut consider this difference to be normal in the legal decision process, as long as it is based on arguments that are in accordance with the faith. On the other hand, the user of the @nsfitr100 account feels that there is no problem as long as the difference in values is not absolute. However, other account users such as @zakayah549 and @annisahutagalung99 are looking for information and questioning the suitability of those with more knowledge. User account @mustika.yn604 expressed confusion because it was difficult to contradict opinions from campus and social media. Meanwhile, @niarhmdn_ and @nursahdiah18 felt mixed feelings when facing the difference between the religious values taught on campus and expectations in the digital world. This can cause internal conflict and discomfort. Interaction via Instagram can influence the level of participation and involvement of informants in religious activities on campus, as is the case at UINSU. This interaction can inspire someone to be active in religious activities. In particular, the impact tends to be positive in that informants can invite other students to discuss religion through the platform, broaden their horizons, and increase awareness of ethics when interacting with religious individuals.

Several informants felt that using Instagram could create a conflict between religious identity and the desire for free expression. This is especially true when there is pressure to adhere to religious norms and values that may conflict with personal expression on the platform. It is feared that this could produce detrimental output for the audience. However, whether this creates a conflict depends on individual judgment. Positive appraisals can reduce the likelihood of conflict, while negative appraisals can increase it. The strategies used by informants to overcome the

tension between religious identity and the desire to express other aspects of the self on Instagram varied. For example, the user account @nsftr100 chose not to express it at all. Meanwhile, account users @annisahutagalung99 and @annisaaut follow Islamic law which teaches tolerance as a strategy to balance the two. Users of the @niarhmdn_ account may use selectivity in sharing content, creating a balance between the two aspects, and communicating openly with followers. Meanwhile, the account user @mustika.yn604 chooses to understand personal values and beliefs first before sharing appropriate content. And account user @nursahdiah18 selects content that reflects religious values while maintaining space to express other personal identities.

Social media, such as Instagram, has been shown to influence teenagers' religious behavior. The use of Instagram also plays a role in the process of forming adolescent identities, especially in religious-based campus environments such as UINSU. In the UINSU context, where religious values and the campus environment are very influential, Instagram and other social media can be useful tools if used wisely to support a positive religious identity. Therefore, it is important for teenagers, especially in religious campus environments, to use social media intelligently, utilizing existing features for positive things such as preaching or strengthening religious values.

4. CONCLUSION

The implications of the findings above are very important in the context of understanding adolescent identity and the use of social media, especially Instagram, in strengthening religious identity. These findings make a significant contribution to the understanding of how youth, especially UINSU Class of 2020 students, use the platform to reflect and strengthen their religious identity. Here are some implications that can be concluded: a) The Role of Instagram in Strengthening Religious Identity: These findings show that Instagram plays an important role in strengthening teenagers' religious identity, especially in the campus environment. This shows that social media is not only a tool for social interaction, but also a forum for expressing and strengthening religious identity; b) Influence of Campus Environment in Identity Formation: These findings highlight the influence of an inclusive campus environment in influencing how teenagers share religious content on Instagram. This suggests that the values learned in the campus environment can be reflected in the way teenagers view themselves and in their interactions on social media; c) Motivations for Sharing Religious Content: Various motivations underlie teenagers for sharing religious content on Instagram, ranging from providing knowledge, providing motivation, to conveying da'wah. These findings illustrate the diversity of individuals' goals and desires in using social media to spread religious messages; d) Identity Conflict in Social Media Use: These findings suggest that Instagram use can also create conflict between religious identity and the desire for free expression. This shows the complexity of maintaining identity in the digital world which is often different from identity in everyday life; e) Thus, these findings not only confirm findings from previous research, but also provide new insights into how adolescents' religious identities are formed and strengthened through social media use. The resulting implications can also be the basis for further research in understanding more deeply the relationship between identity, social media, and the social environment of adolescents.

The implications of these findings are profound, offering both theoretical and practical insights into adolescent identity formation and the role of social media, particularly Instagram, in reinforcing religious identity. The research highlights that Instagram is a significant tool for strengthening teenagers' religious identities, demonstrating that social media platforms serve as more than just channels for social interaction they are pivotal spaces for expressing and solidifying religious beliefs. The study also reveals how an inclusive campus environment influences teenagers' engagement with religious content on Instagram, reflecting the values and norms learned in educational settings. Furthermore, it uncovers the diverse motivations behind sharing religious content, ranging from educational purposes to motivational and da'wah efforts. However, it also points to potential conflicts between maintaining a religious identity and the desire for personal expression on social media, illustrating the complexities of navigating identity in the digital age. These insights not only align with existing research but also provide a basis for further exploration into the intricate dynamics between social media use, identity formation, and the broader social environment.

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