



## The Role of Religious Leaders and Social Media Influencers in Promoting Participation in Online Infaq and Shadaqah in Indonesia: A Social Influence Theory-Based Analysis

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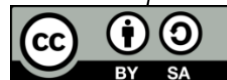
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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The digital era has brought profound transformations across various aspects of social life, including religious practices. This article aims to examine the role of religious leaders and social media influencers in promoting public participation in online *infaq* and *shadaqah*. **Methodology:** Employing a literature-based approach combined with qualitative analysis of relevant scholarly sources, this study identifies key strategies, challenges, and collaborative potentials between religious leaders and influencers in leveraging digital platforms for philanthropic purposes. The article underscores content engagement, transparency, and accessibility as key drivers of sustained participation in online donation platforms. **Findings:** The findings offer valuable insights for religious organizations and online donation platforms in designing effective strategies to enhance digital philanthropy in Indonesia. From a theoretical perspective, this article draws on Social Influence Theory to explain how the religious authority of clerics and the digital popularity of influencers function as agents of social influence in shaping public attitudes and donation behaviors. The main findings indicate that the internalization of digital philanthropic values occurs through a combination of normative authority, social identification, and symbolic persuasion mediated by digital platforms. This study enriches Islamic philanthropy scholarship by emphasizing social actors as key components of the digital donation ecosystem.

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## A. Introduction

The rapid development of information and communication technologies—particularly through the internet and social media—has generated profound transformations in social and economic interactions worldwide, including in Indonesia. This digital era has created new opportunities and conveniences across various sectors of life, including religious practices and philanthropic activities. *Infaq* and *shadaqah*, which constitute integral components of Islamic teachings emphasizing social responsibility and altruism, have undergone significant transformations in their modes of implementation. Whereas these practices were traditionally conducted through mosques, zakat management institutions (*lembaga amil zakat*), or community-based mechanisms, online platforms now offer more practical, efficient, and far-reaching alternatives capable of engaging broader audiences (Azra, 2002).

Public participation in online *infaq* and *shadaqah* has increased markedly in recent years. Factors such as the ease of digital transactions, transparency in fund allocation, and temporal and spatial flexibility have substantially contributed to this growth (Nugraha & Fauzia, 2021). Nevertheless, sustaining and further enhancing participation requires innovative strategies that are responsive to the evolving dynamics of digitally mediated societies.

Within this context, the roles of religious leaders and social media influencers have become increasingly salient. Religious leaders possess strong moral authority and spiritual influence within society, rendering their messages regarding the importance of *infaq* and charitable giving particularly persuasive. Conversely, social media influencers—who can establish strong relational ties with online audiences—hold considerable potential to mobilize public support and raise awareness of philanthropic initiatives in digital spaces (Hidayanto et al., 2022).

This article aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the roles played by religious leaders and influencers in encouraging Indonesian society to participate in online *infaq* and *shadaqah*. It examines how the credibility of religious authorities and the appeal of digital influencers can be strategically leveraged to enhance awareness, build trust, and ultimately increase participation in digital philanthropy. Furthermore, the study identifies key challenges and opportunities inherent in collaborations between these two actors and offers strategic recommendations to optimize their potential in advancing philanthropic engagement in the digital era. The analysis is grounded in Social Influence Theory, which explains how individuals' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are shaped through social interactions (Cialdini, n.d.). Within this framework, religious leaders and influencers function as agents of social influence who motivate their followers to engage in online *infaq* and *shadaqah* through mechanisms of persuasion, social identification, and internalization.

To date, much of the research on digital philanthropy in Indonesia has predominantly focused on technical aspects of platforms, user behavior, and the efficiency of digital payment systems. Studies that explicitly position religious leaders and influencers as primary social actors driving participation in online *infaq* and *shadaqah* remain relatively limited. This gap is particularly significant in a highly religious society such as Indonesia, where social influence derived from religious authority and popular digital figures plays a strategic role in shaping preferences, trust, and donation-related decision-making. Accordingly, this article offers a novel contribution by integrating social actor analysis and social influence theory into the study of Islamic digital philanthropy.

Based on this framework, the objective of the study is to analyze the roles of religious leaders and influencers as agents of social influence in promoting public participation in online *infaq* and *shadaqah* practices in Indonesia. More specifically, the article seeks to examine the mechanisms of social influence operating through religious authority and digital popularity, as well as to identify the challenges and theoretical implications arising from the collaboration between these actors within the context of digital philanthropy.

## B. Methods

This study adopts a conceptual qualitative research design, employing a narrative literature review combined with qualitative content analysis. This approach was selected to enable an in-depth theoretical construction of the roles of religious leaders and social media influencers in digital philanthropy, while systematically linking the analysis to the Social Influence Theory framework. The research methodology integrates library research and content analysis as complementary strategies. Library research serves as the primary foundation for data collection, through which the researcher systematically identifies, collects, and critically reviews a wide range of written sources relevant to the research topic (Bungin, 2017). These sources include peer-reviewed articles published in national and international journals, scholarly books addressing philanthropy, digital communication, and consumer behavior, as well as online publications such as research reports and news articles related to the development of online *infaq* and *shadaqah* practices in Indonesia.

The content analysis process was conducted through several stages: (1) selecting relevant literature based on key themes of digital philanthropy, religious leadership, social media influencers, and social influence; (2) categorizing dominant themes emerging from the literature; (3) interpreting the data by mapping conceptual findings onto the core dimensions of Social Influence Theory, including authority, social identification, and value internalization; and (4) synthesizing the analysis to formulate both theoretical and practical implications.

Qualitative content analysis was subsequently applied to examine the collected data in greater depth (Romli, 2012). This method enabled the identification of recurring themes, communication patterns, and specific representations related to the roles of religious leaders and influencers in encouraging public participation in online *infaq* and *shadaqah*. The analytical approach is inherently qualitative, emphasizing contextual interpretation and meaning-making within the examined texts, rather than statistical generalization (Ardianto, 2007).

## C. Results and Discussion

### 1. Results

The literature analysis reveals several key findings regarding the roles of religious leaders and social media influencers in enhancing participation in online *infaq* and *shadaqah* in Indonesia. These findings encompass several critical dimensions.

First, the credibility and authority of religious leaders exert a substantial influence on shaping Muslim communities' perceptions and behaviors concerning the obligation and virtues of *infaq* and *shadaqah* (Rakhmat & Surjaman, 2001). Messages delivered by religious leaders—grounded in profound religious knowledge and strong moral reputation—are commonly perceived as sincere and theologically legitimate guidance. Consequently, such messages tend to be trusted and followed by the broader community.

Second, the appeal and reach of social media influencers, particularly those with loyal followings and high levels of engagement, play a significant role in expanding the

audience for online philanthropy (Setiawan, 2020). Influencers are capable of reaching diverse segments of society, especially digitally active younger generations. Through personalized, creative, and accessible communication styles, influencers effectively convey messages emphasizing the importance of online charitable giving.

Third, strategic utilization of digital platforms—such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, websites, and online donation applications—emerges as a crucial factor in facilitating participation in *infaq* and *shadaqah*. Religious leaders and influencers alike employ these platforms to disseminate messages and lower barriers to participation. Engaging content formats, including short videos, infographics, testimonials, and live streaming, are widely used to attract attention and educate the public about the benefits and impacts of digital donations (Nasrullah, 2015).

Fourth, the findings highlight the strong potential for synergistic collaboration between religious leaders and influencers in amplifying philanthropic messages and reaching broader segments of society (Effendy, 2003). The combination of religious authority and digital appeal can generate a more substantial impact on digital philanthropy participation. For instance, influencers may collaborate with religious leaders to promote specific donation campaigns or to educate their audiences about religious values underpinning philanthropic practices.

Fifth, several challenges and barriers persist, particularly those related to public trust in online donation platforms, transparency in fund distribution, transaction security, and the credibility and authenticity of influencers. These issues remain major concerns for segments of the public and must be addressed to ensure that efforts to increase participation in digital philanthropy are effective and sustainable.

## 2. Discussion

From the perspective of Social Influence Theory, the role of religious leaders in digital philanthropy can be understood through mechanisms of *normative influence* and *authority-based compliance*, whereby individuals are motivated to donate due to the moral and religious legitimacy conveyed by authoritative figures. In contrast, social media influencers primarily operate through *identification* and *informational influence*, in which audiences emulate donation behaviors as part of social affiliation processes and the pursuit of collective meaning within digital spaces.

The findings of this study affirm that both religious leaders and influencers play critical roles in increasing participation in online *infaq* and *shadaqah* in Indonesia's digital era. The credibility of religious leaders provides a strong moral and spiritual foundation that encourages public engagement in charitable giving. Conversely, the extensive reach and appeal of influencers enable them to mobilize support across diverse social groups, particularly among younger, technologically adept audiences. By leveraging digital platforms, religious leaders and influencers can disseminate their messages more widely, rapidly, and interactively. Creative and contextually relevant content tailored to online audiences has proven effective in capturing attention and raising awareness of the importance of *infaq* and *shadaqah*. Moreover, the accessibility and transparency offered by online donation platforms constitute key factors in fostering public participation.

Collaboration between religious leaders and influencers represents a particularly promising strategy. By integrating religious authority with digital popularity, messages related to digital philanthropy can be communicated more effectively and with greater credibility. Religious leaders contribute spiritual legitimacy to online donation practices, while influencers facilitate broader outreach and present information in engaging and easily digestible formats. Nevertheless, challenges related to trust, transparency, and

platform security must be addressed to maximize public participation. Online donation platforms are therefore required to develop accountable and transparent systems for fund management and distribution. Public education concerning the security of online transactions is equally important in strengthening trust. Furthermore, religious leaders and influencers must consistently maintain their credibility and authenticity. The messages they convey should be grounded in sincere and sound religious values, and influencers should ensure that the donation platforms they endorse are reputable and trustworthy.

Despite the significant potential offered by collaborations between religious leaders and influencers, there is an inherent risk of commodifying religious values when philanthropic practices are reduced to viral content. The popularity of influencers, when not accompanied by adequate religious literacy, may also generate tensions or conflicts of authority between traditional religious scholars and digitally prominent figures. Accordingly, ethical boundaries and social control mechanisms are essential to ensure that digital philanthropy remains oriented toward sincerity, accountability, and long-term social sustainability.

#### **D. Conclusion**

The digital era has generated new opportunities to enhance public participation in *infaq* and *shadaqah* through online platforms. Within this context, religious leaders and social media influencers play a pivotal role in mobilizing support and raising awareness of the importance of digital philanthropy. The combination of religious leaders' credibility and moral authority with the appeal and reach of influencers – supported by the efficient use of digital platforms – possesses substantial potential to stimulate broader public engagement in online charitable giving. To fully realize this potential, sustained and synergistic collaboration between religious leaders and influencers is essential.

At the same time, online donation platforms must strengthen transparency, accountability, and transactional security to build and maintain public trust. Efforts to educate the public regarding the benefits and convenience of online donations, as well as the importance of selecting credible and trustworthy platforms, should also be continuously enhanced. Through these measures, collaboration among religious authorities, digital influencers, and secure technological infrastructures can serve as a key driver in advancing digital philanthropy in Indonesia.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings underscore that digital philanthropy cannot be disentangled from the dynamics of social influence. Interactions among religious authority, digital figures, and technology collectively shape a new ecosystem of religious practice in the digital era, highlighting the central role of social actors in mediating the relationship between faith-based values and technological innovation.

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#### **F. Author Contributions Statement**

Jati Imantoro conceptualized the study, developed the theoretical framework based on Social Influence Theory, and conducted the primary literature review and qualitative content analysis. Annisa Rakhma Dewi contributed to the research design, refined the analytical structure, and led the interpretation of findings and discussion sections. Both authors collaboratively wrote, reviewed, and revised the manuscript, approved the final version for publication, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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