

The Humorous Aspect of Religious Messages Popular in Generation Z on Social Media: A Study of Religious Students in Samarinda

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

Humorous; Religious Messages;
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As digital natives, Generation Z spends over six hours daily on social media. One type of content they access is Islamic content. However, the themes most commonly associated with this content remain a topic of ongoing debate. This study aims to examine Generation Z's preferences for Islamic content on social media within tertiary-level religious studies programs. A mixed-methods approach was employed, beginning with a quantitative survey followed by qualitative analysis, with data collected via a Google Form completed by 86 undergraduate students at a state Islamic religious university in Samarinda. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings indicate that (1) the most popular social media platforms are Instagram and WhatsApp, (2) Generation Z tends to be uniform in consuming Islamic messages, with 83.7% preferring Islamic content that includes humor, followed by inspirational themes, for various reasons. These results suggest that adding humorous elements to Islamic content can help make these messages more accessible, understandable, and relevant to Generation Z. This study recommends that Muslim influencers incorporate humor into their Islamic content, provided it does not overshadow the core message. This approach aims to capture Generation Z's attention and foster full engagement with Islamic messages.

1. Introduction

The Islamic world is currently at a critical juncture that demands new reflection and responses in two main areas: the environmental crisis and the transformation of da'wah in the digital era (Sarjito, 2025). Advances in digital media have brought about significant changes in the religious communication ecosystem. One example is that religious practices no longer take place solely in physical spaces like mosques, Islamic boarding schools, or religious study groups, but have also spread to open, interactive, and ubiquitous digital spaces like YouTube, Spotify, TikTok, and Instagram (Nugroho et al., 2025). Not only are conventional clerics or ustadz involved in producing da'wah content, but also public figures, hijrah artists, and non-religious content creators who also convey moral and spiritual messages through digital media (Muthohirin, 2021). This condition indicates how important it is for religion, especially Islamic preaching, to undergo adjustments in the form or method of delivery in the current communication environment (Faladhin et al., 2025).

One of the main challenges is the intense competition for attention on social media, where Islamic messages must compete with a wide range of other content. Furthermore, the spread of inaccurate or

controversial content is a challenge, given that social media allows anyone to share information without adequate filtering (Pratama et al., 2024). This requires preachers to be more careful in presenting accurate and reliable messages. Preachers need to develop strategies to broaden the reach of their messages, promote constructive dialogue amid diverse opinions on social media, and package their messages in an engaging format. Overcoming these challenges will help increase the effectiveness of preaching in the digital age and ensure that messages reach their audiences accurately and effectively.

One strategy for conveying religious messages that can be used to achieve its communication goals is to insert the message in humor, allowing the audience to reflect and absorb deeper meanings without feeling forced or burdened. By creating an entertaining atmosphere, preachers can capture their audiences' attention and win their hearts. Why is humor attractive as a strategy for conveying religious messages? Because, overall, Islam is portrayed as a strict and structured religion in practice, with academic studies on humor often assuming that humor is rare among religious adherents, especially Muslims (Choudhury, 2024). Even though Rakib (2020) in Abida et al (2024) explains that the tradition of humor in Islamic preaching is a legacy of Islamic civilization dating back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). His preaching was interspersed with humor, and even in his daily life, the Prophet often displayed humorous attitudes (Qadaruddin & Bakri, 2022).

As an integral part of religious practice in Indonesia, this research will focus on Generation Z students studying at state Islamic religious universities in Samarinda and their consumption of Islamic content on social media. As a generation born and raised amidst the rapid advancement of digital technology (Kristyowati, 2021), they spend a lot of time with computers and internet access more than 6 hours per day, according to a report released by the IDN Research Institute in 2024 (Hidayah & Anshar, 2025). Even though they get a lot of information via the internet, they still have sensitivity to the information presented in the digital space (Subowo, 2021). Therefore, this study highlights the importance of examining the social media preferences used by Generation Z in consuming Islamic content, as well as the themes of Islamic content that they choose, so that it becomes a basis for preachers in producing Islamic content that is in line with the needs of Generation Z.

2. Method

This study employed a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach, using a survey and a narrative design. For the descriptive quantitative approach, data were collected via a self-administered online questionnaire. This online questionnaire aimed to facilitate Generation Z students registered as active students at Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris State Islamic University Samarinda in providing feedback on the social media platforms they use most frequently and the Islamic content they select most often, while also leveraging the convenience of internet technology for data collection.

With the convenience participation of 86 students from various study programs, sampling with this method is believed by researchers to be easily accessible and opportunistically used to stabilize estimates for one variable of interest in the population or to construct estimators for target population quantities with measurable statistical properties, because it treats convenience samples as "pseudo random" samples (Savitsky et al., 2023). To create greater ease of communication and produce more naturalistic data in narrative design, researchers conducted informal conversations (Swain & King, 2022) interpersonally at different times. This conversation originated with two students of different genders who were purposively selected based on data from the study programs with the most participation, as recorded in a Google Form. The purpose of this interpersonal conversation was to elicit the informants' reactions and responses from perspectives unaffected by each other's opinions.

The data obtained was then analyzed using thematic analysis, which is basic knowledge in conducting analysis in qualitative research (Rozali, 2022), where the data collected can be explained in depth from the researcher's point of view (Sitasari, 2022). This was used to identify themes of meaning that emerged from the students' narratives, such as humor as a complement, a sweetener, or

a topping. Furthermore, quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, a method that allows data to be presented and interpreted directly and easily understood (Melani & Izmuddin, 2024) also facilitating the delivery of easily accessible information, because this technique does not require further generalization to a wider population (Subhaktiyasa et al., 2025).

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Social Media as a Religious Space for Generation Z

Respondent data by gender show that 34 male students and 66 female students participated. They came from various religious study programs such as Islamic Religious Education, Constitutional Law, Da'wah Management, Islamic Guidance and Counseling, Quranic Studies and Tafsir, and the majority of respondents came from Islamic Communication and Broadcasting, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents' study programs

Respondent	Study Program	Amount
Generation Z	Pendidikan Agama Islam	7
	Hukum Tata Negara	3
	Komunikasi dan Penyiaran Islam	52
	Manajemen Dakwah	3
	Bimbingan dan Konseling Islam	20
	Ilmu Alquran dan Tafsir	1

Meanwhile, in terms of age, they are in the range of 18 to 23 years, with the largest share at age 19, at 26.7 percent, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Sebaran usia responden

Respondent	Age	Amount
Generation Z	18	19
	19	23
	20	18
	21	9
	22	1
	23	16

Meanwhile, regarding the types of social media they use most frequently, the order from largest to smallest is Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube, as shown in Figure 1.

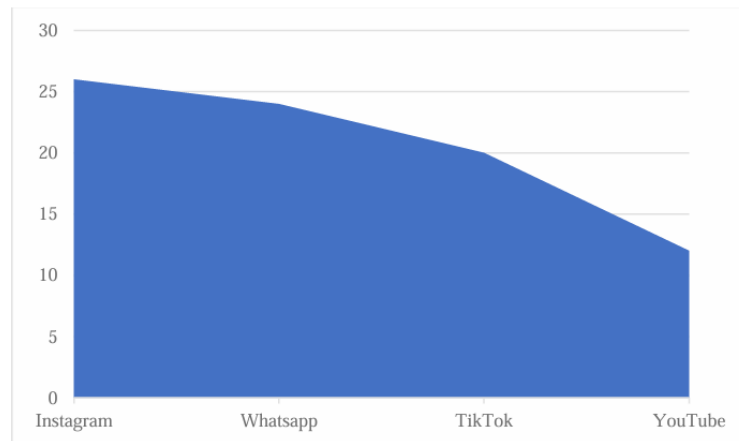


Figure 1. Social media that Generation Z often uses

Because all respondents share the same religious beliefs, they all answered that they never forget to enjoy the religious messages that appear on the social media feeds they frequently access. Meanwhile, among 72 students (83.7 percent of respondents), the majority preferred humorous or comedic Islamic content, with the remainder seeking inspirational themes.

Elaborating on the terms "humorous" and "comedy" in separate informal conversations, the first informant revealed that humor is an important element that needs to be included as a spice in conveying Islamic messages. Meanwhile, according to the second informant, humorous messages are a topping that sweetens the core religious messages delivered by preachers and da'iah. Both seem to signal that the Islamic content they consume should be beneficial, entertaining, and stress relieving. Both informants stated that their preferred Islamic content is presented in an audiovisual and creative manner. The first informant added that the main message should be easy to grasp, in addition to being related to their daily conditions, while the second informant looked more at the duration, not being too long, which usually has rules on the Instagram platform.

3. 2 Humor as an Effective Tool of Religious Communication

From the research findings, it can be seen that Generation Z will not interact using the social media accounts they have, because, as digital natives (Iskandar, 2023), they tend to be constantly in touch with their devices, including to access Islamic content. This is in line with the findings Fajrussalam et al (2022) 53.3% of respondents chose to listen to and watch Islamic preaching through social media and other digital platforms. The difference lies in the large number of social media platforms, with less access due to generational differences among respondents. The majority of respondents in this study chose Instagram, consistent with data from *kompas.com*, *antaranews.com*, and the IDN Research Institute from 2024, which stated that Instagram is the platform most preferred by Generation Z (Hidayah & Anshar, 2025) because it is not only simple, but also powerful to build and expand reach (Nurhasanah & S, 2024). This is a useful and important note for Muslim influencer teams managing content and its duration on platforms close to Generation Z.

The informants preferred audiovisual Islamic content. Besides being creatively presented, the main message was easy to understand and relevant to their daily lives, and the videos were kept short due to Instagram's platform rules. The informants' responses align with research findings from four TikTok Islamic preaching accounts, which showed that Generation Z is attracted to educational video content, Islamic motivation, and lighthearted humor (Fahrudy et al., 2026). Their goal is to motivate themselves to continually do good and to have the ability to alleviate life's problems. Their distinctive characteristics, namely a high dependence on technology and widespread access to random information, make them critical in interpreting evolving realities (Kristyowati, 2021). Therefore, to reach their audience, Muslim influencers should incorporate Islamic values in ways that are more readily accepted by combining humor with religious messages (Betirudin et al., 2025).

This is so that the religious message is not monotonous and is more interesting (Wandi, 2019), while remaining light and memorable. The atmosphere becomes more relaxed, audience boredom is reduced, and drowsiness, even falling asleep, is avoided, especially if the message is delivered conventionally, as was the case in Makassar (Yusuf & Kasman, 2025). Karena penyelipan aspek humor juga bersifat membebaskan dan feedback-nya berupa tersenyum dan tertawa yang tidak berlebihan, hal ini merupakan ekspresi jiwa yang spontan tanpa terikat oleh aturan apa pun (Suyud et al., 2023).

Similarly, religious messages on social media, which are widely consumed by Generation Z, need to incorporate humor, just as face-to-face messages do. As both informants noted, content containing humorous or comedic elements is one indicator of humorous content, according to Suharijadi (2016) in Wandu (2019), for them, like spices and toppings, the function is to complement and sweeten the delivery of religious messages. This is in line with the findings of the use of humor in the film *Insya Allah Sah 2*, which offers a more inclusive, lighthearted, and entertaining approach to conveying Islamic teachings (Betirudin et al., 2025).

Humor in the activity of conveying religious messages delivered by Muslim preachers or influencers, both in face-to-face studies and those mediated by technology, is permitted as long as it is positive and not excessive (Hermanto & Irfansyah, 2025), however, its use, which functions as a complement and sweetener, must be ensured by preachers in accordance with Islamic principles (Ridwan & Arifin, 2024). This is as stated in the Al-Quran QS. An Nahl 125 is used as a principle in the concept of digital da'wah (Fahrudy et al., 2026) namely based on wisdom, maintaining the honor of each congregation, and prioritizing the main objective of conveying the religious message itself, namely conveying the religious message peacefully and effectively.

The use of humor by Muslim preachers or influencers in religious messages is an inevitability that must exist in today's digital era (Japarudin, 2017). First, because religious messages are informative, persuasive, and recreational, they can create a comfortable, positive atmosphere for listeners. Therefore, it is important for every preacher to be increasingly creative in mastering these three qualities. This is especially true when delivering messages through digital media to Generation Z, with the goal of not only making them easier to understand and garnering sympathy, but also maintaining relevance to the daily lives of Generation Z, according to White (2017) in Subowo (2021) can spend almost nine hours a day on their digital communication media. Second, humor has several functions, such as improving physical health, positively correlating with psychological well being and self-esteem, improving quality of life, and positively influencing the learning process and the workplace (Hilmi, 2018).

This study recommends that Muslim influencers consistently incorporate humor into their Islamic content, provided it doesn't overshadow the core message. This approach aims to capture the attention of Generation Z and encourage full engagement with Islamic messages. This means that humor is a social phenomenon, and every nation has its own unique sense of humor (Savaş et al., 2024) so the appeal of the humor presented must be adjusted to each audience's generation. It could be that humor for Generation Z is not suitable for the humor that Generation X usually consumes. No less important, the humorous message must foster a sense of trust and equality (Binawan, 2024), and highlighting incongruities, unusual characteristics, or events that occur unexpectedly in a given situation. Incongruity is seen as a basic element of humor, with philosophers such as Aristotle, James Beattie, Immanuel Kant, and Søren Kierkegaard considering incongruity as the primary source of humor (Tsakona & Popa, 2011) in Kasmani (2022)). As a form of discourse, humor can make people smile and laugh, strengthen relationships, and demonstrate agreement about its meaning. Humor is also considered a form of solidarity and can sometimes build closeness or rapport. For example, through jokes, wordplay, and abbreviations, humor can make conversation easier for the interlocutor. Thus, humor can make giving or receiving advice, in this case, religious messages, more easily accepted (Afriani, 2021). The findings of this study can also help preachers, both in conventional

media and in the digital space, to always improve their ability to use humor more effectively, so that religious messages are better understood.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study place Instagram as the social media platform most frequently chosen by Generation Z for obtaining and sharing information. As students at a state Islamic religious college in Samarinda, they also use social media daily to access Islamic content. They primarily choose Islamic content with humorous and comedic themes, followed by inspirational themes. This research serves as a reflection that contributes to the study of religious communication and encourages Muslim preachers and influencers to strengthen the religious content needed by Generation Z by combining it with humorous messages in the digital age.

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