Religious Influencers on Social Media: Do They Really Affect Followers' Religiosity and Intention to Donate?

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of religious influencers' credibility on followers' religiosity, social media engagement, and donation intention. Primary data was acquired through online surveys to 204 Instagram and TikTok followers of the religious influencers. PLS-SEM technique was utilized to assess the structural model in the study. The results show that the credibility of religious influencers, respectively, has a direct and significant effect on followers' religiosity, social media engagement, and donation intention. Followers' religiosity significantly mediates the effect of religious influencers' credibility on followers' social media engagement. In addition, followers' social media engagement appears to be a significant mediating variable of the effect of religious influencers' credibility on followers' donation intention.

Keywords: Influencer credibility · Religious influencer · Religiosity · Social media engagement · Donation intention

1 Introduction

Social media has become an inseparable part of human life. It contains any information shared by its users and acts as a collaborative medium that emphasizes users' active interaction in creating and exchanging the content [1]. Given its use nowadays, social media is utilized to market products or services, inform one's existence, or influence others. Social media leads to various new professions, one of which is marketing influencers.

An influencer is an individual who creates valuable content, has a high reputation in a particular field, and has many followers on social media [2]. By 2020, marketing influencer will represent a US$10 billion industry and has become increasingly relevant for most companies, particularly those operating in a business-to-consumer environment [3].

The Top TensVR revealed that the 300 most influential individuals in 2019 came from various groups, including actors, singers, fashion models, athletes, businesspeople, politicians, and religious leaders who become the focus of this study [4]. The trend of social media utilization by religious leaders to preach and create religious content is increasingly widespread globally. The Covid-19 pandemic has even triggered massive use of social media. Along with the government's policy to suppress the spread of the

Covid-19 virus through restrictions on religious activities in worship places thus, many religious leaders use social media to teach and interact with their people, especially the millennial generation. YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok are the top three social media platforms mostly used by religious influencers to create content [5].

The content created can be in the form of text and video. It includes inspirational quotes, short sermons, reflections, songs, and dance. Followers can be actively engaged by liking, sharing, commenting, or recommending the content they see. Interestingly, the followers are not only from one particular religion but can also various religions. This phenomenon is fascinating to explore further to see whether the response on social media is due to the impact of the influencers' credibility or other factors. Religious influencers can positively influence the level of religiosity of their followers on social media, especially if the religious influencers have many followers. Religious influencers also use social media by supporting foundations or nonprofit organizations and encouraging their followers to donate [6].

The literature review shows a lack of empirical studies discussing the influence of religious leaders from the marketing viewpoint. Concepts related to religious leaders are mostly examined from the religious domain. This study aims to measure how the credibility of religious leaders as influencers can affect the level of religiosity and followers' engagement, and the donation intention. The results of this study are expected to shed light on how religious leaders can develop their digital marketing strategies to reach out to wider followers and influence them to practice their beliefs in their daily lives.

2   Research Methods

2.1   Survey Administration

This study employed a quantitative approach in which the hypotheses were tested to find the effect of religious influencer credibility on followers' religiosity, social media engagement, and donation intention. The population consisted of followers of religious influencers' Instagram and or TikTok accounts. Samples were selected purposively, as follows: 1) aged a minimum of 18 years old; 2) have ever watched religious content of the religious influencer either on Instagram or TikTok accounts; and 3) samples were followers of the religious influencers' either Instagram or TikTok accounts. Primary data collection was conducted through a survey with a questionnaire as the research instrument. Prior to the data collection, a pilot study was conducted to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. A 7-point Likert Scale was selected to measure the examined variables, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. The PLS-SEM technique was utilized to assess the structural model, confirming the relationships between examined concepts in the research model and to test the hypotheses. It was applied as it is appropriate for causal-predictive analysis with a high enough complexity of the relationship between the variables.

2.2   Measures

All empirical indicators for each variable in this study were developed based on an extensive literature review. Influencers' credibility was measured by attractiveness, expertise,

and trustworthiness [7, 8]. Religiosity were measured five dimensions of the Centrality Religiosity Scale (CRS): intellectual, ideological, public practice, private practice, and religious experience [9]. Two items were developed to measure each dimension.

Social media engagement was measured by three dimensions which include two contributing items (likes), four contributing items (shares), and two creating items (comments) [10]. Finally, the donation intention was measured by four items adapted [11]. The donation was defined operationally as the willingness of followers to donate after watching content from religious influencers. Donations can be in the form of money to the influencers' foundation account or buying products belonging to religious influencers, which profits will be donated to people in need in Indonesia.

3   Results and Discussion

3.1   Respondent Profile

The participants of this study were dominated by females (65.7%). Most respondents were aged 18 to 25, totaling 190 respondents (93.1%). Most of the respondents were private employees (45.1%), followed by students (41.2%) and entrepreneurs (9.8%). Based on the income, half of the total respondents (56.4%) had an average monthly income of IDR 3 million, while 35.3% of respondents had an average monthly income of IDR 3–6 million. Regarding the frequency of watching religious influencers' content on Instagram or TikTok, 41.2% of respondents watched the content 1 to 3 times a week (Table 1).

Table 1. Path Coefficients

Effect	Path Coefficients	T-statistics	P-Value	Decision	Path Coefficient Total Effect	VAF	Remark
H1: IC → R	0.658	7.688	0.000	Accepted			
H2: IC → SME	0.402	4.868	0.000	Accepted			
H3: IC → DI	0.193	2.152	0.033	Accepted			
H4: R →SME	0.183	2.226	0.027	Accepted			
H5: R → DI	0.026	0.159	0.876	Rejected			
H6: IC → R → SME	0.120	2.086	0.032	Accepted	0.522	23.0%	Partial mediation
H7: IC → R → DI	0.017	0.156	0.876	Rejected			No mediation
H8: IC → SME → DI	0.141	3.438	0.000	Accepted	0.394	35.8%	Partial mediation
H9: R → SME → DI	0.064	1.864	0.058	Rejected			No mediation
H10: IC → R → SME → DI	0.042	1.747	0.074	Rejected			No mediation

3.2 Evidence for Measurement Fit

All items measuring the four variables had Cronbach's Alpha values greater than 0.60; thus, all variables are declared reliable. This study employed the Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) statistical technique, which focuses on testing a series of hypothetical relationships to develop theories in exploratory research. Partial least squares tested two models: the outer and inner models. The outer model is a measurement to assess the validity and reliability of a research model. In the outer model, the validity test was carried out by analyzing the convergent validity and discriminant validity, while the reliability test was carried out by analyzing the composite reliability (CR). First, in evaluating convergent validity, this study used the outer loading of each indicator and the average variance extracted (AVE). The results of the convergent validity test showed that all indicators were valid because the AVE value of the four variables was above 0.5. The composite reliability value of all variables was >0.7, indicating that all variables in this study are reliable. This study reduced the IC1 item (religious influencers have physical attractiveness) because it did not meet the minimum outer loading value requirement and two indicators of religiosity starting from the lowest outer loading to meet the requirements for the AVE religiosity value >0.5.

3.3 Result

The value of R^2 for the dependent variable was all >0 (zero). The calculation results showed that the R^2 value of the religiosity variable was 0.433, which indicates that the magnitude of the influencers' credibility on religiosity was 43.3%, while the other 56.7% was claimed by other variables not explained by the study. Furthermore, the magnitude of the influence of credibility and religiosity on social media engagement was 29.2%, while other variables explained the other 70.8%. Finally, the R^2 value for the variable of donation intention was 24.7%, which shows that the magnitude of the influence of credibility, religiosity, and social media engagement on the donation intention was 24.7%. The values of path coefficients H_1, H_2, H_3, and H_4 were more significant than the t-table value of 1.96. Thus, H_1, H_2, H_3, and H_4 were accepted. Both hypotheses regarding the indirect effect of influencers' credibility on social media engagement with the mediation of religiosity (H_6) and influencers' credibility on donation intention with the mediation of social media engagement (H_8) were accepted. Furthermore, the results of the study show that the effect of influencers' credibility on the donation intention with the mediation of religiosity (H_7), religiosity on donation intention with the mediation of social media engagement (H_9), and influencers' credibility on the donation intention with the mediation of religiosity and social media engagement (H_{10}) were rejected.

The Variance Accounted For (VAF) value of influencers' credibility on social media engagement mediated by religiosity was 23%, meaning that religiosity explained 23% of the influence of credibility on social media engagement. The VAF value of influencers' credibility and donation intention mediated by social media engagement was 35.8%, meaning that social media engagement explained 35.8% of the impact of influencers' credibility on donation intention.

3.4 Discussion

The results of this study reveal that influencers' credibility positively and significantly shows a direct religiosity, social media engagement, and donation intention. The more the religious influencer is considered credible by followers, the higher the followers' religiosity values are. Furthermore, followers of religious content assess religious influencers as trustworthy; thus, followers also consider praying privately and worshipping as a fundamental activity carried out by religious people. Influencer credibility has been proven to be positive and significantly encouraged consumers to increasingly believe in the religious values they adhere to, which ultimately affected consumer attitudes and behavior [12].

In addition to affecting followers' religiosity, influencer credibility shows a positive and significant effect on social media engagement. This shows that followers of religious content perceive religious influencers as someone who can be trusted; thus, they "mention/tag" other people in the religious influencers' content and even share the influencers' content related to foundations or organizations they own TikTok and Instagram. The result shows that the prominent dimension was trustworthiness due to different contexts related to religiosity. Therefore, religious influencers must be sincere and trustworthy on religious values and teachings spread through social media. This leads to higher engagement with the content posted by religious influencers. Influencer credibility dimensions of attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise encouraged social media users to spend more time liking and commenting on the content of aesthetic dermatology businesses' social media in Jordan [1].

Furthermore, the influencers' credibility positively and significantly affects the donation intention. This shows that followers of religious content perceived religious influencers as trustworthy; thus, followers were willing to make donations to organizations or social foundations owned by the influencers. These results supported a study that found trustworthiness as the key to changing consumer attitudes and behavior [13], in this context, the behavior to donate. Effectiveness of advertising reflected in the higher influencers' credibility will encourage someone to spend time and donate money [14].

Religiosity is found to have a positive and significant effect on social media engagement. This shows that followers of religious content consider praying privately and worshipping was an essential activity to carry out as religious people; thus, they 'mention/tag' other people in the religious influencers' content and even share the influencers' content related to foundations or organizations they own on TikTok and Instagram. Religious values had a positive effect on active social media engagement in terms of contributing (like and/or share) and creating (posting positive comments) brand-related content through online brand communities on social media [10].

In contrast, religiosity was found to have no significant effect on donation intention. This indicates that encouraging followers' willingness to donate to influencers' foundations or organizations is not enough only to increase followers' religiosity. This is probably because followers have not entirely recognized the foundation or organization owned by the influencers; thus, they do not know the clear direction and purpose of the donation funds, and followers may consider several well-known government or social institutions to donate their money. Religiosity had no positive and significant effect on the donation intention through social media platforms to mitigate the impact of Covid-19

[15]. This study reveals that religiosity affects the donation intention through a mediating variable: attitude toward online donations for those affected by Covid-19. The insignificant results of the direct influence of religiosity on the donation intention through social media platforms indicate the tendency of religious beliefs or religiosity in predicting attitudes rather than direct behavioral intentions. Attitudes towards online donations exert the most significant influence on individuals' intentions to donate through social media platforms [15–17]. Theoretically, the theory of planned behavior states that a firm attitude was considered a great positive predictor of behavioral intentions [18]. Therefore, although religiosity does not directly affect behavioral intentions, when it is added to the followers' attitude as a mediator, it can significantly trigger their donation intention through social media platforms [15].

From the five mediation hypotheses, two were accepted (H6 and H8). First, religiosity is a variable that significantly mediates the influence of credibility on social media engagement. This shows that the more a religious influencer is considered credible by followers, the more followers' religious values increase, leading to higher engagement or interaction with influencers' content on TikTok and Instagram. Influencers' credibility has been proven to be positive and significantly encouraged consumers to increasingly believe in the religious values they adhere to, which ultimately affected consumer attitudes and their behavior [12].

Second, social media engagement is a variable that significantly mediates the impact of influencers' credibility on the donation intention. This shows that the more the religious influencer is considered credible by followers, the higher the followers' interaction with the influencer's content on TikTok and Instagram, increasing followers' willingness to donate to influencer's organizations or foundations. Influencers' credibility (attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise) can encourage social media users to spend more time liking and commenting on aesthetic dermatology businesses' social media content [1].

The hypothesis involving joint mediation in this study was also rejected. Religiosity and social media engagement are not significant in mediating the effect of influencers' credibility on the donation intention. This shows that no matter how good the influencers' credibility is, this will not influence the religious values of followers, encourage social media engagement, and raise the intention of followers to donate to the foundations/organizations owned by the influencer. This finding indicates that two variables cannot intervene in the impact of influencers' credibility on followers' donation intention at once: followers' religiosity and social media engagement. Although, according to the results, the followers' belief in religious influencers related to Christian religious teachings on TikTok and Instagram can affect followers' engagement or interaction with religious content and even willingness to donate (IC à SME à DI) it is not in conflict with followers' religious values. In contrast, when it conflicts with the value of religiosity, the credibility of the religious leaders is enough to make followers rethink their religious values and even make them more engaged with the content (CI à R à SME). However, if the donation intention is added, it becomes insignificant.

The three hypotheses (H7, H9, dan H10) were rejected because followers may have not entirely recognized the foundation or organization owned by the influencers; thus,

they do not know the precise direction and purpose of the donation funds, and followers may consider several well-known government or social institutions to donate their money. There is a possible reason that the participants may not want to be viewed as having a high level of religiosity, which in turn, they are obliged to donate. On the other hand, if the respondent's level of religiosity is not too high, it does not mean that they will not donate. The younger generation in Indonesia tends to adopt universal values; they do not want to be fanatical about a specific religion or belief. One of the universal values is the kindness of helping others without being associated with a person's level of religiosity. Respondents intend to donate because they see the influencers' figures. This is in line with the research's results that support the effect of influencer credibility on the donation intention. When the religious influencer can be trusted or even become someone who is admired, the followers' donation intention to the influencers' nonprofit foundation would increase. A person's high level of religiosity does not necessarily encourage someone to donate. This could be because it is not the level of religiosity of the respondents that encourages them to donate but because of their universal values or sense of humanity. Religiosity could affect the donation intention through a mediating variable: attitude towards online donations [15]. The level of religiosity may become a better antecedent in predicting attitudes rather than direct consumers' behavioral intentions.

4 Conclusion

The presence of many influencers has emerged, and it turns out that the influencers are not only ordinary people, but also religious leaders. However, studies on religious influencers are still rarely discussed in previous research. Most studies that examine religious influencers only relate it to religion and religiosity, and no study has ever examined their influence on engagement with social media and the donation intention.

For Indonesians, donating and 'zakat' activities have become a form of worship or a declaration of faith. Therefore, this study focuses on examining the relationship of donation intention when associated with the credibility of its influencers. This study indicates that the influencers' credibility encourages followers' intentions to donate. The credibility of the influencers does have a direct effect on the donation intention, but when it is associated with religiosity, it does not affect the donation intention.

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