Hoax on religious topics on social media: exploring experiences and their influence on students' religiosity

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Abstract. The rapid development of information and communication technology increasingly provides easy access and speed of dissemination of religious information. However, this convenience raises new challenges in the form of the spread of hoaxes on social media. This study aims to explore the intensity and experience of students using social media, as well as their responses to hoax information on religious topics and its influence on their religiosity. A qualitative approach with a phenomenological method was chosen, where questionnaire data on the experiences of 38 student respondents collected through Google Forms were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study found that the age of students has an intensity that is closely related to social media. All respondents have found hoax information on religious topics. Although the majority were not affected by the hoax information, there were still a small number of respondents whose beliefs and worship practices were affected. The results of this study have implications for the importance of strengthening digital-based religious literacy among them.

Keywords: Hoax, religiosity, students

Abstrak. Pesatnya perkembangan teknologi informasi dan komunikasi semakin memberikan kemudahan akses dan kecepatan penyebaran informasi keagamaan. Namun, kemudahan ini memunculkan tantangan baru berupa penyebaran hoaks di media sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggali intensitas dan pengalaman mahasiswa bermedia sosial, serta respon mereka terhadap informasi hoaks tentang topik agama dan pengaruhnya terhadap keberagamaan mereka. Pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode fenomenologis dipilih, di mana data kuesioner pengalaman 38 responden mahasiswa yang terkumpul melalui Google Forms dianalisis melalui tahap reduksi data, penyajian, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menemukan bahwa usia mahasiswa memiliki intensitas yang lekat dengan media sosial. Seluruh responden pernah menemukan informasi hoaks tentang topik agama. Walaupun mayoritas tidak terpengaruh informasi hoaks tersebut, namun masih terdapat sebagai kecil dari responden yang keyakinan dan praktik ibadahnya terpengaruh. Hasil studi ini berimplikasi pada pentingnya memperkuat literasi agama berbasis digital di kalangan mereka.

Kata kunci: *Hoaks, keberagamaan, mahasiswa*

Introduction

In this digital era, social media has become the main means for sharing and obtaining information (Alamin, 2023; Firmansyah & Fakhruddin, 2022) . Unfortunately , not all information circulating on social media can be trusted, including information related to religion. As a result, hoax information about religious content on social media is currently often an issue that is often discussed (Hidayati, 2024) . If this is allowed, inaccurate information will not only circulate widely, but will also have a major impact on public perception and create confusion about true religious teachings. Worse still, religious issues are often misused in political and social contexts, thus having the potential for great harm to the harmony and religiosity of society. (Khamid, 2016) .

Among the groups vulnerable to the impact of religious hoaxes are students (Lestari & Saidah, 2023; Susanti et al., 2024) . This is because from a psychological perspective, college students enter the young adult phase. The young adult phase is marked by the formation of identity and independence. Referring to the theory of psychosocial development, this phase is a transitional stage and even a search for identity (McAdams, 2021) . Therefore, inaccurate information related to religious teachings and practices or religious hoaxes that appear on social media have the potential to cause confusion and lead to a decrease in consistency in worship for college students (Anjani, 2023) . The spread of non-credible information or hoaxes is also suspected of being able to influence those who are forming their identity and personal beliefs in religion (Salsabila et al., 2023) . However, on the other hand, students who are able to identify hoaxes in the information they receive can become more critical and maintain their consistency in worship (Junaedi, 2024) .

Related to efforts to improve students' critical thinking skills regarding religious information circulating on social media has attracted the attention of researchers. Al Halik's research offers media literacy guidance services for students so that they have the ability to think critically about the information they receive. This media literacy offer is based on data showing that students are among those who use a lot of digital media. In addition, the level of media literacy among students is still low (Halik, 2021) . Meanwhile, for Rahman et al. (2023) , using digital media-based information as a learning medium to improve critical thinking skills. Such as research conducted by Alamin (2023) which utilizes content on social media in the form of text, images, audio, and video to support the success of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. However, Rahman et.al's article emphasizes the importance of using social media information in a controlled manner so that it always has a positive impact.

The previous studies have informed that the rapid development of digital-based media has also increased the amount of religious information circulating. In addition, these studies recommend that social media be used to support the success of religious learning and strengthen media literacy so that it can provide significant benefits. However, unlike previous studies, this study seeks to explore their experiences with hoax information about religion circulating on social media. In addition, this article also explores how students' abilities respond to hoax information about religion, including whether the hoax information has implications for their religiosity. Exploring students' experiences and responses as the purpose of this article is closely related to their ability to think critically, and this describes their cognitive construction. Thus, this study contributes to enriching the insights of education practitioners, especially Islamic Religious Education Lecturers, as important information to formulate a learning formula that strengthens

students' abilities to filter information critically and not be easily influenced by information that is not accurate, especially related to religious issues.

In an effort to dissect its focus, this study uses the theory of perceptual and cognitive work. The concept of perception proposed by Winarno Surakhmad (1994) is a reference for understanding how students respond to Islamic religious hoaxes on social media. The focus is on three main dimensions, namely: (1) the cognitive dimension which focuses on students' understanding and assessment of hoax information. Indicators for this dimension include the level of understanding, evaluation, and level of skepticism towards sources of information and content on social media; (2) the affective dimension which examines students' emotional reactions to hoaxes. Indicators used include the level of discomfort, emotional influence, and changes in attitude towards religious topics when exposed to hoaxes; and (3) the conative dimension which focuses on students' actions when exposed to hoaxes. Indicators for this conative dimension include actions taken against hoaxes, such as sharing, reporting, or ignoring content. By integrating Surakhman's perception theory in cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions, this study can deepen the understanding of how students process, feel, and act on religious hoaxes, while also describing the role of perception in forming adaptive responses to hoaxes on social media (Junaedi, 2024) . In addition, in the cognitive context, students as a generation that is active on social media are in a more complex phase of thinking development, where they think abstractly, logically, and critically. (Habsy et al., 2024) . Based on Jean Piaget's cognitive theory, individuals build knowledge through the process of assimilating and adapting new information. (Insani et al., 2024) . Thus, exploring the intensity of social media and their experiences with hoax information about religion is very important, so as to obtain an overview of whether students' religiosity is affected or not affected by this information .

Methods

In an effort to dissect its focus, this study chose a qualitative approach and phenomenological method. The phenomenological method is a method that seeks to explore the experiences of respondents, and in addition, also explores their perspectives on an object (Creswell, 1998; Starks & Trinidad, 2007) . The choice of a qualitative approach and phenomenological method is very appropriate because it is in line with the objectives of this study, namely to uncover students' perceptions of religious hoax information spread on social media and examine the implications of these hoaxes on their religiosity.

Convenience sampling technique was used. In addition to capturing respondents who truly have experience and want to be involved in this study, this sampling technique was chosen because of its convenience (Emerson, 2015) . A total of 38 respondents from among students participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 18 to 22 years. They consisted of 8 men and 30 women. Respondents voluntarily participated in filling out a questionnaire in the form of Google Forms consisting of 14 questions. This questionnaire was designed based on the dimensions of perception, intensity of social media use, and religious consistency.

The data collected from respondents were then analyzed qualitatively. Referring to the opinion of Miles and Huberman (1992) the data was analyzed into the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Meanwhile, in an effort to uphold research ethics, the questionnaire distributed to respondents was preceded by a notification about the contents of the questionnaire, including the data needed in this study. Thus, the participants involved in this study were those who filled it out voluntarily.

Results and Discussion

Respondents' activities on social media

Figure 1. below illustrates the frequency of respondents using social media. After the frequency of social media is explored, the next step is to describe the social media platforms used by the respondents.
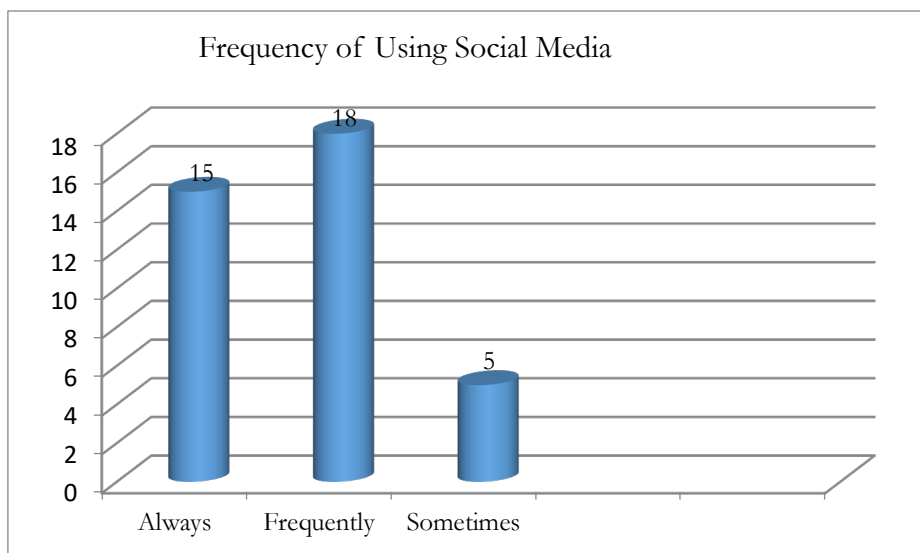

Figure 1. Frequency of respondents using social media

Meanwhile, Figure 2. illustrates the social media platforms used by respondents.
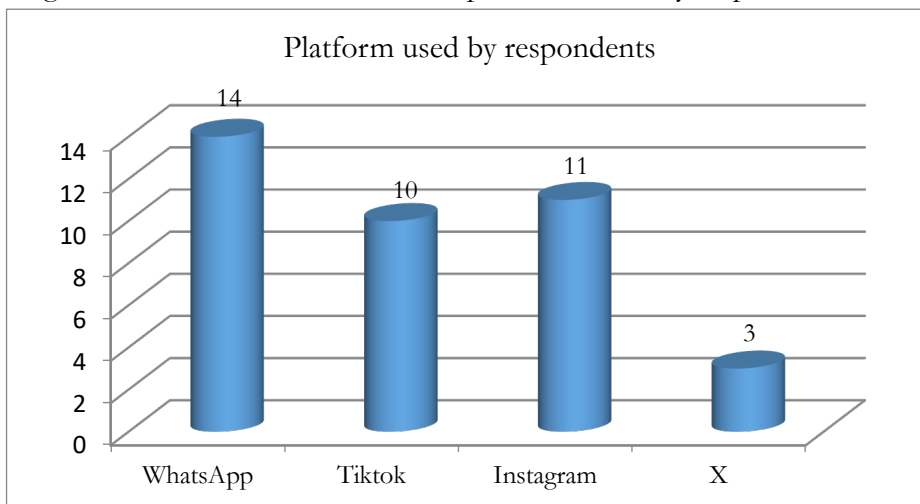

Figure 2. Social media platforms used by respondents

Figure 1. shows the respondents who are intense with social media. As many as 15 respondents or 39.47% showed a frequency of always, as many as 18 respondents or 47.37% showed a frequency of often, and 5 respondents or 13.16 showed a frequency of sometimes using social media. This study did not obtain frequency information from respondents who rarely and never used social media. Meanwhile, this study found that WhatsApp was the most widely used platform with 14 respondents or 36.84%, followed by the Instagram platform with

11 respondents or 28.95%, the Tiktok platform with 10 respondents or 26.32%, and the X platform with 3 respondents or 7.89%.

Respondents' experiences with hoax information about religion
In this section, this study explores three things: respondents' experiences of encountering hoaxes about religion on social media, the frequency of seeing these hoaxes, and their responses to religious information. Figure 3 shows respondents' experiences of encountering hoaxes about religion on social media.
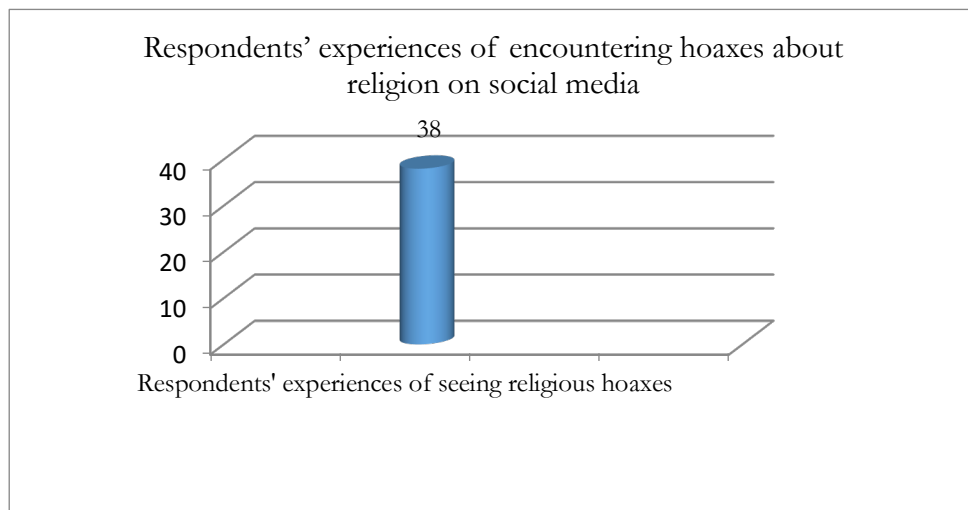

Figure 3. Respondents' experiences of finding hoaxes about religion on social media

Furthermore, the frequency of respondents finding hoax information about religion on social media is shown in Figure 4 below.
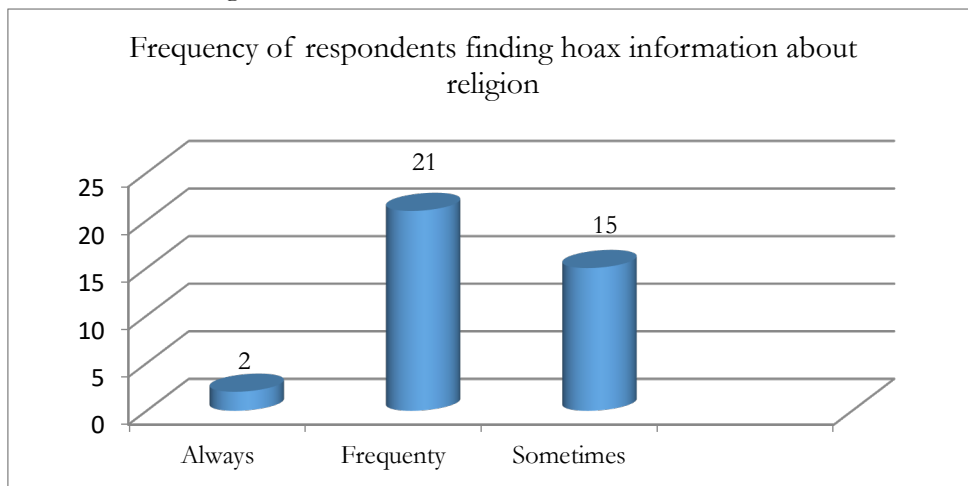

Figure 4. Frequency of respondents finding hoax information about religion on social media

Then, how do the respondents react to hoax information about religion? Figure 5. visualizes the respondents' reactions to the stimulus of hoax information about religion.
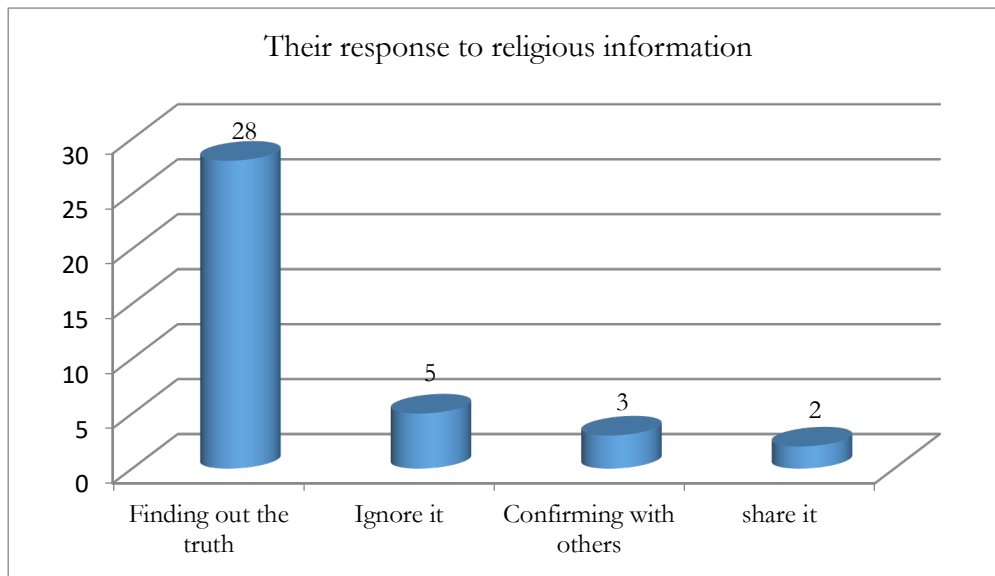
Figure 5. Respondents' reactions to hoax information stimuli about religion

Based on Figure 3. it appears that all respondents or 100% have found hoax information about religion, while the frequency intensity varies. This shows that the problem of hoax information about religion is very widespread among students. For example, as in Figure 4, as many as 21 respondents or 55.26% have the experience of often finding information about religion that is considered a hoax on social media, then as many as 15 respondents or 39.47% have a frequency of sometimes, and as many as 2 respondents or 5.26% have a frequency of always. This shows that the majority of students, either often, sometimes, or always, are faced with hoax information on social media. Furthermore, how do the respondents react to information about religion that is considered a hoax. Figure 5. found that the majority of respondents, namely 28 people or 73.68% chose to find out the truth. This shows the high effort to verify the information they receive and the high awareness of the importance of information literacy to access valid sources. Then, as many as 5 respondents or 13.16% chose the reaction to ignore it. This shows that even though they see religious hoax information, they prefer not to pay more attention. Furthermore, as many as 3 respondents or 7.89% chose the reaction to confirm with others. This shows a desire to verify but by relying on opinions or information from others. As many as 2 respondents or 5.26% chose to share the religious hoaxes they saw. This is a concern because even though the percentage is relatively small, it can still have a negative impact.

Does hoax information about religion influence respondents' religiosity?
In this section, the study focuses on the respondents' experiences of being affected or not affected by hoax information about religion towards their religiosity. Elements of firmness of belief and worship practices are two things that are explored from the respondents. For those who are affected, this study continues by exploring their efforts to overcome it. Figure 6 shows the influence.
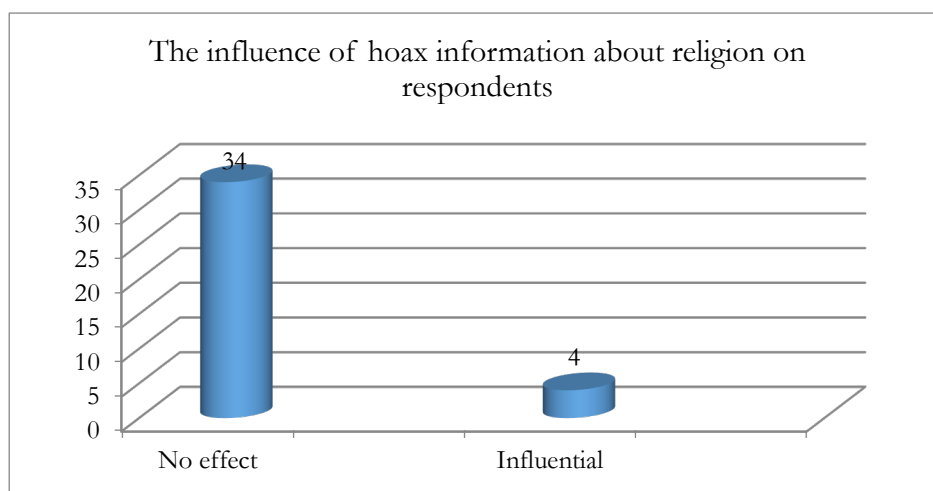
Figure 6. The influence of hoax information about religion on respondents

Figure 6. informs that as many as 34 respondents or 89.47 % have experience of not being influenced by hoax information about religion. This means that hoax information about religion on social media does not expose the majority of respondents, and affects their beliefs about religion and worship practices. This shows that for the majority of students, perceptions of religious hoaxes do not significantly affect their religious practices . However, this study found that as many as 4 respondents or 10.53 % admitted to being influenced by hoax information about religion on social media. This fact shows that there are groups that are vulnerable to the negative influence of hoaxes .

This study then continues to deepen the influence of differences in religious information on social media on the religiosity of respondents focused on their beliefs. As previously described about the number of respondents who were not affected and affected, this study emphasizes that for those who were not affected, it showed that they still had strong beliefs in religious teachings even though they saw hoax information about religion on social media. In addition to not affecting beliefs, this study found that hoax information about religion on social media also did not affect the majority of respondents in their religious practices.
Meanwhile, for a small number of respondents who were affected by hoax information, this study deepened the elements and their efforts to overcome it. After being further explored, those who were affected admitted that the information made them doubtful and confused about the beliefs they had believed in so far and the worship practices they usually did. This finding implies the importance of strengthening religious literacy for students so that they are able to choose and sort out correct religious information and avoid hoax information about religion.

Discussion
The findings of this study provide three essential information, namely: social media and platforms that are familiar to students, students' experiences with hoax information about religion, and the influence of hoax information about religion on respondents' religiosity. First, social media and platforms that are familiar to students Based on the findings, social media has a fairly high frequency of use because it plays an active role in the dissemination of information among students. No respondents reported rarely or never using social media. In terms of the most familiar and widely used platforms, WhatsApp is the platform most frequently accessed by students , followed by Instagram, Tiktok, and X platforms. This finding concludes that the age

of students is very close to social media and the platforms they use. This finding is in line with statistical data information on internet and social media users in Indonesia in the last five years. In 2019, social media users in Indonesia reached 150 million people or 54% of the total population. Increased to 160 million or 58% in 2020, to 175 million or 63% in 2021, and to 191 million or 69% in 2022. While in 2023, it decreased by 12.57% to 167 million or 60.4%. Based on age, the age groups 13-19 years and 20-35 years are those who are most and very active on social media. While the WhatsApp and Instagram platforms are widely used, and in 2022 the Tiktok platform began to be used for social media (kaptenseo, 2023) .

If we look at the closeness of students and their frequency of social media, then this can be a potential for conducting digital-based da'wah to promote Islam as rahmatan lil 'alamin. This view is supported by the research results of Mubarok and Sunarto (2024) which emphasized that digital-based da'wah can currently be one of the trending choices to promote moderate Islam through the government's religious moderation program. Mubarok and Sunarto's article also informs the platform Social media such as WhatsApp, Instagram, X, or Telegram can be an option to promote moderate Islam. This means that the platform can be used as a means to build tolerance and harmony between religious communities. However, this article emphasizes that the younger generation who live in a world that is already internet-friendly and full of technology makes government authorities and religious paradigms not have full power to control people's minds. As a result, social media often becomes a source of dissemination of inaccurate information and fake news that can cause conflict between religious communities. Therefore, the active role of society, government, and educational institutions is very important in strengthening religious moderation in the digital era. As the findings of this study, strengthening students' religious literacy on information circulating on social media. Concerns about exposure to hoax information about religious content are supported by several other study results. Ruslin's study (2023) stated that the main motive for spreading unverified information in WhatsApp Groups is to show self-existence, identity campaigns, and emotional satisfaction. Supported by objective data from the research results of Ruswandi et al. (2023) that there is an influence of the circulation of hoax news in forming public trust in the current era via the WhatsApp platform for Gen Z.

The findings of this study are in line with other studies and research results that show that WhatsApp is widely used as the main communication, allowing information including hoaxes to spread quickly in a more private environment. By identifying the high frequency of social media use among students, this study provides a clear picture that social media is an integral part of student life. This means that behind the students' attachment to various social media platforms, there is another side that holds concerns about being exposed to hoax information about religion. Thus, the findings of this study have implications for the importance of efforts to improve religious literacy among students.

Then the second essential finding of this study is that the students' experience of hoax information about religion. Based on the findings, all students who were respondents had found religious hoaxes on social media. Although most students are aware of verifying information, there are still some respondents who are less critical of receiving information. This shows that religious hoaxes in the media have the potential to reduce the quality of religious beliefs and consistency. The findings of this study are in line with research by Junaedi (2024) which concluded that the spread of hoax information can be fatal in a religious context. Two other studies support the findings of this study that young people are vulnerable to changes due to

being influenced by information from social media (Agustina & Azizah, 2024) , including abundant global information which also brings challenges in interpreting Islamic teachings (Oktavia & Khotimah, 2023) .

In order to maintain the true religiosity of students and not be exposed to hoax information about religion, Adelia's study (2023) emphasizes that the impact of the development of digital technology contributes to crime in the world and emphasizes the importance of improving digital security. Based on Adelia's study, this study looks more at and emphasizes the importance of enriching students' religious literacy as a preventive measure. This choice is based on the findings of this study which show that some students tend to ignore or even share hoax information without verification, which shows the urgency of digital literacy and students' ability to verify information in order to sort information properly. This study contributes to understanding their experiences with religious hoaxes and their responses to the information. This study not only underlines the importance of digital literacy but also strengthens data references regarding students' experiences in dealing with religious hoaxes on social media.

Furthermore, the third essential finding is the influence of hoax information about religion on respondents' religiosity. The findings show that the majority of respondents are not affected by hoax information about religion on their religious practices. Meanwhile, some respondents are vulnerable to the negative impacts of religious hoaxes. Some of these respondents are affected by hoax information about religion on social media by feeling confused and doubtful about their religiosity. These findings indicate that religious literacy is still weak among a small number of respondents. This means that increasing digital-based religious literacy for students is a necessity. This is supported by research by Salsabila et al. (2024) which states that digital literacy is very important in countering hoaxes on social media. The spread of hoaxes occurs due to a lack of knowledge in sorting information and the urge to share it immediately. Research by Putra et al. (2023) strengthen the study where the study concluded that students face a number of digital challenges that affect their learning process due to a lack of awareness of technology and the habit of relying on Copy-Paste being the main focus. As with these studies, the findings of this study have implications for the importance of religious education that emphasizes digital literacy and religious literacy so that students are not easily influenced by hoaxes that have a negative impact on their religiosity. In addition, this study also provides reinforcement to previous studies on how religious hoaxes can affect the religiosity of students and encourage stronger education in the digital era. As a result, the implications of this study are in line with the research of Wahyudi and Kurniasih (2021) which states that religious moderation literacy is the basis for strengthening religious understanding that is tolerant, modern, and full of compassion.

In relation to this information literacy, the opinions of John Mingers and Craig Standing are very important to present in this article. According to both of them, information can be explained in two ways, namely objectively and veridically. Objectively means that information consists of signs, messages, or texts, and the circumstances that lead to them. Well-organized data may have meaning, which means that the data can propositionally represent certain external circumstances, making the data relevant and truthful, that is, the information may or may not be true. Although veridical, knowledge must be true or accurate before it can be useful. Incorrect information is called misinformation or disinformation, not information (Mingers & Standing, 2018) . In this regard, Floridi (2009) defines information as something that consists of data, the data is well-structured syntactically (wdf), meaningful (wfd meaningful), and the meaningful content is accurate. This shows that information is the same as well-structured, meaningful, and

correct data, which makes it objective. Otherwise, anything would be useless, trash, nonsense, misinformation, or disinformation. The information available to a particular observer is determined by their prior knowledge (entry behavior). If the observer is not familiar with the code or language, the sign may not provide useful information.

For a small number of students who were respondents, this study emphasized the importance of their ability to select information. This is as Boris Kotchoubey believes that the main difficulty in perception comes from selectivity. According to him, the difference between information selection is not active selection vs. passive reception, or the "amount" of activity, but rather the concrete mechanisms underlying it. According to him, behavioral and cognitive theories of perception assume that the brain actively selects and filters information. According to the cognitive framework, perception begins with a stimulus. The information included in the stimulus is then processed through several phases, influenced by attention, emotions, or the subject's entire past. Perception is far from "passive" in this context. From a cognitive point of view, there must be mechanisms (Kotchoubey, 1998) . One of these universal methods is mismatch detection (Näätänen et al., 2001) . All cognitive theories assume the existence of a similar mechanism: a "primary pool" where all information from the outside world is collected and then classified into "relevant" (information to be further processed) and "irrelevant" (information to be filtered). The selection process is closely related to the process of improving information literacy skills and competencies (Ferguson & Lloyd, 2007) . These skills and competencies include; information search, choice of information sources, evaluation and selection. The skills and competencies in information literacy are actually general, so that these abilities can be applied in other contexts. Specifically in the context of education, information literacy can describe a student who is scientifically capable, such as research and in determining references.

Håkansson and Nelke (2015) suggest taking a critical approach when selecting and analyzing information sources. Authority, objectivity, and reliability are some of the characteristics used to evaluate sources. One aspect of this approach is creating an intelligent search strategy. The process of extracting what is meaningful from a large amount of information requires skills and understanding of the topic under consideration. Filtering and structuring information in a meaningful and predictable way is necessary for good analytical work. For analytical validation, be sure to include references to the sources used, as well as recording and organizing the information needed to conduct accurate and qualitative analysis. Thus, it can be concluded that the ability to select relevant information is essential for effective decision making.

Acceptance or rejection of value information at this stage is determined by its credibility, which includes the consistency of value information, the role of the information provider as a value agent, the source and media of the value, and the input behavior of the value recipient. The more positive the content of a value, the more qualified the subject who carries the value information, the more credible the source and media, and the value in accordance with the input behavior of the recipient, the higher the chance of the value information being accepted, and the lower the chance of being rejected. At this level, the competence of the subject who carries the value, including his/her skills in choosing (Hakam & Nurdin, 2010, pp. 7-12) .

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, this article concludes that the age of college students has an intensity that is closely related to social media. With the findings that all respondents have found hoax information about religious topics, it shows that this problem has become widespread among college students. Although the majority are not affected by the hoax information, there are still a small number of respondents whose beliefs and religious practices are affected, so this study has implications for the importance of strengthening digital-based religious literacy among them. This study also underlines the importance of digital literacy and more critical understanding so that students can identify hoaxes and remain consistent in their beliefs and practice of worship. Through critical understanding and deepening of information, students are expected to be better at filtering information related to religion on social media. This study is limited to a qualitative approach, so future research is needed to objectively examine the influence of social media on student religiosity using a quantitative approach.

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