

Instagram Usage Among Adolescents: A Study of Media Dependency on Academic Performance and Religious Obligation During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Academic excellence is a major factor on a student's success in addition to religiosity; especially in Indonesia where strong religious values are upheld. However, maintaining performance at school and religious obligations had become difficult challenges that emerged due to the stay-at-home policy during the COVID-19 pandemic. The intensifying Instagram usage among Indonesian teenagers is predicted to significantly contribute to this problem. This study focused on analyzing the impact of Instagram usage on the academic and religious performances of adolescent Muslims in Indonesia during the pandemic. The author utilized qualitative methodology by applying focus group interviews to test the Media Dependency theory as the basis of this study. The population for the study was 24 Muslim male students aged 15–18 from Jakarta, Indonesia. An indexing and retrieval system was used through identifying key terms and grouping the interview excerpt into salient themes for data analysis. Interestingly, the result showed that Instagram dependency per se had low negative influences on the informants' quality of academic and religious practices. Therefore, further studies are expected to also measure the other variables at once, particularly online games and other social media apps due to the students' feasibility to simultaneously access multiple instruments.

Keywords: Instagram, adolescent, pandemic, academic performance, religious obligations

1. INTRODUCTION

The usage of Instagram has been significantly intensifying among adolescents in Indonesia since the emergence of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in February 2020 (Siste et al., 2021). Siste et al. (2021) found that the internet usage has significantly increased by 52% in Indonesia with Instagram as one of the most social media apps accessed. Students who are heavy users of social media are prone to be less responsible for their studies as they could not manage their time correctly between personal and academic matters (Azuan et al., 2015). In addition, according to Lad (2017), despite the quality of education and new skills acquired in class, they may get distracted and addicted by too much use of social media. Consequently, it may impact the lower point of their final score eventually (Foroughi et al., 2021).

Further, as a country with the most significant number of Muslims globally (Adinugraha et al., 2021), Islamic principles substantially influence society. In Indonesia, religious beliefs, values, and obligations are taught at home and schools from a very young age (Pulungan, 2017), making it equally, if not more, fundamental as academic performance. Islam highly values time and encourages its believers to use it wisely. In Islam, religious obligations, including daily five-time prayer, require discipline in time management as it has a time limit to adhere (Aziz, 2015). However, social media usage, especially Instagram, can be a significant timewaster when used excessively.

In the context of Muslim adolescents from an Islamic school in Indonesia, academic performance and religious obligations are two things that are at stake. Poor time and priority management will deprioritize academic and religious duties resulting from overindulgence gained from the social media app, particularly Instagram. This is a crucial issue as adolescents will reach the working age during the post-pandemic time. In addition, there is very little research that has discussed the impact of social media, particularly Instagram, on the academic performance and religious obligations of adolescent students, especially during the COVID-19.

Palla and Sheikh (2020) argued that social media apps have more positive than negative impacts on the academic performance of adolescent students. Wickramanayake and Jika (2018) also pointed out that social media can improve students' learning skills when used for education purposes. However, social media apps, including Instagram, can distract adolescents from devoting proper attention to matters with greater importance, such as academic performance and religious obligations (Abubakar et al., 2020; Jordaan & Surujlal, 2013). Excessive social media usage may waste much of adolescent people's time and drain their physical and mental energy (Bashir & Bhat, 2017).

This paper employs the Media Dependency theory which analyzes the phenomenon of one's reliance on social media (Li et al., 2019). Several studies have been continuously attempted in examining the outcome of this theory. Dokunmu and Ayoola (2020) argued that media dependency might impact media users' cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects. To a certain extent, media dependency may also affect the social order that influences political and economic stability in a region. Negative impacts of media dependency have also been studied by numerous researchers, especially regarding mental health and self-esteem (de Lenne et al., 2018). However, rare research notices the role of social media dependency in adolescents' academic performance, particularly in Indonesia and during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was also found that Media Dependency theory has not been tested on the concept associated with religious obligations. Therefore, to address this gap, the Media Dependency theory is employed in this research model (Li et al., 2019). Furthermore, this study hopes to provide new findings related to the research objectives and the concept that can be useful for future research.

Therefore, regarding the problems mentioned above, this study focuses on addressing the phenomenon of Instagram usage among adolescent Muslim high school students in Jakarta, Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic. It will specifically explore the reason of usage, the nature of engagement, and impact of Instagram among the students in relation with their academic performance and religious obligations. Several studies were found to be discussing the relationship of Instagram usage on adolescent's academic performance. However, minimal research was conducted on its relationship with one's religious obligations. In addition, fewer research was found to investigate the topic in the context of Indonesia, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge and fill the gaps in this area.

2. METHODS

Most studies on Instagram usage and academic performance have used a quantitative approach to answer the research questions and fulfill the research objective of their studies. Due to the lack of qualitative methodology used in this research area, this study uses qualitative methodology by applying focus group interviews to study the case. Qualitative methods are deemed more suitable for studies related to phenomena in the social context, including this study. This type of study involves intangible factors that are immeasurable by numbers, such as motivations, emotion, empathy, and spirituality. In addition, despite the reliability of quantitative methods, qualitative methods allow natural investigation of social phenomena, generating detailed and practical data (Powell & Single, 1996). As this method reports accurate statements from actual informants, new hypotheses can be formulated. Thus, the results will be highly reliable.

The population for the actual data collection of the study is 18 students of Madrasah Aliyah Swasta (MAS) Kafila Jakarta, Indonesia. MAS Kafila Jakarta comprises two types of classes: science class and religion class. Students from the religion class were chosen as the pilot informants, while students from the science class were selected as the informants for the actual data collection. Furthermore, as the variables are related to Instagram usage, the participants' criteria are narrowed down as follows:

- a. Active MAS Kafila Jakarta students impacted with physical distancing policy or required to stay home.
- b. Grade 10, Grade 11, or Grade 12 students of MAS Kafila Jakarta.
- c. Active users of Instagram.

Implementing a purposive sampling method, there were three focus group interview sessions in addition to a pilot study with six informants per session. According to Krueger and Casey (2015), six informants are sufficient for a purposive sampling study to reach saturation. Purposive sampling is one of the most popular sampling procedures in research methodology. It involves selecting informants based on predetermined criteria related to a certain study subject (Aziz, 2015).

The focus group interviews were done upon agreement with the school authority. Students who fulfilled the criteria were selected from different grades. As pointed out by Krueger and Casey (2015), researchers should prevent students from close-friend circles for a youth focus group interview. Students who are close friends tend to have a dominating figure that may influence the opinion of others, thus limiting the range and quality of the desired answers on the interviews.

The informants decided the interview schedule according to their availability. The duration of the interview sessions took no longer than an hour and a half. The sessions were done through a face-to-face setting for students who were able to attend the interview directly in which a digital camera recorder was used to archive the result of the interview. For students who could not attend the face-to-face interview, a virtual interview through Zoom was conducted and recorded using a recording feature on Zoom.

An interpretative analytical statement was prepared after the focus group interview sessions. The statement was based on the information gathered, also known as the raw data. All responses given by the participants were transcribed including informal language and dialects. After the transcription process, the data were analyzed to identify reappearing terms and patterns. It began with examining similar words by using an indexing and retrieval system of the terms and patterns, as stipulated by Berg and Lune (2017). The observation of participants' responses was observed through video recording (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015). The researcher also used the audit-trail procedures to trace the course of the research step by step. Audit trails are records that the researcher kept from the investigation. It enables researchers to reflect on the study and helps the readers follow the flow of each stage.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reason and Motivation

This section discusses the informants' reasons and motivations for using Instagram. The researcher found that an informant may have various reasons for using Instagram. Some of the reasons may be outdated, while others may still be valid until the interview. Below (Table 1.) is the informants' reasons and motivations of Instagram usage.

Table 1. Reason and motivation of Instagram usage among Indonesian adolescents

Reason and Motivation	Number of informants (out of 18)
Personal gallery	6
Content creation	14
Social interaction	12
Information seeking	7
Business	2
Dawdling	15
Educatio	7
Entertainment	14
Finding ideas	3

Instagram Algorithm and Simplicity

The researcher found that this theme is salient as the algorithm is a significant factor that sets a social medium apart from others. As such, the researcher found that seven informants brought up Instagram Algorithm as one of their motivations for using the app. The algorithm would give them related content on their feeds and explore the feature. Thus, users could be more attached to the app as the algorithm gives them mostly content that they like to read or watch.

Another salient theme that the researcher felt intrigued to discuss is Instagram simplicity. At least seven of them, many informants stated that Instagram simplicity represented the youth taste. The simplicity of Instagram allowed the informants to use it efficiently, either for creating their content or consuming other people's content. From the informants, it was found that Instagram appearance, also known as User Interface, was appealing to the eyes of the youth. Further, it provided a better User Experience than other social media, which, in this case, is Facebook.

The Pandemic Effect

With the stay-at-home policy enforced in Indonesia, the informants had to undergo their daily activities indoors. Thus, Instagram became a way for them to escape boredom due to being hindered from going outside their houses. The researcher calls this phenomenon “The Pandemic Effect,” The pandemic is a powerful reason for the Instagram dependency among the informants. The informants also confessed that this pandemic effect was a significant factor in becoming more dependent on the app. Thus, the researcher has chosen this topic as a salient theme for investigating one of the paper’s research objectives.

At least, there were 11 who specifically highlighted the pandemic as their main reason for the different frequency of their Instagram usage. Instagram allowed them to consume entertaining contents that would eliminate their boredom due to being hindered from going outside. During the pandemic, Instagram helped them stay social as it allowed them to chat and connect with their friends virtually.

The pandemic is directly or indirectly correlated with the informant’s Instagram dependency. The pandemic effect has hindered the informants from undergoing their activities outside. Feeling bored and confused about what to do, many informants decided to replace their usual activity before the pandemic with Instagram usage. Thus, the finding showed that their Instagram usage increased. Some informants used this opportunity to explore their creativity and create their content. A group of informants used it for entertainment. Some others used it for social interaction. Unfortunately, many of them had lost too much time due to Instagram dependency, thus affecting their academic and religious activities.

Bond of Attachment

The bond of attachment of the informants on Instagram usage has resulted in various feelings. The finding showed that some informants would feel eager to open Instagram as it was uneasy. The researcher found that 11 informants often thought about opening Instagram during online class. Nevertheless, several others (7 informants) would feel okay (normal) as they were not too attached to the app, busy with other activities, or more dependent on other platforms, especially other social media, and online games. Another group of informants only felt eager to open the app upon posting their content to see the audience's interaction with their content.

The researcher was also intrigued to discuss the frequency of Instagram usage among the informants. It is another salient theme under the bond of attachment section. Attachment is often associated with frequency. It is also in line with the method of this study which discusses how media dependency is related to the period spent of a particular media platform which, in this case, is Instagram. From the interview, the researcher found that more than half of the informants’ frequency of Instagram usage significantly increased due to the stay-at-home policy during the pandemic.

The finding shows a significant correlation between the Instagram dependency of the informant’s frequency of Instagram usage. In other words, the informants with a higher frequency of their Instagram usage tend to be more dependent on the app. Reciprocally, when their use of Instagram is low in frequency, they were not too reliant on the app.

Media Dependency Phenomenon on Academic Performance and Religious Obligations

The context of Instagram usage is situated to two aspects of the lives led by the informants, which are academic performances and religious obligations. The study found that Instagram usage gave both negative and positive influences towards adolescents’ academic performance and religious obligations. Among the negative impacts was lack focus during online class time, as confessed by most informants. Only four informants achieved lower final grades due to Instagram distraction. On the other hand, the minority of the informants also conveyed that they could learn school lessons, linked to other sites, and obtained motivation for learning through Instagram.

In terms of religious obligations, most informants (n=11) would feel distracted by Instagram as it led them to procrastinate in attending their obligatory prayers, be lazy on non-obligatory matters such as Quran reading, and lack of solemnity in prayers. Nevertheless, some would learn more about Islam and obtained motivation to be more religious by consuming religious content presented by Islamic preachers on Instagram.

It can be concluded that Instagram usage did not significantly hinder the informant students from fulfilling their priority in academic and religious matters as it only distracted them from focusing on both matters. The reason can be seen through their final academic grades which were not significantly impacted as well as their obligatory worships that they still managed to undergo.

The discussion around Instagram dependency among adolescents is of paramount importance as adolescents are the most active Instagram users in Indonesia. With the rise of the COVID-19 outbreak, the issue became more crucial to delve as Indonesian adolescents were forced to undergo learning from home. Instagram dependency is strongly related with the pandemic situation as the informants were not allowed to go out without emergency. Also, there were several motives of the informants' Instagram dependency which related to Instagram contents, algorithm, simplicity, and familiarity.

The study found that stalking is an intriguing phenomenon among the informants to maintain their social interaction with peers during home quarantine. Regarding Instagram dependency, the researcher found that it had significant influence on the informants' academic performance, especially in lack of focus during class time. Nevertheless, it did not significantly impact their grades because they could find another time for self-learning. The researcher also found that Instagram dependency had a significant correlation with the lower quality of the informants' non-obligatory religious worships such as Quran reading, non-obligatory prayers, and attending Islamic lectures. Also, the finding did not have sufficient data to show significant correlation between the app usage and the positive influences on the informants academic and religious performances.

4. CONCLUSION

The study attempted to examine whether Instagram dependency would influence Muslim adolescents' academic performance and religious obligations in Indonesia. It can be concluded that Instagram dependency had a significant influence on the academic performance and religiosity of the informants in several points. The significant influence could be found in lack of focus during class time and lower quality of non-obligatory worships such as Quran reading, non-obligatory prayers, and attending Islamic lectures. The lack of focus and low quality were caused by excessive scrolling/content consumption and social interaction obtained from Instagram.

The researcher also found no significant correlation between Instagram dependency and the informants' final grades at school as they could replace their learning time with self-studying. Also, there was no significant correlation between Instagram dependency and the obligatory prayers of the informants. The data only showed that they came a little bit late and still underwent the prayer accordingly. In addition, the study did not have enough data to validate that Instagram has a positive influence on the informants' academic and religious matters because only a small number of informants were willing to discuss it openly. However, according to the finding, the researcher could not neglect that Instagram still had positive values even though not specifically in academic and religious matters. As such, Instagram helped the informants explore more information and skills in subjects other than academics and religion.

The limitations of this study include the number of informants. There were only 18 informants that did not fully represent Muslim adolescent students in Indonesia. Also, all informants were male, limiting the possible findings the researcher may have got from female students. The research could also be more comprehensive if the researcher could delve into other factors that influence one's academics and religiosity other than Instagram since Instagram could not be the only factor. Also, it would be more illuminating if the period of the focus group interview was longer to obtain more information.

Further, the researcher would like to recommend future researchers of this study to conduct mix-method research since there were questions that could have been easily answered through survey questionnaires. It would make the focus group interview more open-ended and interactive. Also, the researcher highly suggests that future researchers would also delve into TikTok as the rising star of social media among adolescents in Indonesia and globally. In addition, the term religiosity could also be broadened to other religions, especially the major religions in Indonesia such as Christianity and Catholicism, to measure and compare the result with findings derived from the Islamic context.

This part consists of two (2) sub-parts: the article's conclusion and suggestions or recommendations from the research. Conclude the article critically and logically based on the research findings. Please be careful in generalizing the results. The authors should also state the research limitation in these parts. Generally, the conclusion should explain how the research has moved the body of scientific knowledge forward. In suggestion, please describe the author's recommendations for further studies regarding the author's research implication.

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