

## **Social Media and Lifestyle Formation among Islamic Religious Education Students in an Indonesian Islamic University**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study analyzes the role of social media in shaping the lifestyle of Islamic Religious Education students at Universitas Islam Negeri Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padangsidempuan, Indonesia. The study focuses on how social media influences students' appearance, self-expression, academic practices, social interaction, leisure activities, and time management. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews with students of the Islamic Religious Education Study Program, and documentation of students' social media-related activities. Data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, supported by source triangulation, technique triangulation, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and peer discussion. The findings show that social media functions not only as a means of communication and entertainment but also as a multidimensional lifestyle-forming environment. Students use social media as a reference for fashion, hijab style, self-presentation, learning materials, religious motivation, peer interaction, and leisure activities. However, social media also creates challenges, particularly in relation to online dependency, reduced face-to-face communication, trend-following behavior, and time mismanagement. The study concludes that social media shapes student lifestyle through a continuous negotiation between digital exposure, peer culture, academic needs, Islamic values, and self-control. The study implies that Islamic higher education institutions need to strengthen digital literacy and Islamic character education so that students can engage with social media critically, ethically, and productively.

### **ARTICLE HISTORY**

Received: 14-04-2026

Revised: 128-04-2026

Accepted: 29-05-2026

Published: 31-05-2026

### **KEYWORDS**

Social Media;  
Student Lifestyle;  
Islamic Religious  
Education;  
Digital Identity;  
Islamic Higher  
Education;  
Digital Literacy

## **Introduction**

Social media has become an important part of university students' everyday life. Digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Telegram are no longer used only for entertainment, but also for communication, learning, information exchange, self-expression, and social networking. Studies on college students' social media use show that different platforms are used for different motivations, including entertainment, interaction, information seeking, convenience, and self-expression (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). In contemporary student life, online and offline experiences are increasingly interconnected because social media connects profiles, networks, streams, and messages that influence self-presentation, social comparison, and social connectedness (Bayer et al., 2020).

The concept of social media refers to internet-based applications that enable users to create, exchange, modify, and circulate user-generated content. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as internet-based applications built on Web 2.0 foundations that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Similarly, boyd and Ellison (2007) explain that social network sites allow individuals to construct public or semi-public profiles, articulate social relationships, and view connections created by others. Kietzmann et al. (2011) further identify seven functional building blocks of social media: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. These functions are highly relevant to university students because social media has become a space where they communicate, construct identity, search for recognition, and negotiate belonging.

Lifestyle is also a useful concept for understanding student behavior in digital culture. In consumer and social theory, lifestyle refers to a pattern of life expressed through activities, interests, opinions, preferences, and symbolic practices (Chaney, 1996; Kotler & Keller, 2016). In this sense, lifestyle is not merely an individual habit but also a social expression of identity, taste, value orientation, and social positioning. When social media becomes part of students' everyday routines, it also becomes part of the symbolic environment through which lifestyle is learned, displayed, evaluated, and negotiated.

For students of Islamic Religious Education, social media has a particular significance. These students are not only ordinary digital users but also future Islamic educators who are expected to embody religious values, moral discipline, and responsible social conduct. Islamic education is closely related to the cultivation of moral personality, religious consciousness, and ethical conduct, not merely the transfer of knowledge (Halstead, 2004). Therefore, the lifestyle of Islamic Religious Education students cannot be understood only through fashion, entertainment, or consumption. It must also be examined in relation to Islamic values, academic responsibility, self-control, and the ability to filter digital influences.

Previous studies have shown that social media influences students' lifestyle in several ways. Nasir et al. (2023) found that Instagram affects students' lifestyle because it becomes a medium for accessing information, seeking entertainment, communicating, and finding fashion references. Nabila et al. (2023) reported that social media shapes student lifestyle by encouraging students to follow trends and negotiate peer pressure. Batubara et al. (2023) also showed that social media functions as an agent of lifestyle change by influencing students' identity, social interaction, consumption, and clothing practices. These studies indicate that social media is an important factor in the formation of student behavior and everyday practices.

However, much of the existing literature discusses social media and lifestyle in a general university context. Relatively limited attention has been given to Islamic Religious Education students in Islamic higher education institutions, where lifestyle formation intersects with religious norms, moral education, and the institutional expectation that students become educators with Islamic character. This context is important because Islamic Religious Education students negotiate digital influence not only as young social media users, but also as individuals who are expected to internalize religious values and demonstrate ethical conduct. Digital literacy frameworks also emphasize that digital

competence involves not only technical ability, but also critical, safe, responsible, and ethical engagement with digital technologies (Law et al., 2018; Vuorikari et al., 2022).

The research gap addressed in this study lies in the limited discussion of how social media shapes lifestyle among Islamic Religious Education students in a religious higher education environment. Previous studies have identified the general influence of social media on student lifestyle, but they have not sufficiently explained how students in Islamic education programs negotiate social media use in relation to religious identity, academic needs, self-presentation, social interaction, and everyday discipline. This study argues that social media shapes student lifestyle not through one single influence, but through a multidimensional process involving digital content, peer culture, academic practices, personal identity, religious values, and self-regulation.

Thus, this study aims to analyze the role of social media in shaping the lifestyle of Islamic Religious Education students at Universitas Islam Negeri Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padangsidempuan and to explain how social media shapes their lifestyle in everyday life. The study is expected to contribute to the development of digital lifestyle studies in Islamic higher education and provide practical insights for lecturers, study programs, and university policymakers in strengthening digital literacy and Islamic character education among students.

## **Methods**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to obtain a contextual understanding of how social media shapes the lifestyle of Islamic Religious Education students at Universitas Islam Negeri Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padangsidempuan. A qualitative approach was selected because this research focused on students' experiences, perceptions, interpretations, and everyday practices in a natural setting without manipulating variables. Qualitative inquiry is appropriate for exploring the meanings individuals or groups assign to social and human problems (Creswell & Poth, 2018). With a descriptive design, this study sought to present a systematic account of social media use, lifestyle formation, academic practices, social interaction, and time management among students.

The research was conducted at Universitas Islam Negeri Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padangsidempuan, Indonesia, with a specific focus on students of the Islamic Religious Education Study Program. The participants were eight students from the 2022 cohort who actively used social media in their daily academic and social activities. The participants were selected purposively because they represented students who were exposed to digital platforms and experienced social media as part of learning, communication, identity formation, and social interaction. The use of purposive selection was intended to obtain information-rich data related to the phenomenon under study.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Non-participant observation was conducted to examine students' visible practices related to social media-influenced lifestyle, including smartphone use, appearance, peer interaction, online communication habits, leisure activities, and time management. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain deeper information about how students perceived the influence of social media on appearance, self-expression, academic needs, personal development, social

interaction, entertainment, and time management. Documentation was used to support field data through relevant records, student activity documentation, academic information shared through digital platforms, and other supporting materials.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected, summarized, and categorized data related to social media use and lifestyle formation. The data were grouped into themes such as appearance and self-expression, academic and personal development, social interaction, leisure, and time management. In the data display stage, the data were organized into thematic narratives and a summary table to identify patterns of meaning. In the conclusion drawing stage, the researcher interpreted the relationship between students' social media practices, lifestyle formation, Islamic values, and self-control. This process is consistent with thematic analysis, which is useful for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Data trustworthiness was ensured through source triangulation, technique triangulation, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer discussion, and documentation review. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from different student participants. Technique triangulation was carried out by comparing observation, interview, and documentation data. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation helped the researcher understand students' daily digital practices more carefully. Peer discussion was used to strengthen interpretation and reduce researcher bias. These procedures are consistent with the trustworthiness principles of credibility, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017).

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Social Media as a Multidimensional Lifestyle-Forming Space***

The findings show that social media plays a significant role in shaping the lifestyle of Islamic Religious Education students at Universitas Islam Negeri Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padangsidempuan. Students do not use social media only as a communication tool; they also use it as a reference system for deciding how to appear, how to express themselves, how to interact, how to learn, and how to spend leisure time. This finding confirms that social media is not merely a technological instrument, but a social environment that provides models, symbols, norms, and expectations. Through repeated exposure to digital content, students become familiar with certain standards of appearance, communication, learning habits, and self-presentation. This is consistent with the view that social media connects identity, sharing, conversation, relationships, and reputation in everyday communication practices (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

The field data indicate that social media shapes students' lifestyle through at least five major dimensions: appearance and self-expression, academic and personal development, social interaction, leisure, and time management. These dimensions are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Main Themes of Social Media Influence on Student Lifestyle**

Theme	Field Evidence	Interpretation
Appearance and fashion reference	Students observed clothing models, hijab styles, and fashion trends on Instagram and TikTok, then adapted them to their personal style.	Social media becomes a symbolic reference for constructing appearance and lifestyle identity.
Digital identity expression	Students used posts, stories, photos, videos, and captions to display daily activities, interests, and personality.	Social media becomes a space for identity construction and impression management.
Academic and personal development	Students searched for lecture materials, learning videos, assignment information, motivational content, and religious knowledge.	Social media functions as an informal learning resource and self-development medium.
Social interaction	Students interacted through chats, comments, story replies, and direct messages, but some became more comfortable with online communication than direct conversation.	Social media expands social connections while potentially weakening face-to-face interaction.
Leisure and time management	Students accessed social media during free time and after academic activities, but excessive use sometimes delayed assignments and other responsibilities.	Social media provides relaxation but also challenges students' self-regulation and time discipline.

One of the strongest findings is that students use social media as a reference for appearance and self-expression. Instagram and TikTok are frequently used to observe clothing models, hijab styles, modest fashion trends, and visual presentation. Students do not always imitate these styles directly, but they adapt them to their personal preferences, religious norms, and peer expectations. One student stated that social media influenced students' appearance because she often saw clothing and hijab styles on Instagram and TikTok and then adjusted them to her own style. This indicates that social media functions as a symbolic resource for lifestyle formation. Lifestyle theory explains that appearance and consumption practices often become expressions of identity, taste, and social belonging (Chaney, 1996; Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the case of Islamic Religious Education students, appearance is not only related to fashion, but also to modesty, campus image, religious identity, and the expectation that students maintain appropriate conduct as future educators.

Social media also becomes a medium for digital self-presentation. Students use stories, posts, photos, videos, and captions to display their activities, interests, and personality. One student explained that social media is not only a place for entertainment, but also a place to show personal activities and personality through posts and stories. This finding shows that students use social media to communicate who they are, what they value, and how they wish to be perceived by others. Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation is relevant in interpreting this finding because individuals tend to manage impressions when appearing before others. In digital spaces, this impression management is mediated through profiles, images, captions, audience expectations, and platform features. Marwick and boyd (2011) also argue that social media users often communicate with imagined audiences, meaning that users construct posts while anticipating how others may interpret them. Therefore, students' posts are not random digital activities; they are part of identity construction and social positioning.

In addition to shaping appearance and identity, social media supports students' academic and personal development. The findings show that students use social media to search for lecture materials, educational videos, assignment-related information, motivational content, and Islamic knowledge. One student reported that social media helped her academic needs because she used it to search for lecture materials, learning videos, and information related to assignments. Another student explained that she used social media to access motivational, self-development, and religious content, which helped her gain new insights and strengthen personal motivation. This finding aligns with Greenhow and Lewin's (2016) argument that social media can bridge formal and informal learning through participatory digital cultures. It also supports previous discussions that social media can facilitate information sharing, peer communication, and learning engagement when used appropriately (Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Tess, 2013).

The academic role of social media is particularly important for Islamic Religious Education students because they can access religious lectures, motivational messages, and self-development content. This finding challenges the assumption that social media only weakens religious character. In this study, social media also provides opportunities for religious learning and moral reflection when students intentionally follow positive content. However, the benefit of social media depends strongly on students' ability to select relevant and credible content. Digital platforms contain both educational and distracting materials. Students may begin by searching for learning resources but later become distracted by entertainment videos, viral trends, and unrelated posts. Thus, social media functions ambivalently: it can support learning and self-development, but it can also weaken focus if students lack self-regulation.

The findings also show that social media transforms students' social interaction. Through chats, comments, story replies, and direct messages, students can communicate more easily with peers. One student explained that social media made interaction easier because students could become more familiar by replying to stories or commenting on posts, even if they were not previously close. This supports boyd and Ellison's (2007) explanation that social network sites allow users to articulate and maintain social connections. It also reflects the functional dimensions of conversation, relationships, and groups described by Kietzmann et al. (2011). For students, these functions appear in peer communication, academic coordination, friendship maintenance, and informal bonding.

Nevertheless, social media also creates a challenge for direct communication. Another student stated that social media sometimes made interaction less effective because many students became more comfortable communicating through chat than speaking directly when meeting face to face. This indicates that online communication may reduce confidence in direct interaction when it becomes the dominant mode of communication. This issue is significant in the context of Islamic Religious Education because future educators need not only religious knowledge but also communication skills, empathy, leadership, and the ability to guide others directly. Therefore, social media should be positioned as a complement to direct interaction, not as a replacement for face-to-face relationships.

Social media also shapes students' leisure and time management. Students often access social media during free time, after completing assignments, or when they feel bored. One student explained that she usually opened social media during leisure time or after completing academic tasks because it helped reduce boredom after many activities. In this sense, social media provides entertainment, relaxation, and emotional relief after academic activities. Studies on social media and well-being indicate that the effects of social media are not uniform; they may be positive or negative depending on the type of use, user context, and psychological condition (Meier & Reinecke, 2021; Valkenburg et al., 2022).

However, excessive use may disrupt time discipline. Another student acknowledged that when she spent too much time on social media, she lost track of time and postponed other tasks. This shows that social media does not only consume economic resources through trends and consumption, but also consumes attention and time. In this study, time management becomes one of the most important issues because students may initially use social media for entertainment or learning, but continuous scrolling can shift their focus away from academic responsibilities. Bayer et al. (2020) explain that streams and messages are important elements of social media ecology because they shape attention and user experience. In the context of this study, these elements appear in students' tendency to remain engaged with social media longer than initially intended.

Overall, social media forms students' lifestyle through several interconnected dimensions: appearance and identity, academic and personal development, social interaction, leisure, and time management. These dimensions show that lifestyle formation is not a single process but a complex pattern involving visual culture, learning practices, communication habits, and daily discipline. The main finding of this study is that social media has become a multidimensional lifestyle-forming space. It provides students with references, resources, connections, and entertainment, but at the same time creates pressures, distractions, and challenges that require self-control and critical digital literacy.

### ***Negotiating Digital Lifestyle, Islamic Values, and Student Self-Regulation***

The influence of social media on Islamic Religious Education students cannot be understood only as a matter of digital habit. It must be interpreted as a process of negotiation between digital culture, peer expectations, academic needs, Islamic values, and self-regulation. Students do not simply accept all digital influences passively. They interpret, select, adapt, and sometimes resist the content they encounter online. However, their interpretation is influenced by repeated exposure, social pressure, platform design, and the desire to remain relevant within their peer environment. Bayer et al. (2020) explain that social media ecologies shape user experience through profiles, networks, streams, and messages. In this study, these elements appear in students' practices of following fashion references, maintaining social relations, accessing educational content, and managing online self-presentation.

For Islamic Religious Education students, this negotiation is complex because they are exposed to modern lifestyle trends while also being expected to uphold modesty, discipline, and religious identity. Social media may encourage students to follow fashion trends, display personal activities, and communicate online. At the same time, it may provide access to Islamic lectures, motivational content, and educational materials. Thus, social media is not inherently negative or positive. Its

effect depends on user intention, content selection, peer environment, self-control, and institutional guidance. This finding supports the idea that digital literacy should not be limited to technical ability, but should include critical, ethical, safe, and responsible digital participation (Law et al., 2018; Vuorikari et al., 2022).

The findings also indicate that self-regulation is a decisive factor in determining whether social media strengthens or weakens student lifestyle. Students who are able to manage time, select content, and maintain academic priorities tend to benefit from social media as a learning resource, communication tool, and space for self-development. Conversely, students who lack self-control may experience distraction, procrastination, online dependency, and reduced direct interaction. This is why social media use among Islamic Religious Education students should not be discussed only as a behavioral problem, but also as a moral and educational issue. Time management, modesty, discipline, and responsible communication are part of the ethical formation expected in Islamic education.

The data also show that social media influence operates through two directions. First, it provides positive opportunities. Students can use social media to access academic content, religious knowledge, self-development materials, and peer support. Second, it produces potential risks. Students may become more concerned with digital appearance, more dependent on online interaction, more easily influenced by trends, and less disciplined in managing time. These two directions demonstrate that the central issue is not whether social media is good or bad, but how students use it, what kind of content they access, how they interpret digital exposure, and how they maintain ethical control over their online behavior.

This finding challenges two simplistic views. The first view portrays social media only as a threat to students' morality. This study shows that students also use social media for learning, religious motivation, self-improvement, and academic communication. The second view treats social media as automatically beneficial for education. This study shows that without guidance and self-control, social media can encourage excessive entertainment, online dependency, image pressure, and time mismanagement. Therefore, students' digital lifestyle should be understood as a negotiated practice shaped by technological affordances, social expectations, religious values, and personal discipline.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to discussions on digital lifestyle by showing that social media functions both as a symbolic and practical environment. It provides symbols of identity, models of appearance, channels of communication, learning resources, entertainment practices, and spaces for religious expression. From a practical perspective, the findings provide insight for Islamic higher education institutions to design programs that integrate digital literacy with Islamic character education. Students need guidance not only on how to use social media, but also on how to evaluate information, select content, manage time, communicate ethically, and present themselves responsibly in digital spaces.

The implication of this study is that universities should not respond to social media merely by prohibition or moral warning. A more constructive response is to develop structured digital literacy programs, strengthen Islamic character education, integrate ethical social media use into academic guidance, and encourage lecturers to use digital platforms productively. Such efforts can help

students use social media as a space for learning, da'wah, collaboration, and self-development while avoiding its negative consequences. In this way, Islamic higher education can guide students to become not only active digital users but also critical, ethical, and responsible digital citizens.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that social media plays a significant role in shaping the lifestyle of Islamic Religious Education students at Universitas Islam Negeri Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padangsidempuan. Social media is not used only for communication and entertainment; it has become a multidimensional environment that influences students' appearance, self-expression, academic activities, personal development, social interaction, leisure, and time management. The findings show that students use social media as a reference for fashion and hijab style, a medium for digital self-presentation, a source of learning materials and religious motivation, a tool for peer interaction, and a form of entertainment. However, social media also creates challenges, including trend-following behavior, online dependency, reduced face-to-face communication, and time mismanagement. The study contributes to digital lifestyle studies by showing that social media influence among Islamic Religious Education students must be understood as a negotiation between digital exposure, peer culture, academic needs, Islamic values, and self-regulation. Practically, the findings imply that Islamic higher education institutions should strengthen digital literacy, ethical social media use, and Islamic character education so that students can benefit from social media without losing discipline, modesty, academic focus, and moral responsibility. Future studies are recommended to involve participants from different study programs, compare the influence of specific platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Telegram, and examine the relationship between social media use, religious identity, academic performance, and psychological well-being through mixed-method or longitudinal designs.

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