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Social Media as a Digital Da'wah Ecosystem: Examining Youth Religiosity, Moral Awareness, and Digital Religious Literacy

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Abstract

Objective: This study aims to analyze the role of social media as a means of da'wah and the influence of exposure to Islamic content on the religious behavior of young people in the digital era. **Theoretical framework**: The theoretical framework of the research is based on the concept of digital da'wah, the use of social media as a medium for spreading religious messages, and the relationship between exposure to Islamic content and the formation of religious attitudes and behaviors of the younger generation. **Literature review**: The research study highlights the development of social media such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube as a new space in da'wah activities, as well as discusses the exposure of young people to lectures, motivational quotes, and interactive studies that have the potential to influence religious understanding and behavior. **Method**: The study used a quantitative approach with a survey method of 200 students and students aged 16–25 years. Data were collected through an online questionnaire that measured the intensity of access, the form of involvement with Islamic content, and changes in religious attitudes. **Results**: The results of the study showed that exposure to Islamic content on social media had a positive effect on the religious behavior of young people, especially in increasing the motivation to worship, understanding of moral values, and more Islamic social attitudes. However, there are challenges in the form of religious content that is provocative or less credible. **Implications**: The findings of the study show that social media can be used as an effective means of da'wah if managed wisely. In addition, it is necessary to strengthen digital literacy so that young people are able to select and evaluate credible and quality religious content. **Novelty**: The novelty of the research lies in an empirical analysis of the influence of Islamic content on various social media platforms on the religious behavior of young people while identifying the importance of digital literacy as part of a digital da'wah strategy that is in accordance with the characteristics of the young generation.

Keywords: social media, islamic content, religious behavior, digital literacy, youth religiosity

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology has transformed the way people communicate, access information, and engage in social and religious activities. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and X have become important spaces for the production and dissemination of information [1], [2].

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Through short videos, live streaming, podcasts, visual posts, and interactive features, social media enables messages to reach broad audiences quickly and across geographical boundaries. These characteristics have also created new opportunities for the dissemination of Islamic teachings through digital da'wah.

Digital da'wah represents a transformation of conventional religious communication into virtual spaces that can be accessed anytime and anywhere. Rather than being limited to mosques, religious gatherings, television, or radio, Islamic messages can now be delivered through diverse and engaging digital formats [3]. This development is particularly relevant to youth, who are among the most active users of social media. Beyond entertainment, young people increasingly use these platforms to obtain educational, motivational, and religious information [4]. Islamic content may take the form of short lectures, Qur'anic verses and hadith quotations, Islamic motivation, podcasts, interactive discussions, and educational visual materials.

The increasing exposure of youth to Islamic content raises an important question regarding its potential influence on religiosity. Islamic content may provide religious knowledge and motivation that encourage religious practices, strengthen moral understanding, and support the application of Islamic values in everyday life [5]. However, social media also allows inaccurate, provocative, or poorly verified religious content to circulate widely. This situation may create confusion and demonstrates the importance of digital literacy in enabling young people to critically evaluate the credibility and quality of religious information.

Youth religiosity can be reflected in religious practices, moral understanding, and social attitudes influenced by Islamic values. Therefore, examining the relationship between Islamic content on social media and youth religiosity is important for understanding the broader role of digital platforms in contemporary religious engagement [6], [7]. Accordingly, this study examines social media as a medium for digital da'wah by investigating the influence of Islamic content on youth religiosity, with particular attention to the intensity of exposure, forms of engagement, and changes in religious attitudes among young people aged 16–25 years. The findings are expected to provide empirical insights for developing digital da'wah strategies that are relevant to the characteristics and needs of younger audiences.

The implications of this study extend to religious education, digital da'wah practice, and youth engagement in contemporary Islamic communication. The findings may assist da'wah practitioners, Islamic educators, and religious organizations in developing social media content that is informative, engaging, and responsive to the characteristics of young audiences. In particular, digital da'wah should integrate accessible communication styles with reliable religious sources and appropriate contextualization. The study also highlights the importance of strengthening digital religious literacy so that young people are able to distinguish credible Islamic information from misleading or unverified content. For educational institutions, these findings may support the integration of digital literacy, critical thinking, and Islamic values into learning activities, particularly in relation to students' everyday interaction with social media. For social media-based da'wah initiatives, understanding patterns of exposure and engagement may contribute to the development of more interactive and youth-oriented communication strategies [6], [7].

The novelty of this study lies in its examination of Islamic social media content not merely as a channel for religious information, but as a digital environment in which exposure, engagement, and religiosity interact. Unlike studies that primarily discuss digital da'wah from a communication or technological perspective, this research specifically connects the intensity of young people's exposure to Islamic content with dimensions of religiosity, including religious attitudes, practices, moral understanding, and everyday application of Islamic values. By focusing on youth aged 16–25 years, the study provides a contemporary perspective on how digital da'wah may contribute to religious engagement within a highly connected generation [8].

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LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review in this study serves as a theoretical foundation to understand key concepts related to social media, digital da'wah, Islamic content, religious behavior, and the influence of media on the religious development of young people. This theoretical study is prepared based on the findings of previous researchers and relevant theories in the fields of communication, sociology, and Islamic studies [8].

Social Media and Communication Transformation

Social media is a digital platform that allows users to create, manage, and disseminate content in various formats, ranging from text, images, videos, to audio. The development of information technology has made social media an integral part of modern human life. According to mass communication theory, social media has changed the pattern of communication from a one-to-many model to a two-way (many-to-many) model, which allows for more intense interaction and quick responses between users and content creators [9]. Various studies have shown that social media has interactive, real-time, and community-based characteristics. This allows messages to be conveyed effectively and easily accepted by a wide audience. Previous studies have also revealed that social media can shape public opinion, influence social behavior, and become a means of informal learning [10].

Da'wah in the Digital Era

Da'wah is the process of conveying Islamic teachings through wise, educational, and persuasive methods. In the digital era, da'wah has undergone a transformation with the presence of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube [11]. Digital da'wah is often packaged in a modern visual format, light language, and short duration to make it easier for the younger generation to understand. The concept of digital da'wah is in line with the principles of *Wisdom Bill* (with wisdom) and *Mau'izhah Hasanah* (good advice), which prioritize a communicative approach that is relevant to the conditions of society. Previous research shows that digital da'wah has great potential in spreading Islamic values more widely and quickly, but requires the credibility of the source and the validity of the content so as not to cause misunderstandings [12],[13].



Figure 1. Digital Da'wah Transformation: Social Media Platforms, Islamic Message Dissemination, and Youth Engagement in Contemporary Religious Communication among Young Audiences
https://www.kompasiana.com/umarofficial1185/68fcb79bed641559761c3e18/dakwah-digital-menyebarkan-pesan-kebaikan-di-era-modern

Islamic Content and Its Variety of Presentation

Islamic content on social media can be in the form of short lectures, study pieces, spiritual motivation, quotes of verses and hadiths, educational posters, and Islamic animations [14],[15]. This variation emerged in response to the media consumption patterns of the

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younger generation, who like visual, interactive, and practical content. Research on Islamic content shows that the presentation of religious messages that are attractively packaged can increase the interest and attention of the audience. The short video format that is popular on TikTok or Instagram Reels is considered effective in conveying moral messages or spiritual reminders [16]. Meanwhile, longer content such as podcasts or YouTube studies provides an opportunity for deeper discussions. In addition, the platform's algorithm also affects the spread of content. Islamic content that is widely liked or shared can quickly go viral, reaching a wider audience.

Young People as Active Users of Social Media

Young people, especially 16–25 years old, are known as digital natives, namely the generation that grew up with digital technology [17]. They have a tendency to spend more time on social media, both for entertainment, communication, and information search [18]. Studies on digital behavior show that young people are more responsive to visual, interactive, and emotional content. In religious contexts, young people often use social media as a source of Islamic knowledge, spiritual reference, and a means of discussing religious issues. However, the level of digital literacy varies, so not all young people are able to distinguish between credible content and biased or provocative content [19].



Figure 2. Young Digital Natives Engaging with Islamic Content on Social Media and the Challenge of Digital Literacy Skills

https://www.arwaniyyah.com/dakwah-digital-kontekstualisasi-dakwah-walisongo/

Religious Behavior and Its Formative Aspects

Religious behavior includes the dimensions of belief, worship, spiritual experience, knowledge, and morals. Experts state that religious behavior is influenced by several factors:

1. Family and Social Environment
2. Formal and informal education
3. Religious communities
4. Mass Media and Social Media

In the context of young people, religious behavior can be influenced by digital role models such as ustaz or popular dai who are active on social media [20],[21]. Religious messages delivered persuasively can encourage better religious understanding and practice [22].

The Influence of Social Media on User Behavior

Media influence theories such as *Uses and Gratifications Theory* state that individuals use media to meet specific needs, including spiritual needs [23]. Islamic content that is relevant, emotional, and easily accessible can increase worship motivation and spiritual awareness. In addition, *Social Learning Theory* explains that behavior can be learned through observation

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of models or exemplary figures in the media. Young people who often see Islamic content such as invitations to prayer, almsgiving, or commendable morals tend to be encouraged to imitate these behaviors [24]. However, media theories also highlight negative sides such as *filter bubbles*, *echo chambers*, and misinformation that can influence religious perceptions in a biased way. This suggests that social media has a dual influence—positive and negative—on young people's religious behavior.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method designed to understand more deeply the influence of Islamic content on social media on the religious behavior of young people. The selection of the quantitative approach is based on the consideration that the phenomenon being studied requires measurable data and can be analyzed statistically, thus allowing researchers to obtain an objective understanding and generalization of findings. This study involved 200 respondents consisting of students and students aged 16–25 years, who were considered to represent the characteristics of the young generation who actively access social media. The sampling technique used the purposive sampling method by considering criteria such as age, social media access habits, and involvement with Islamic content. This method was chosen because the researcher needed respondents who were relevant and in accordance with the focus of the research, so that the data obtained could describe the phenomenon more accurately [25].

The research instrument is in the form of an online questionnaire which is compiled in several parts to measure various aspects related to the research variables. The questionnaire consisted of questions related to the respondent's profile, the intensity of access to Islamic content, the form of interaction with the content, and the change in religious behavior experienced. The questions used a Likert scale of 1–5 so that respondents could convey their level of approval more clearly and systematically [26]. Before being widely disseminated, the questionnaire goes through a validity and reliability testing stage to ensure that each question item is able to measure the desired construct and is consistent when retested. The data collection procedure is carried out online through platforms such as Google Forms, and links are disseminated through various social media in order to reach respondents more efficiently. The use of online methods was also chosen because most of the respondents are active internet users, making it easier to fill out the questionnaire [27].

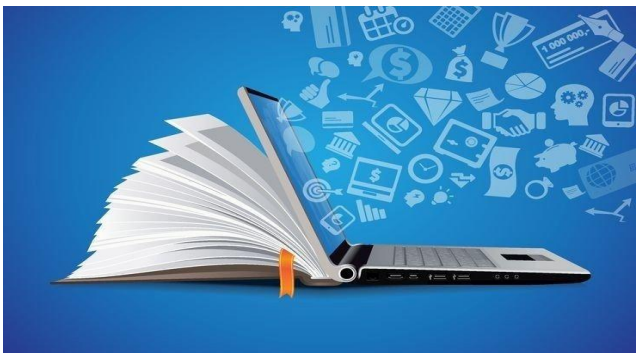


Figure 3. Questionnaire Validity Testing, Online Data Collection via Social Media, and Statistical Analysis of Islamic Content Engagement Levels

https://amaliyyahqurani.ponpes.id/pojoksantri/cara-dakwah-di-era-digital/

The collected data was then analyzed using statistical analysis techniques, both descriptive and inferential. Descriptive analysis was used to describe the general picture of respondents and the level of intensity of engagement with Islamic content. Meanwhile, inferential analysis—such as correlation tests and linear regression—was used to examine the relationship and influence between independent variables (exposure to Islamic content on

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social media) and dependent variables (religious behavior of young people). The use of statistical tests aimed to find out how much influence occurred and whether the influence was scientifically significant [28]. The results of the analysis were then interpreted comprehensively, taking into account the theory of digital da'wah, the psychological characteristics of young people, and the dynamics of their interaction on social media.

This study also pays attention to the ethical aspects of research, especially in terms of the confidentiality of respondents' data. All respondents' identities are kept confidential and are not used for purposes other than research. Respondents are also given the freedom to fill out questionnaires without pressure and can withdraw at any time without consequences. In addition, the researcher ensures that the instruments used do not contain elements that are offensive or have the potential to cause discomfort to respondents. The entire research process is carried out systematically and in a structured manner, starting from problem formulation, instrument preparation, data collection, data analysis, to interpretation of results, so that this research is expected to make a strong academic contribution in understanding the effectiveness of digital da'wah through social media and its influence on the religious behavior of young people [29],[30].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study showed that most respondents had a high intensity in accessing Islamic content on social media. Of the 200 respondents, more than 70% admitted to accessing Islamic content at least 3–5 times a week, while the other 30% accessed it more than once a day. The most chosen content is short lectures lasting 1–3 minutes, which are widely found on the Instagram and TikTok platforms because they are considered more practical, easy to understand, and aligned with the information consumption style of the younger generation [31]. This data shows that social media is indeed a popular space for young people to get concise but relevant religious materials, in line with the pattern of fast communication that prevails among digital users. In addition to the intensity of access, the form of respondents' involvement with Islamic content also shows a positive trend. Most respondents not only watch content, but also like, share, or save content that they find inspiring [32]. In fact, about 40% of respondents engage in discussions through the comment section or send content to friends and family. These findings show that social media is no longer just a consumption space, but also an interaction space that allows users to expand the reach of digital da'wah. Respondents admitted that this active involvement makes it easier for them to strengthen their motivation and deepen their understanding of Islamic values [33].

On the other hand, the study showed that there was a change in religious behavior in most of the respondents after being exposed to Islamic content regularly. From the results of data processing, it was seen that 65% of respondents experienced an increase in motivation to worship, such as praying on time, reading the Qur'an, and increasing prayers [34]. Meanwhile, 60% of respondents felt that they better understood the importance of maintaining morals, respecting parents, and being polite in social interactions. In fact, there were respondents who admitted that Islamic content helped them get out of the lazy phase of worship or provided moral encouragement when facing difficulties in life. This shows that Islamic content can play an educational and motivating role that influences religious behavior in a real way [35]. However, the research also reveals the complex side of the phenomenon of digital da'wah. Some respondents said that not all Islamic content circulating is of good quality or sourced from credible parties. Around 25% of respondents have found religious content to be misleading, extreme, or provocative, which actually triggers confusion and division. This is a challenge because not all users have the ability to verify information. The lack of religious and digital literacy can cause some young people to be trapped in misunderstandings. These findings underscore the need for filtering and critical understanding of da'wah content in the digital space [36],[37].

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Overall, research shows that social media has strong potential as an effective means of da'wah. The high level of access, engagement, and positive impact on religious behavior shows the great opportunity to utilize digital platforms as a means of delivering Islamic messages. However, this success is highly dependent on the quality of content and ethics of digital preachers [38],[39]. The influence of social media can be beneficial if managed properly, but it can have a negative impact if it is not accompanied by adequate supervision and digital literacy. Therefore, the existence of the findings of this research can be the basis for the preparation of a digital da'wah strategy that is more effective, educational, and in accordance with the needs of the younger generation [40].

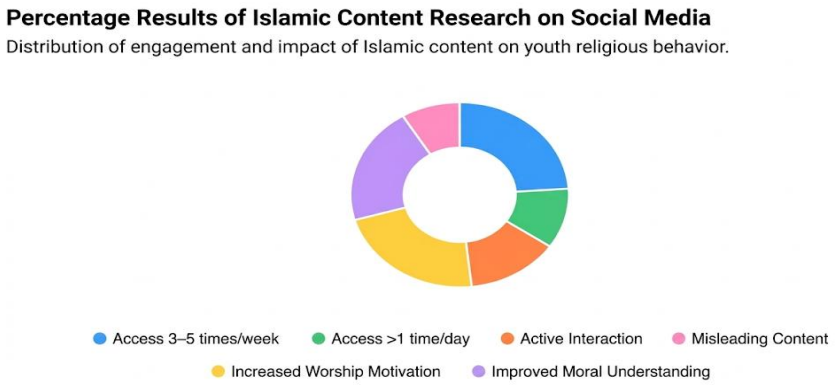


Diagram 1. Distribution of engagement levels and impact of Islamic content on youth religious behavior

The diagram above shows the results of a study on the influence of Islamic content on social media on the religious behavior of young people. As many as 70% of respondents access Islamic content 3-5 times a week, while 30% of respondents access it more than once a day. In terms of engagement, around 40% of respondents actively discussed or shared Islamic content with others. In addition**,** 65% of respondents experienced an increase in motivation to worship, such as praying on time, reading the Qur'an, and praying, while 60% of respondents felt that they understood the importance of maintaining morals and manners [41]. However, the study also found that 25% of respondents had found religious content to be less credible, misleading, or provocative. These findings show that social media has a considerable influence on the religious behavior of young people, but still requires digital literacy so that the information received can be filtered properly [42].

Deep Analysis: Structural Mechanics and Implications of Digital Da'wah

The empirical findings from the research provide critical quantitative insights into how digital da'wah operates as both a transformative spiritual medium and a complex socio-technological ecosystem. To fully comprehend the impact of Islamic social media content on youth religiosity, this phenomenon must be analyzed through three key dimensions: cognitive-behavioral motivation, algorithmic structural risks, and the imperative for Digital Religious Literacy (DRL).

Cognitive-Behavioral Ignition vs. Theological Depth

The data reveals that 65% of respondents experienced increased motivation to worship (e.g., performing prayers on time, reciting the Qur'an), while 60% reported an enhanced understanding of moral values (akhlak). From a psychological standpoint, this high rate of positive behavioral intent can be explained through Bandura's Social Learning Theory and the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT).

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1. Parasocial Modeling and Behavioral Imitation: Young digital natives aged 16–25 actively observe digital da'is (preachers) and peer influencers who package Islamic teachings into modern, visually appealing, and emotionally resonant formats. By observing these role models perform daily rituals or share practical advice, youth experience a reduction in cognitive distance, making religious observance feel achievable and socially validated.
2. The "Micro-Content" Affective Hook: The dominance of short-form videos (1–3 minutes on Instagram Reels and TikTok) serves as an effective ignition mechanism. These bite-sized reminders (tazkiyah) trigger immediate affective responses—feelings of spiritual comfort, moral accountability, or transcendent motivation.
3. The Cognitive Depth Gap: While micro-content excels at driving affective motivation, it inherently lacks the structural capacity to deliver comprehensive jurisprudential (fiqh) nuances or deep contextual exegesis (tafsir). Consequently, social media operates primarily as a spiritual gateway rather than a standalone educational institution. Without structured supplementary learning, young users risk developing an oversimplified, emotionalized understanding of complex Islamic traditions.

Algorithmic Architecture and the 25% Misleading Content Risk

A critical finding in the study is that 25% of respondents encountered religious content that was misleading, extreme, or provocative. This metric highlights a structural flaw inherent in contemporary social media platforms: the conflict between algorithmic optimization and religious authenticity.

1. Optimization for Engagement: Social media algorithms prioritize content that generates high interaction rates (clicks, watch time, shares, and contentious comments). This often elevates sensationalized, black-and-white, or emotionally divisive religious discourse over balanced, nuanced commentary.
2. Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles: Algorithmic curation groups users into homogenous content loops based on historical interactions. This amplifies sectarian bias and radical interpretations, isolating young users from alternative scholarly consensus.
3. Authority Disruption: The platformization of da'wah replaces formal scholarly accreditation (isnad) with engagement metrics (follower counts, virality). This grants unverified creators equal or greater platform reach than traditionally trained Islamic scholars.

The democratized nature of social media allows anyone to produce religious content. While this empowers creative youth outreach, it simultaneously strips away traditional peer-review and institutional verification mechanisms (bahtsul masail). When provocative or sensationalized content is rewarded by platform algorithms, young users with low baseline religious knowledge become vulnerable to theological confusion, misinterpretation, or radicalization.

Interactive Engagement and Social Transmission

The study demonstrates that 40% of respondents actively engage with Islamic content by participating in comment discussions, sharing posts with peer networks, or saving clips for personal reflection. This transforms digital da'wah from a passive reception model into a participatory social phenomenon.

1. Peer-to-Peer Faith Diffusion: When young people share Islamic motivation or moral reminders across their personal stories or group chats, they act as secondary distributors of da'wah. This peer-level endorsement carries higher credibility among youth than traditional top-down lectures.
2. The Comment Section as a Virtual Space: Interactive comment sections function as informal digital forums where users seek clarification, express spiritual struggles, and

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debate contemporary social issues. However, without active moderation by knowledgeable content creators, these spaces can quickly degenerate into unconstructive ideological debates or toxic call-out culture.

Conceptualizing Digital Religious Literacy (DRL)

To maximize the benefits of digital da'wah (65% worship motivation, 60% moral awareness) while mitigating its inherent risks (25% exposure to misleading content), the study underscores the necessity of establishing Digital Religious Literacy (DRL) as a core competency for youth.

1. Source and Authority Verification: Teaching young users to evaluate the background, formal credentials, and methodological consistency (manhaj) of online preachers before accepting legal rulings or doctrinal claims.
2. Contextual Hermeneutics: Training youth to recognize that short-form video quotes are often severed from their broader linguistic and historical contexts, necessitating cross-referencing with established scholarly texts (kitab).
3. Digital Ethics (Adab al-Digital): Encouraging respectful disagreement (adab al-ikhtilaf) and constructive discourse in comment sections, steering youth away from online takfirism or aggressive polematics.

Strategic Recommendations for Institutional Da'wah

To harness these insights effectively, religious educators, institutions, and digital creators must adopt a dual-layer communication strategy:

1. Adopt the Funneling Model: Digital content creators should use short-form platforms (TikTok, Reels) as a top-of-funnel hook to capture attention and inspire worship motivation, while embedding explicit links to deep-learning ecosystems (podcasts, long-form lectures, interactive classes, or verified reading materials).
2. Institutional Digital Presence: Traditional Islamic universities and scholars must actively cultivate engaging digital media formats, bridging the aesthetic gap between traditional scholarly rigor and modern visual storytelling.
3. Curricular Integration of DRL: Educational institutions (both formal schools and pesantren) should incorporate explicit Digital Religious Literacy training into their curricula, equipping students with critical thinking tools to navigate online religious algorithms safely.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that social media has an important role as a means of da'wah in the digital era, especially in influencing the religious behavior of young people. Social media not only functions as a means of communication and entertainment, but also as a medium of religious education that is easily accessible and able to shape the mindset, attitude, and behavior of the younger generation towards Islamic values. The high intensity of respondents' access to and involvement in Islamic content shows that young people have a considerable interest in religious materials when presented in an attractive, concise, and relevant way to their lives. Various forms of content such as short videos, Islamic quotes, and digital studies have proven to be more acceptable and can increase understanding of moral values, motivation for worship, and better social attitudes. However, this study also found challenges in the form of religious content that is less credible or provocative, so it has the potential to cause misunderstandings. Therefore, digital literacy is very necessary so that the young generation is able to sort and understand religious information wisely. Thus, this study emphasizes the

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importance of developing a digital da'wah strategy that is quality, moderate, and in accordance with the characteristics of the younger generation.

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Author Contribution

Nafilatus Silmi Al Afifah designed the study and analyzed statistical data, while Adinda Silvia Monica managed online survey collection and assisted in writing the manuscript

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no personal, financial, academic, or professional conflicts of interest that could inappropriately influence the findings, interpretation, or publication of this research study.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The authors explicitly confirm that no artificial intelligence or generative machine learning technology was utilized during the creation, statistical analysis, or writing of this manuscript.

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