

SOCIAL MEDIA MISUSE (SMM) AND ITS INFLUENCE ON FAITH AMONG SOCIAL MEDIA (SM) USERS IN BRUNEI

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ABSTRACT

The prevalence of social media uses is not a recent development, it has been rampant and rapidly evolving for the past decades. This usage however is not necessarily equivalent to positive uses only, but negative uses has become a mainstream practice among social media users. This resulted into negative consequences where one of them has detrimental influence to the users' faith. Much like the whole world, Brunei is also not immune to this phenomenon. Hence, this study aims to explore the influence of social media misuse to one's faith, particularly in the context of Muslim social media users in Brunei. To serve this objective, a qualitative method was employed, where semi-structured interviews were conducted to a total of 11 Bruneian Muslim. The data was analysed using a thematic analysis, where the finding revealed the consistent link between the degree of user's religious devotion to the influence of social media misuse on faith. The study also highlighted the crucial role of knowledge in managing the impact of the influence. The implications of this research extend to policy makers, educators, developers and even parents, in understanding the significance of knowledge, religious understanding and commitment in barricading the misuses' influence on faith. Subsequently, future research may delve deeper on the aspect of how religious understanding influence the effects and impacts.

Keywords: Social Media Misuse (SMM), Social Media's Influence to Faith, Brunei Darussalam

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, the world had witnessed the rampant widespread of social media usage. This prevalence is not a recent development, however, it has been a continuous evolvement and consecutive development from a developers and public users alike. Globally, the usage of social media increase year after year (Figure 1). Not only were the number of user increase, the number of times spent on social media also increase year after year (Figure 2). The year 2023 recorded the highest number of times spend on social media yet compare to the previous year (Kemp, 2023a).

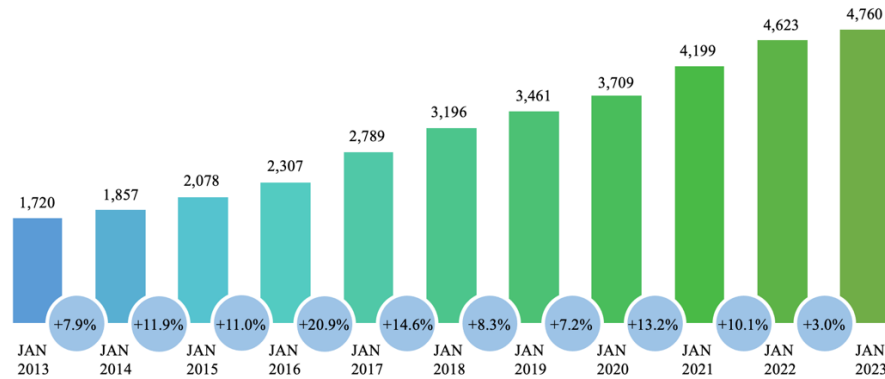


Figure 1: Social Media Users Over Time

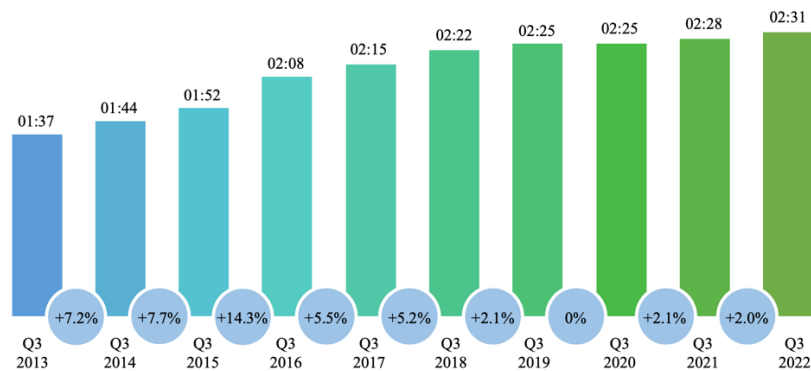


Figure 2: Daily Time Spent Using Social Media

In the context of Brunei Darussalam, Brunei accounted its highest number of social media user at the start of 2023, which is at 94.4 percent of the total population (Kemp, 2023b). Although social media brought a lot of positive aspect including improvement and advancement in people's life, the negative aspect can also be observed as a result of social media usage (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016; Akram & Kumar, 2017). Subsequently, multiple studies (Field & Chelliah, 2012); Bon et al, 2013; Fisher, 2013; Taylor et al, 2016; Zhang & Rau, 2020; Soussan & Trovati, 2022; Siti Kharteeny & Zulkifli, 2022) can be found discussing this issue, and it can be established early on that the social media usage is not necessarily equivalent to positive uses only, but negative uses have also become a mainstream practice among social media users. As a result, negative consequences found its way to social media users, affecting faith, life, mind, dignity and even property of social media users. These five components are commonly associated to the five higher objectives of the Maqasid al-Shari'ah: (1) protection of faith, (2) protection of life, (3) protection of mind, (4) protection of dignity and (5) protection of property (Shompa et al, 2020).

Negative consequences of social media usage were born out of the negative use of social media, which in this paper shall be addressed as social media misuse (SMM). The term 'social media misuse' (SMM) is a not a relatively new term, however it remains quite unfamiliar in the field of research. However, the essence of it has already been encompassed in many research even a few decades ago (Zhang & Rau, 2020).

In an article by Zhang, A., & Rau, P. P. (2020), social media misuse (SMM) is defined as “the use of social media that creates psychological, social, school and/or work difficulties in (a) person’s life,” which was taken from Internet misuse’s definition outlined by Lee, Z. W. Y. et al., (2012). To put it simply, the term social media misuse (SMM) can be simply referring to the adverse usage of social media that brought negative consequences.

Due to the negative consequences and detrimental effects it carries, according to UNESCO (2023) social media misuse has become a global concern, ranging from spread of false information, hate speech, cyberbully, identity theft and the likes (Web-1). This then, could lead to dangerous consequences such as cyberbullicide, unhealthy community, deteriorating mental health (such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, decrease in life-satisfaction, self-esteem, body image) and much more (Akram & Kumar, 2017). These misuses also play a significant role in influencing the faith of the social media users. Therefore, this paper aim to explore the influence of social media misuse to one’s faith, particularly in the context of Muslim social media users in Brunei.

2 METHODS

The objective of the research is to explore the extent of the influence of social media misuse on faith, particularly in the context of Muslim social media users in Brunei. To serve this objective, a qualitative method was employed. This is in accordance with the nature of the research that sought to explore the extent of the influence, therefore, qualitative approach is an appropriate approach (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The qualitative data collected in this research is a primary data which mean it is collected at the time of the research being done. A semi-structured interviews were conducted on a total of 11 social media users within Brunei community whom are of Islamic faith. The finding of the data was then analysed using a thematic analysis, undergoing the process of Open, Axial and Selective (OAS) coding. This process also aligned with the Six Steps Framework for Thematic Analysis introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) become familiar with the data, (2) generate initial code, (3) generate themes, (4) review themes, (5) define themes and (6) report (Figure 3).

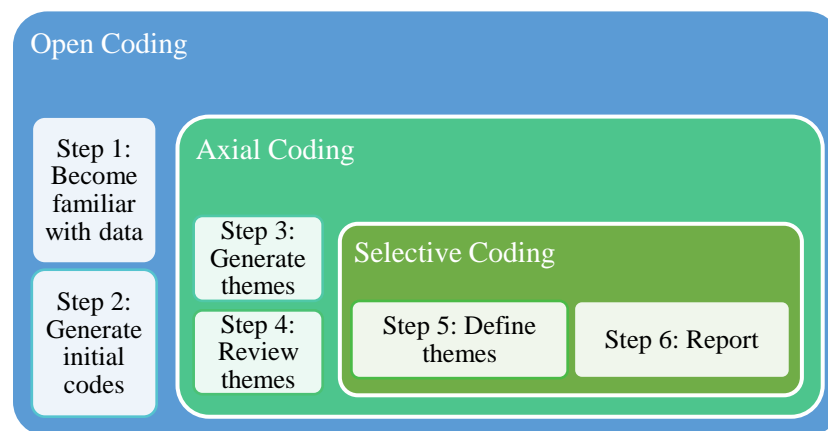


Figure 3: Alignment of OAS Coding with Braun & Clarke’s 6 Steps Framework for Thematic Analysis

Exploring the extent of the influence of social media misuse on faith is complex to begin with, therefore it is ideal to use thematic analysis to explore the subject matter (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). The data analysed revealed several important themes, which will be discussed in the next sections.

3 FINDING AND DISCUSSION

For better understanding of the result and findings, the finding in this paper is presented into three parts: (1) social media misuses observed within Brunei community, (2) the extent of the influence on faith, and (3) factors regulating the influence.

3.1 Social media misuses observed within Brunei community

Before going into an in-depth discussion of the research objective, it is imperative to first discussed the arising social media misuses that were identified from the analysis of the data, within the Brunei community. It is also noteworthy to mention that, social media misuse encompassed a wide range of influence on one's life. However, the social media misuses highlighted and discussed in this paper will focus only on the subject of "influence to faith". In this regard, several themes emerged (Figure 4):

- (1) Spread of religiously contrary ideologies
- (2) Normalisation of religiously contrary contents
- (3) Misrepresentation of Islam
- (4) Misleading/fake news about Islam
- (5) Misleading examples from trusted entities

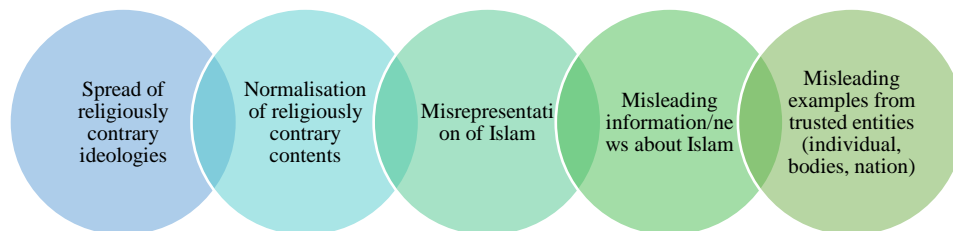


Figure 4: Emerging Themes from Thematic Analysis of the Findings

The five main themes were identified as a result of the analysis of the data. Figure 5 below is the tree index figure of the data undergoing the process of open and selective coding. Open and selective coding is an important part of qualitative analysis, particularly in extracting the themes. Figure 5 demonstrated that several initial codes (in blue circles) were first identified from the interview data, and were theme connected and related with other codes in order to find common ground, this is process is known as selective coding. This was then formed into a theme, which is illustrated in the orange boxes. As a result, five major themes generated from the analysis of the data, which are presented in Figure 4 above.

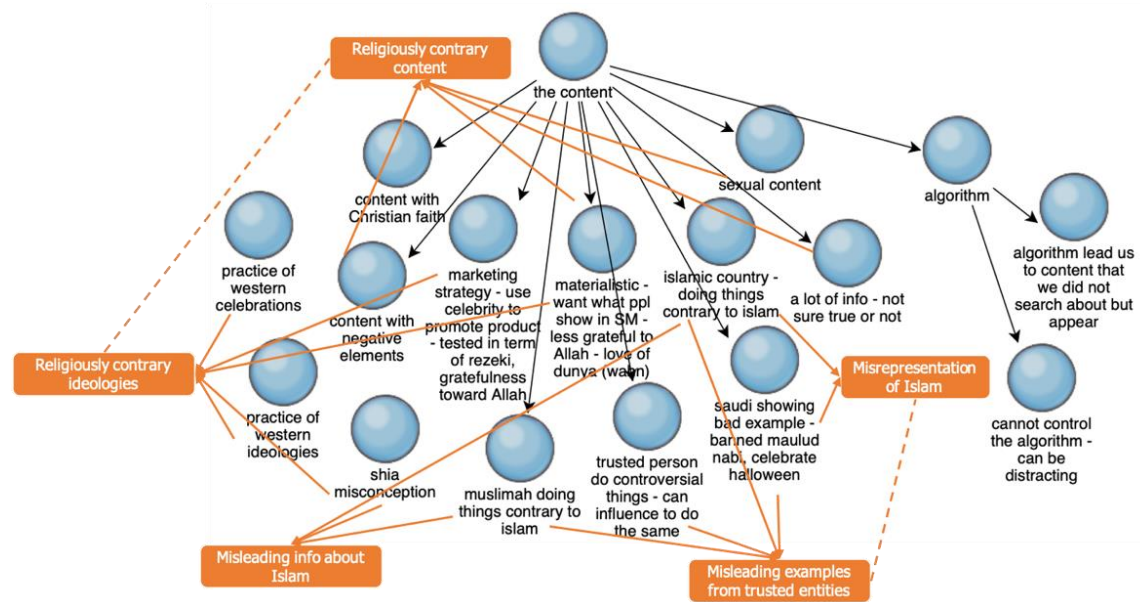


Figure 5: Open & Axial Coding of SMM observed within Brunei community

3.2 The extent of SMM influence on faith

To answer the objective of the research, which is to explore the extent of the social media misuse influence on faith, this section will be further separated into two sections: (1) components of the influence, and (2) level of the influence.

3.2.1 Components of the influence

Two categories of the component of the influence can be identified in regard to the extent of SMM influence on faith, they are as outline in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Component of the influence

Internal Conflict	External Conflict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Emotion •Rational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Inter-faith •Intra-faith

These themes were discovered as a result of the selective coding of the data (which is known as the last part of the OAS coding process), this is illustrated in Figure 6 below. After the initial coding and generating the themes, the themes were then reviewed and defined (green and blue boxes).

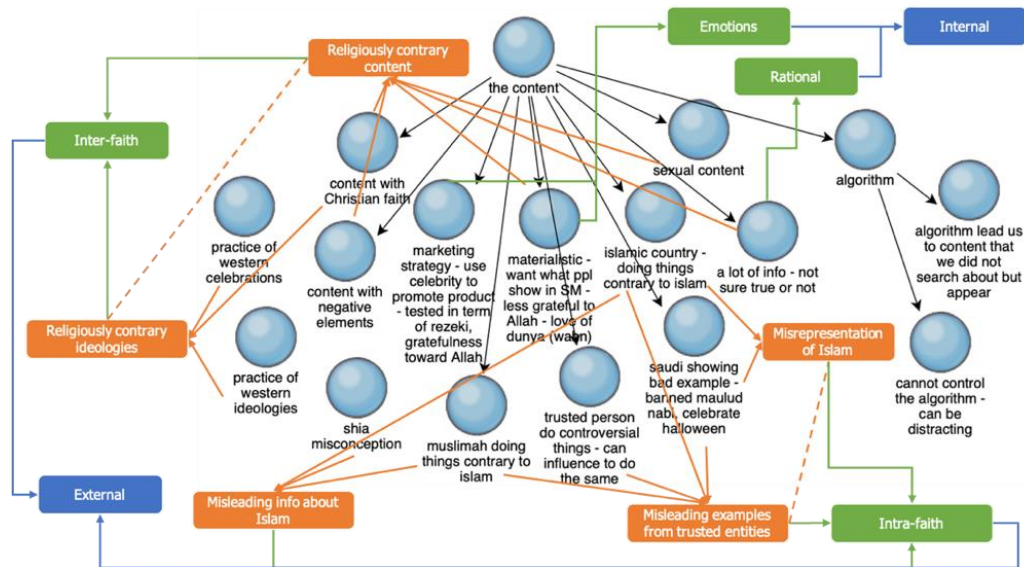


Figure 6: Selective Coding of the extent of SMM influence on faith

The first theme, 'internal conflict', refers to the struggle that happened within themselves, issues that user faced internally, in other words within themselves, and something that they can control. This is covering the emotional and rational issues. For example, in the instance of both the emotions and rational factors, users sometimes found themselves contradicting between their emotion and rational. Regardless of what they think, users still find themselves experiencing certain emotion that are conflicting with their thought, such as envy, jealousy, ungratefulness as a result of engaging with other user's social media content.

Several respondents revealed that they cannot help but to feel envy after seeing other people's accomplishment, whether it is in term of wealth, job, relationship, family and the likes, on social media. This in return, affecting their faith, which adversely also made them feel ungrateful and doubtful towards Allah S.W.T, questioning one's blessing (*rizq*) and one's fate and destiny (*qada* and *qadar*).

Another example is when reading comments talking bad about someone, this is actually the same as backbiting (*ghibah*), and in Islam it is consider as if we have eaten the flesh of our own brother/sister. Abdullah ibn Mas'ud reported: "We were sitting with the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, when a man stood to leave, then another man spoke badly about him after he left. The Prophet said, "Pick your teeth." The man said, "O Messenger of Allah, why should I pick my teeth when I have not eaten meat?" The Prophet said, "You have eaten the flesh of your brother." (Source: al-Mu'jam al-Kabir 9951, Grade: Sahih (authentic) according to Al-Albani). This type activities are actually affecting the state of one's faith. Even when then user did not have the intention of participating in backbiting activity, but just from reading those comments and not stopping oneself from doing those things after realising is also affecting one's faith, respondent admitted.

As for the second factor, 'external conflict', refers to the struggles that happened outside of something that users can control, such as the issues coming from inter-faith or intra-faith. Inter-faith conflict refers to any type of influence coming from religion or beliefs other than Islam. For instance, preaching of Christian belief, or the LGBTQ+

advocacy. Inter-faith conflict also transpired during the consumption of content and ideologies conflicting with Islamic teaching, such as sexual content, western ideologies (gender equality, women empowerment, feminism). However, it is worth noting that these ideologies (such as gender equality, women empowerment) are not totally rejected in Islam, in fact Islam upheld and uplift women's status and give equal opportunities to woman, albeit not in the context of balance equation, but more on the context of abstract equation, because the reality is man and woman are different species and have different capabilities, needs and values that they prescribed as important. Nevertheless, there are times when the ideologies (on gender equality, women empowerment, feminism) carries by the other parties, lack the essence of Islamic understanding and much more liberal in nature, which in a way will affect the mindset as well as faith of the consumer (the one that consume such content and ideologies), shifting them against what is thought in Islam. For instance, to

As for intra-faith conflict, refers to the type of influence that comes from and within the Islamic community themselves. For instance, the different viewpoint of different school of thoughts, such as on the ruling (*hukm*) of touching dog, celebration of western celebration (Valentine's Day, Halloween, Christmas), and the likes. When dealing with inter-faith conflict, it was revealed that users are resolute in their belief. On the contrary, when it comes to intra-faith conflict, there are a noticeable falter in their conviction. This is especially apparent when the influence come from a trusted source, for instance public figure, celebrities and even a reputed Islamic nation. A living case would be the controversies of Saudi Arabia's banned on *Maulidur Rasul* (Web-2), which is an Islamic event honouring the *hijri* birthdate of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W), which is widely practice in many Islamic state countries around the world, and their celebration of Halloween (Web-3), allowance of concert to be made (Web-4) and the likes. In this instance, several of the respondents conveyed that their faith is affect as a result of this occurrence.

3.2.2 Level of the influence

Based on the previous discussion, it can be distinguished that there are several levels of influence that SMM impacted on faith of users within Brunei community. They can be classified into two categories; (1) in the event of negative influence, and (2) in the event of ambiguous influence. In the event of negative influence that contradict Islamic teaching, there are five different level of influence that users experienced (1) affected, (2) confuse, (3) doubt, (4) indifferent, (5) support (Figure 8):

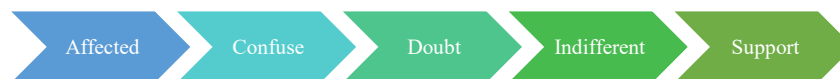


Figure 8: Level of influence (Negative)

It has to be noted that this degree of influences is however not necessarily in the right order, users are found to experience them in gradual manner as well as in amalgamated fashion. The 'Affected' level refers to when users felt affected by the negative influence, to their faith and religion. The 'Confuse' phase, refers to the user experiencing feeling of confusion about one's faith and religion, which later on will

progress to 'Doubt', where users experienced doubted towards one's faith and religion. Another phase is 'Indifferent', this is a phase where the users reach a point of indifference or beyond care of what is being transmitted in social media, whether it people around them committing social media misuse or the likes, they no longer view such action or ideology in an unfavourable picture. Subsequently, some even progress as far as supporting it, which is the last phase or level of these influence.

While in the event of ambiguous influence, which are influence that are considered as ambiguous (meaning that influence that falls under rulings not explicitly stated as prohibited in al-Qur'an and Sunnah), users are observed to have experienced this degree of influences: (1) aware, (2) curious, (3) interested to follow/had intention to follow, (4) started to follow, and lastly (5) started to do it.



Figure 9: Level of influence (Ambiguous)

Apart from their faith being affected by a certain incident, data also revealed that user experienced a degree of interest to try certain action that was done by a trusted public figure. For example, use of halal dye, halal nail polish, touching dog (on a basis on using 'sertu' soap to clean after). Respondents admitted that seeing a trusted person do this type of thing within the muslim community play a massive role in influencing them to do the same thing regardless of its initial ruling (*hukm*). This is negatively affecting one own faith, due to the intention to follow an action that could lead to *haram* things.

The finding also found that repetitive exposure can affect the users, consciously or subconsciously, user found themselves affected by certain influence that they know for a fact is a bad influence but due to the repetitive exposure, they cannot help but feel that it was slowly injected into their subconscious and this is reflection in their words and actions.

Some even admitted to having experience a waver in heart, when exposed to many forms of social media misuses. Some have come to a point of beyond care, while in Islam, when seeing a wrong-conduct, the response such be as according to what was taught by Prophet Muhammad S.A.W in his hadith, as reported by Abu Sa'eed al-Khudree R.A: "I heard the Messenger of Allah S.A.W say, "Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then [let him change it] with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart — and that is the weakest of faith." (Muslim) (Hadith 34, 40 Hadith an-Nawawi). Yet this person, is no longer denying with his heart. This is in regard to LGBTQ+, respondent found themselves beyond care and at one point condoning such action. Some even admitted to supporting it (western ideologies), even when knowing its haram, and some even admitted to doing it (not LGBTQ+), also even when knowing its haram.

3.3 Factors regulating the influence

Another crucial thing to note is that, through the analysis of the qualitative data, two pivotal factors also emerged in relation to barring the influence of SMM on faith, and they are: (1) religious devotion, and (2) knowledge.

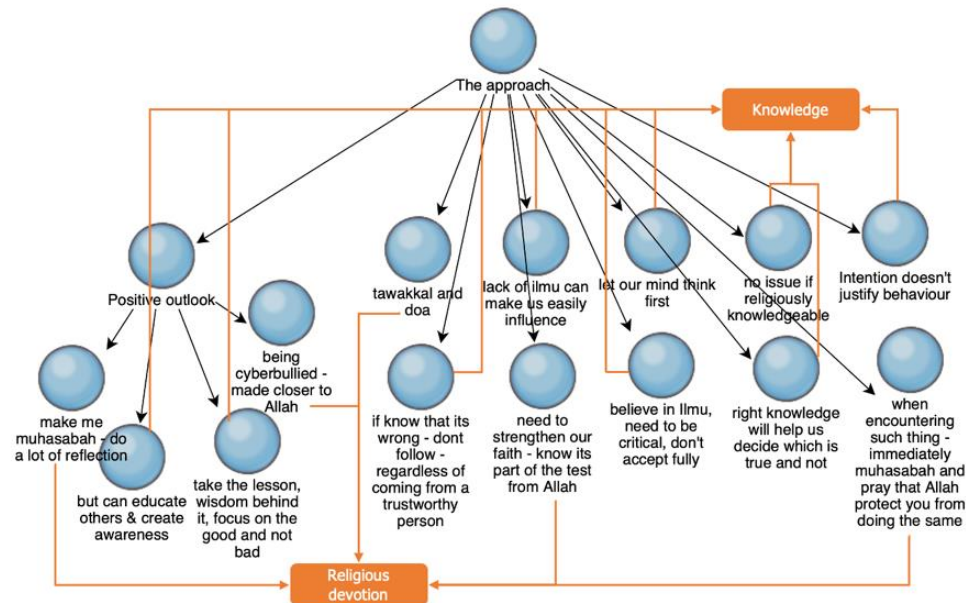


Figure 9: Religious devotion and knowledge role

From the interview data, it can be observed that there is a strong resistance toward the adverse influence when one is a devoted Muslim, and much more so when equipped with the right religious knowledge. Figure 9 showcased the initial code identified by respondents when faced with SMM that influenced their faith. Among the point mentioned by respondents are:

- “...being cyberbullied make me closer to Allah...” – Respondent A
- “...make me *muhasabah* and do a lot of reflection...” – Respondent B
- “...when encountering such thing (SMM), immediately *muhasabah* and pray that Allah protect me from doing the same thing...” – Respondent C
- “...(to practice) *tawakkal* and prayer (in time of need, i.e., facing SMM)...” – Respondent D

This is strong evidence of the power of religious devotion in regulating and screening the influence of SMM to one’s faith. Despite all the negative influence or experience that user faced, some user disclosed that this only make their faith stronger and make them return to Allah in time of need instead. Although, the same could not be said to all Muslim, as the level of devotion cannot be really measure (only known by Allah S.W.T), however, it can be observed when one is faced with such challenges, trials, and temptation, one might turn to Allah more. This type of character, whose faith increases when tested, is the character of a true Muslim.

Apart from the vital element of religious devotion, knowledge also plays an important role in regulating the influence. It is evident that with lack of knowledge on religious teaching, one will be weak against the rapid onslaught of SMM's influence. This finding is compatible with Theory of Schema (Kan, 1929; Bartlett, 1932; Piaget, 1976), which in essence indicated that someone with prior knowledge on something is more likely to practice critical thinking rather than to blindly take any information served to them.

The importance of seeking knowledge is also outlined in the hadith of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W, where seeking knowledge is obligated for every Muslim (Sunnah Ibn Majah 224, Sahih according to Al-Albani), moreover, another hadith from Prophet Muhammad S.A.W also mentioned that "Whoever takes a path upon which to obtain knowledge, Allah makes the path to Paradise easy for him," (Narrated by Abu Hurairah, graded Sahih (Darussalam), Reference: Jami' at-Tirmidhi 2646, Book 41, Hadith 2, English translation: Vo. 5, Book 39, Hadith 2646).

With knowledge, one will able to discern the right information, as well as practice critical thinking. Such as the controversial 'banned' of *Maulidur Rasul* in Saudi Arabia, which according to some source is simply not celebrated and not banned, however, this is still seen as strange on the eyes of society that is practicing such celebration widely and merrily (for example in Brunei and neighbouring countries). However, it must be taken into consideration that Saudi Arabic predominately practice Hanbali school of thought (*mazhab*), unlike Brunei and majority of Malay peninsula countries, whom practice Syafie school of thought. In Saudi Arabia, celebrating *Maulidur Rasul* is consider as *bid'ah*, which is a form of addition or innovation that is does not exist in Al-Qur'an or Sunnah (Web-5), and considered as newly form practices because it did not practiced during the time of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W, nor his companion (*sahabah*) (Haj, 2002). This is according to the hadith of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W that forbid *bid'ah*, "Whomever Allah guides, no one can lead him astray. Whomever Allah sends astray, no one can guide him. The truest word is the Book of Allah, and the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad. The evilest matters in religion are those that are newly invented, for every newly invented matter is an innovation, every innovation is misguidance, and every misguidance is in the Hellfire." (Source: Sunan al-Nasa'i 1578, Grade: Sahih (authentic) according to Al-Albani).

Nevertheless, it is practiced in Brunei and some neighbouring countries on the basis that, according to fatwas decreed by mufti from Brunei as well as Malaysia it does not contradict with any *dalil* and it bring a lot of benefits rather than detriments (Web-6; Web-7). Moreover, many of the practices today is not practice during the time of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W, such as using social media as a form of spreading da'wah or utilising the technology to spread knowledge and the likes. Therefore, this form of *bid'ah* (innovation) is known as *hassanah* (good) or *mahmudah* (commendable), which is practices that bring good and considered as commendable (Web-5).

The same issue goes to the touching of dog, some Muslim are seen practicing such action, this is due to the different in school of thought. Some school of thought ruled it as permissible while some rules it as impermissible. As Syafie school of thought is practiced in Brunei and some neighbouring countries, mufti's fatwa decreed that it is impermissible as deliberately touching *najis* (impure/filth) is considered as *haram* (prohibited) (Web-8; Web-9). JAKIM also proclaimed that purification method is not a valid reason to deliberately touch dog as this action is "similar to intentionally

committing sin out of the ability to repent later” (Web-10). Therefore it is evident that further acquire of knowledge is necessary when facing with SMM influences.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the finding revealed the consistent link between the degree of user’s religious devotion to the influence of social media misuse on faith. The study also highlighted the crucial role of knowledge in managing the impact of the influence. Ultimately, the influence of social media misuse to one’s faith relies deeply on one’s religious devotion. Regardless of what may come if they are devoted Muslim, they will not stray. The implications of this research extend to policy makers, educators, developers and even parents, in understanding the significance of knowledge, religious understanding and commitment in barricading the misuses’ influence on faith. Subsequently, future research may delve deeper on the aspect of how religious understanding influence the effects and impacts.

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- Web-4: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/saudi-arabia-hosts-first-concert-female-performer-country-s-history-n827306>, consulted 20 November 2023.

Web-5:

<https://www.pelitabrunei.gov.bn/Lists/Agama/NewDisplayForm.aspx?ID=210&ContentTypeId=0x0100F6D57A3EFF61B0428F673FEADAB5CF1E>

Web-6: <https://muftiwp.gov.my/en/artikel/bayan-linnas/1048-bayan-linnas-siri-ke-80-hukum-menyambut-maulid-al-rasul>

Web-7:

<https://www.pelitabrunei.gov.bn/Lists/Agama/NewDisplayForm.aspx?ID=173&ContentTypeId=0x0100F6D57A3EFF61B0428F673FEADAB5CF1E>

Web-8:

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