

Sufism and Social Media: Correlation between WhatsApp Usage and the Level of Religiosity of PP Jagad Alif Students

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the correlation between WhatsApp usage and the religiosity level of PP Jagad Alif santri, as well as the factors influencing this correlation. A correlational quantitative approach was used to measure the relationship between these two variables. A sample of 58 individuals was selected using simple random sampling from a population of 68 santri at PP Jagad Alif, calculated with the Slovin formula. Data were collected through surveys using the SMUI instrument for WhatsApp and the CRS instrument for religiosity, with each instrument demonstrating a validity of 0.9 Pearson's r and reliability scores of 0.996 and 0.995 Cronbach's α , respectively. Data analysis techniques included Pearson correlation and simple linear regression to test the hypothesis. The results showed a positive correlation of 0.349 with a p -value of 0.004, and the contribution of the social media variable to religiosity was 12.2%. These findings indicate that the correlation between social media usage and the religiosity level of PP Jagad Alif santri is weak.

Keywords: Religiosity, Santri PP Jagad Alif, Social Media, Sufism.

INTRODUCTION

Neil Postman proposed a quite interesting thesis in 1970. Postman formulated the paradigm that the media is part of an ecosystem that is actively involved in interaction with humans (Littlejohn et al., 2017; West & Turner, 2021). Postman views the world as a giant ecosystem with humans interacting, communicating, and building understanding within it. These interactions occur on a varied scale, ranging from global to interpersonal. The flow of ideas and ideas continues to flow in the ecosystem naturally, through face-to-face interaction. When this natural interaction has been built stably, one day the media will be present to offer a new ecosystem of interaction to people. From these events, will people's understanding of ideas, ideas, and reality remain the same in the new ecosystem?

The significant changes that the media offers in the way people interact can be traced back to the last decade (Balbi & Magaudda, 2018). At that time, the United States as one of the superpowers was involved in the Cold War with the Soviet Union. There was a fairly fierce technological and military race between the two camps. To meet the military's need for secure and tactical communications, a project called ARPANET was born that was the forerunner of the internet. The project is intended to be able to connect communication points in one network so that the flow of information can be controlled and circulated smoothly in it (Balbi & Magaudda, 2018; Straubhaar et al., 2012).

Long story short, the project was a great success and turned out to be in demand by many parties so that gradually adoption and adaptation occurred in various fields. Within the framework of the development of the internet compiled by James Curran, there are several stages that can be observed in the adoption and adaptation of this technology (Balbi & Magaudda, 2018). After the initial development that started from a military institution, the academic community took an interest in adopting it. It continues to sequentially starting from the community, government public services, commercial interests, to social activities. At the last point, there was a breakthrough through the growth of various digital media based on internet technology.

These unimaginable spaces of interaction were then born. The internet presents information spaces that are easy for anyone to reach anytime and anywhere. The internet also provides a place for people to build social relationships in new ways virtually. One of them is social media, a digital media with a uniqueness that lies in its interactivity (Baran, 2019; Ji, 2024). The interaction model offered also varies over time and on the service provider's side. Some focus on meeting individual needs and some facilitate the needs of communal interaction. Through this, social media becomes an accelerator for the birth of various new communities and adaptations from old communities to enter them (Cohen, 2007).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The revolutionary interaction model of social media and the internet has also changed the perspective of communities in various parts of the world. One of those affected is the religious community, which scholars say has given birth to the phenomenon of "*digital religion*" (Dawson & Hennebry, 1999). This phenomenon refers to a shift in the perspective of religious communities through the adoption and adaptation of digital media as part of efforts to enrich their religious experience (Bellar & Campbell, 2023; Helland, 2016). If tracked historically, this phenomenon began to emerge around the 1990s, when they saw an opportunity to develop their communities through interactivity and the wide reach of the internet and social media (Campbell, 2013). Its initial form was the use of websites as a means of disseminating information and religious vision of the community to the public, also known as online religion by some scholars (Young, 2004).

One of the religious communities that unexpectedly welcomed the development came from the Sufi community. They are part of an Islamic community that has a focus on spiritual exercise and self-development in its teachings (Bruinessen & Howell, 2007). Hidayat (2022) stated that the Sufi community is actually more familiar and attached to rituals and face-to-face teaching. This is because of their doctrine that emphasizes self-purification efforts through the direct guidance of teachers or *murshids* in the Sufi tradition (Hidayat, 2022; Nasrullah, 2020; Ridgeon, 2021). Even so, there is one Sufi community that is a pioneer in the adoption of the internet and social media to enrich its spiritual experience.

They are the Naqsabandiyah Haqqani Tarekat (TNH), with the belief that the development of technology is one of the means to spread the teachings to more people (Makhasin, 2016; Piraino, 2016). Internet technology and social media are tools, the problem is good or bad depending on what goals are to be achieved. This is shown by the launch of the *Eshaykh* website, a virtual space provided by TNH in collaboration with *The Islamic Supreme Council of America* (ISCA) (Hidayat, 2022). The site provides various information such as prayers, religious advice, and consultation services on various religious issues. Through *Eshaykh*, TNH sends a signal that there are benefits that can be reaped from the adoption of internet technology and social media.

This opportunity was not only seized by the international community such as TNH, but one of the local Sufi communities in Indonesia also read the benefits of adopting and adapting. Located quite far from the city center of the Special Region of Yogyakarta, stands the Islamic Boarding School for Dhikr Lovers Jagad Alif (PP Jagad Alif). This pesantren adheres to the Syadziliyah tarekat school in the historical records of the pesantren (Sambodo, 2022). The term *tariqat* in the Sufi tradition itself refers to the genealogical path that forms a kind of spiritual tradition, relying on one of the prominent figures who became its initiator (Howell, 2015; Nasrullah, 2020).

The form of adaptation carried out is the use of WhatsApp as a means of communication, interaction, and teaching between teachers and students. From the official information collected by researchers before the research, this adoption began around 2017. WhatsApp was chosen as the main social media because it was part of PP Jagad Alif's order to be used as a medium of interaction and learning. Even so, face-to-face spiritual development activities are still carried out as usual.

WhatsApp is an application that focuses on providing short messaging services to its users (Montag et al., 2015; Robin et al., 2017). Still included in the social media family, WhatsApp provides features to share messages in various formats such as text, images, videos, and video-based phone services over the internet (Montag et al., 2015). With the number of social media users reaching 190 million as of 2024, WhatsApp ranks first with a usage rate of 90 percent of the population above (Kemp, 2024).

In several studies conducted to examine the relationship between social media and religiosity, quite diverse results were found. Research conducted by Allisa & Triyono (2023) found that social media has a positive and significant influence on religiosity. Meanwhile, in research conducted by Hesapci Sanaktekin et al. (2013) and Armfield & Holbert (2003), there is a negative influence exerted by religiosity on social media itself.

Recall the illustration that the researcher has presented in the first paragraph, the existence of media has succeeded in fostering a new ecosystem in human interaction. Media as part of the ecosystem in the perspective of ecological media theory, it can be interpreted that the movement of the ecosystem means that comprehensive changes will occur when people step on the new ecosystem (Scolari, 2012; West & Turner, 2021). Oleh karena itu, peneliti bergerak untuk merumuskan penelitian dengan judul “Sufisme Dan Media Sosial: Korelasi Antara Penggunaan WhatsApp dan Tingkat Religiusitas Santri PP Jagad Alif”.

METHODS

This study uses a correlative quantitative approach with the aim of examining the influence of independent variables on bound variables. The quantitative approach is a research method that focuses on measuring variables, testing hypotheses, and then explaining the relationships between existing variables (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2021). This research was carried out at PP Jagad Alif which is located in Sambirejo, Pakembinangun, Pakem, Sleman, D. I. Yogyakarta. and will be held for a period of two (2) months, starting from June to July 2024. The research sample was taken by a total of 58 people using a simple random sampling technique from a total population of 68 people in PP Jagad Alif which was determined by the Slovin Formula.

H1: *The use of WhatsApp is positively correlated with the level of religiosity of PP Jagad Alif students*

With the use of WhatsApp as the X variable (independent variable) and the level of religiosity of PP Jagad Alif students as the Y variable (bound variable).

Data Collection

Data collection was carried out using the survey method, a technique that utilizes a series of questions or statements with the aim of obtaining data from respondents (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2021). In the measurement of variable X, the *Social Media Use Integration* (SMUI) instrument was used which showed excellent validity and reliability test results. It has an r score of 0.2586 and *Cronbach's α* 0.996, respectively. Meanwhile, the instrument to measure the Y variable is the *Centrality of Religiosity Scale* (CRS). The instrument also received excellent validity and reliability test results. It has an r score of > 0.2586 and *Cronbach's α* 0.995, respectively.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study was carried out using a parametric inferential statistical analysis approach, with the aim of testing hypotheses and proving the correlation between the two variables. The normality test was carried out for the first time to reveal the distribution of data obtained through survey instruments. Data that is normally distributed means that it can be used to represent the population being studied (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2021). The normality test chosen is the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test method (Drezner et al., 2010). The data is normally distributed when the significance value is more than 0.05.

The hypothesis testing in this study was carried out in two steps, namely through the Pearson correlation test and a simple linear regression test. The Pearson correlation test is a form of testing with the aim of identifying the strength of the correlation between two variables through scores ranging from -1 to +1 (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2021). Meanwhile, a simple linear regression test is used for the magnitude of the contribution given by variable X to variable Y.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the normality test conducted using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test method, results were obtained that showed that the survey data showed a normal distribution because the p-value was $0.734 > 0.05$. The illustration using QQ Plot also shows that the distribution of data is still quite normal.

Table 1. Normality Tests

	Statistic	p
Kolmogorov-Smirnov	0.0901	0.734

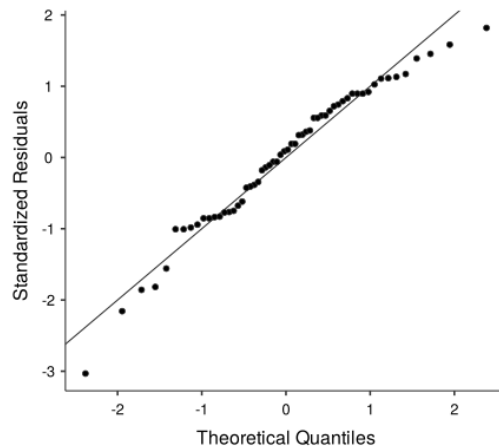


Figure 1. *QQ Plot Normality Test*

Some of the data looks a little off the plot line. Meanwhile, when the survey data of each variable is presented in visual form, it can be seen that there is a slight abnormality that can be detected in the Y variable—while for the X variable it looks normal. Here is an illustration:

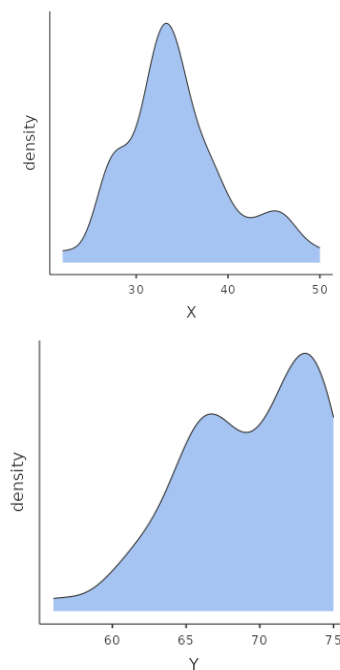


Figure 2. *Density of Distribution of Survey Results*

The illustration shows that the abnormality seen in the Y variable is a form of data distribution that is tilted to the right. The frequency of the majority of respondents' answers with high scores on the Y variable makes the data density as illustrated above.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix

		X	Y
Y	Pearson's r	0.349**	–
	df	56	–
	p-value	0.004	–
	N	58	–

Note. H_a is positive correlation

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, one-tailed

Based on the table of test results above, the correlation between variables X and Y shows a significant correlation. This is evidenced by a p-value of < 0.05 and a Pearson's r score of 0.349.

Table 3. Model Fit Measures

Overall Model Test						
Model	R	R ²	F	df1	df2	p
1	0.349	0.122	7.78	1	56	0.007

Note. Models estimated using sample size of N=58

Based on the table of test results above, there is a significant correlation between the two variables—shown by a p value < 0.05 . In addition, the contribution given by variable X to Y is 12.2% based on the value of R² multiplied by 100%. This means that the remaining 87.8% of the religiosity score of his contribution comes from other aspects.

DISCUSSION

As part of the religious community in Islam, Sufism has its own distinctive values. This shapes their unique and distinct religious perspectives and expressions. These religious values are basically still based on the main reference in Islam, namely the Quran and Hadith (Taleb, 2021). From these two references, religious leaders further translated into more concrete guiding values. Thus, Sufism adherents can practice these teachings in their daily lives.

The teachings of Sufism are rooted in the concept of soul spirituality, emphasizing on the relentless effort to continue to train the soul until it reaches the highest level of consciousness (Nasrullah, 2020; Taleb, 2021). Sufism practitioners are required to build a contemplative consciousness that sees the reality around them critically. This model of awareness is needed to gain a personal attitude that is firm in religious beliefs and patience in facing worldly challenges (Taleb, 2021). For this reason, the practice of asceticism or solitude has become an inseparable part of Sufism. Rituals such as *mujahadah*, *dhikr*, and *musyahadah* are an important part of spiritual development in Sufism (Nasrullah, 2020; Taleb, 2021).

In addition to these individual activities, Sufism emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships both among students and with teachers or murshids in particular. This relationship is an important part of Sufism's teachings which also emphasizes the importance of strong brotherhood in the community (Ridgeon, 2021). In addition, a strong

and intensive relationship between students and mursyid is one of the core teachings of Sufism. Mursyid is present as a leader who provides direction and guidance to his students during their spiritual journey (Ridgeon, 2021). In joint activities such as *halaqah*, mursyid is a figure who gives advice and reminders to his students. Therefore, regular meetings between mursyids and students are inevitable during the spiritual development process (Taleb, 2021).

From the above explanation, it can be seen that both in terms of doctrine and daily practice, Sufism views that spiritual development must be carried out through activities or rituals that involve people directly. Face-to-face meetings have an advantage here because receiving messages and information directly can minimize misunderstandings. Face-to-face meetings are also seen as strengthening fraternal bonds among students (Ridgeon, 2021). From this side, social media is seen by religious communities as having the potential to be able to distract social interaction which in turn reduces the quality of interpersonal relationships (Ferguson et al., 2021). Even so, they still have a positive view of social media which has the ability to disseminate information more widely and easily (Ferguson et al., 2021).

This study succeeded in obtaining findings that support the above presentation. The relationship between the use of social media and religiosity is not as strong as previously imagined, especially when considering the cultural value and religiosity of a community. The results of the statistical test using the Pearson correlation test method show that the hypothesis proposed by the researcher is proven, that there is a positive correlation between the use of WhatsApp social media and the religiosity of students from PP Jagad Alif. The correlation formed is included in the weak category when based on the Pearson score above, which is 0.349. Likewise, the contribution made by social media to religiosity showed a figure of 12.2%. This is proof that resistance to social media in PP Jagad Alif students occurs thanks to the high value of their religiosity. This can also be seen in the density of religiosity scores which tend to be heavy towards the right.

When viewed from an external perspective, the results of this study are also in line with several previous studies that explored the relationship between media and religion. In research conducted by Hesapci Sanaktekin et al. (2013) and using a different perspective, it was found that increasing religiosity encourages the growth of negative perceptions towards internet use. This makes the rate of internet usage tend to decrease. Religious values have a dominant role in this phenomenon, making the internet or social media seen as less aligned with the values of religiosity that are believed in (Hesapci Sanaktekin et al., 2013). In another research conducted by (Armfield & Holbert, 2003), there is a negative correlation between religiosity and negative use, although statistically, the correlation is relatively weak.

Speaking from the perspective of *Uses & Gratifications Theory*, the findings in this study at least prove interesting. The model of using religious institutions for social media is highly dependent on the norms and values it holds. PP Jagad Alif as part of the large Sufism community uses social media to fulfill its essential purpose, which is to be a bridge of communication, interaction, and learning. Even so, the religious values of Sufism are also present as a "fortress" from excessive behavior in social media. The students are encouraged to use it as necessary. In addition, the strong value of brotherhood in the Sufism tradition makes social interaction not just left to be mediated by social media.

From the perspective of Ecological Media Theory, this study shows that the high value of religiosity is a kind of restraint against the changes provided by social media. The interaction ecosystem offered by social media does not have strong bargaining power against the religious values of Sufism. The main interaction remains through face-to-face meetings that can also strengthen the emotional bond between community members. And in relation to all of the above, the values that Sufism carries hold the potential to face an era full of changes in the present and the future.

In this era of uncertainty and risk, change happens so quickly and sometimes it is difficult to notice. Ulrich Beck at that time once stated that in the future, these changes will not only be at the surface level but will touch the fundamentals from the social side (Giddens et al., 2018). Changes in the fields of employment, the environment, the economy, politics, and religion occurred as predicted by Beck. Every definitive change is something that is sometimes difficult for people to accept. To borrow the idea of Everett M. Rogers, every change often brings fear and worry (Rogers, 2003). And this research, at least, brings a new perspective in the information age full of uncertainty.

Sufism, whose religious doctrine is centered on the importance of having a full awareness of the reality of the world, offers a new perspective. Contemplative consciousness that sees the world critically builds a kind of new paradigm to deal with the massive exposure to information in the digital world. In today's reality, people are treated to various types of information whose validity is questionable and they tend to be easy to believe (Altay et al., 2023). Especially when talking about the growth of the culture of "indifference to the truth" once put forward by Harry G. Frankfurt. He stated that the longer people interact with the internet, there is a tendency to be more indifferent to the

truth of information both received and shared with the audience (Frankfurt, 2005).

The findings in this research encourage researchers to see that the values offered by Sufism can be present as a guide in dealing with the rapid uncertainty of information in the digital world. Sufism provides a set of fundamental and practical norms and values to be able to wisely see the benefits of the internet and social media. Social media for Sufism is just a tool that of course has both positive and negative potential. Because it is a tool, one should not be excessively attached to social media. For this reason, critical contemplative awareness is needed to be able to properly navigate life on social media.

In closing, this study also wants to convey that the findings that the researcher has succeeded in obtaining can be an illustration that the synergy between the media and religion is a potential thing. The adaptive religiosity spirit of Sufism and the ever-evolving media world can actively collaborate to encourage a paradigm shift on how the media should be utilized and used.

CONCLUSION

There was a positive correlation of 0.349 with a p-value of 0.004, and the contribution of social media variables to the level of religiosity was also relatively small, at 12.2%. These results show that the correlation formed between social media variables and the level of religiosity of PP Jagad Alif students is relatively weak. This weak positive correlation is influenced by cultural and religious factors that exist in Sufism communities. The community has a doctrine and values that emphasize more on face-to-face-based physical religious activities. In addition, social media from a religious perspective is considered to have the potential to distract social interaction which is the main value in the Sufism community. Even so, social media still gets a positive perception, especially in making it easier to search and exchange information.

The religiosity values offered by Sufism offer a new paradigm in looking at social media and its use. With a focus on building critical contemplative awareness, Sufism values can be a guide in navigating social media life.

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