The Role of Social Media as an Alternative Learning Resource Among University Students

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Abstract
This research is motivated by the increasing use of social media among students of STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq, which has not yet been fully optimized as a learning resource. Although social media holds great potential in supporting digital learning, several problems persist, such as low levels of digital literacy, a lack of lecturer guidance in academic use of social media, and a tendency among students to focus more on entertainment rather than educational content. This study aims to analyze students' patterns of social media use, the types and forms of educational content utilized, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors within the context of modern Islamic learning. The research employs a qualitative descriptive method with data collection techniques including observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving active students from various study programs. The findings reveal that social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp have become effective alternative learning sources, particularly in enhancing students' understanding of Islamic materials and academic communication. Students have also begun to act as producers of simple educational content, although they still face challenges in information curation and maintaining digital learning discipline. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of the role of lecturers and institutions in integrating social media into Islamic value-based learning strategies to foster a reflective, creative, and digitally literate learning culture.

INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology in the 21st century has brought significant changes to various aspects of human life, including education(Büyükbaykal, 2015; Supiandi & Lisa, 2018; Yamin, 2019). One of the most prominent phenomena is the increasing use of social media as an integral part of daily life, particularly among the younger generation and university

students(Abbas et al., 2019; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Thomas et al., 2017). Social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and X (Twitter) are not only used for communication and entertainment but are also increasingly utilized as sources of knowledge and learning media(Fatimah, 2024; Samala et al., 2024). This digital transformation has changed the way students acquire information, interact, and construct knowledge. In the digital era, learning processes are no longer confined to formal classroom settings but have expanded into dynamic and interactive virtual spaces. Therefore, the use of social media in educational contexts has become an important phenomenon that needs to be examined in depth(Greenhow & Lewin, 2019; Y\ild\ir\im & K\il\iç, 2021). This aligns with the demands of modern education, which emphasize independent learning, creativity, and digital literacy.

In the context of higher education, social media holds great potential to support more flexible and participatory learning processes(Greenhow & Lewin, 2019; Mostafa, 2021). Students can access diverse learning resources, engage in academic discussions, and collaborate with peers and lecturers through various digital platforms(Aduba & Mayowa-Adebara, 2022; Simelane-Mnisi, 2023). Social media also serves as a new space to develop digital literacy, critical thinking, and cross-disciplinary as well as intercultural communication skills(Crist et al., 2017). Through features such as educational videos, online discussion forums, and interactive learning content, students can deepen their understanding of course materials independently(Le Roux & Nagel, 2018). In addition, lecturers can use social media to enrich teaching strategies and build active learning communities. However, on the other hand, unregulated use of social media can lead to distractions, the spread of invalid information, and a decline in students' learning focus. Therefore, utilizing social media as a learning resource requires good digital literacy and appropriate pedagogical guidance.

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam (STAI) KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq, as an Islamic higher education institution, bears the responsibility of preparing Muslim intellectuals who are adaptive to technological developments while maintaining Islamic values. Amid the rapid flow of digitalization, STAI students are expected not only to understand religious knowledge textually but also to use information technology to develop contextual Islamic insights. Social media has the potential to serve as an educational da'wah medium and an alternative learning resource that can enrich students' religious understanding. Nevertheless, the use of social media in the learning process at STAI still

needs to be systematically examined to determine its effectiveness and usage patterns. This is important to ensure that social media serves not only as a source of entertainment but also as an instrument for strengthening students' scientific literacy and Islamic character.

Although social media offers great opportunities to support learning, in reality, many students have not utilized it optimally for academic purposes. Preliminary observations at STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq indicate that most students tend to use social media more for entertainment, personal communication, or following popular trends rather than for seeking scholarly references. Low digital literacy awareness often causes students to struggle in distinguishing between educational content and invalid information. Moreover, the limited guidance from lecturers in using social media as a learning tool presents another challenge. This situation may create a gap between students' technological abilities and their productive use of technology for academic development. These issues highlight the need for a deeper investigation into the role of social media in supporting students' learning activities at STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq particularly in terms of motivation, learning behavior, and its impact on academic achievement.

Research by Perguna, Apriyanti, and Kurniasih (2021) shows that social media can be an effective alternative for online learning, especially when conventional learning is not possible. The use of platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube has been proven to enhance student interaction, motivation, and engagement in the learning process. This study also emphasizes that the success of social media-based online learning heavily depends on the creativity of educators and students' ability to utilize technology optimally(Perguna et al., 2021). Research by Susidawati (2023) shows that the use of social media as an alternative learning medium at SMA Negeri 10 Kaur can increase students' interest and participation in learning activities. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube are utilized by teachers to deliver materials, assign tasks, and conduct interactive discussions. This study concludes that social media is effective as an additional learning tool, although supervision and guidance are still necessary to ensure its use remains focused and productive(Susidawati, 2023).

The research by Moghavvemi et al. (2018) shows that YouTube plays an effective role as an additional learning tool that can enhance students' understanding and interest in learning. Educational videos on YouTube help clarify difficult concepts, provide flexibility in learning time, and encourage

independent learning. This study confirms that integrating YouTube into the formal learning process can enrich the learning experience and improve academic outcomes (Moghavvemi et al., 2018). The results of Mpungose's (2020) research indicate that social media functions as a learning platform that is a blend of formal and informal learning in higher education. Students use social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube to discuss academic topics, share materials, and deepen their understanding outside the classroom. This study concludes that social media has great potential to support collaborative and flexible learning, although guidance is needed to ensure it remains aligned with formal academic goals (Mpungose, 2020).

Based on the review of previous studies, it is evident that there remains a research gap concerning the use of social media as an alternative learning resource in local Islamic higher education institutions, particularly at STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq. Few studies have comprehensively explored how students utilize social media in their learning processes—both in expanding religious and academic knowledge. Moreover, there is a lack of research examining social media's role from students' perspectives, including their motivations, learning strategies, and the forms of support they receive from the campus environment. Addressing this gap is crucial for educational institutions to formulate more effective strategies for integrating social media into learning activities. By understanding the roles and challenges of social media use, institutions can design educational policies that are relevant and adaptive to the digital era.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the role of social media as an alternative learning resource among students of Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq. Specifically, it seeks to examine students' patterns of social media use, the types of content utilized for learning, and its impact on motivation and learning outcomes. This research also aims to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors in the use of social media as a means of independent learning. The results are expected to provide practical contributions to the development of technology-based learning strategies within STAI. Furthermore, this study is expected to offer valuable insights for lecturers in designing more contextual, adaptive, and student-centered learning models suitable for the digital generation. Thus, social media can truly serve as a medium for strengthening scientific literacy, Islamic values, and a productive academic culture.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of social media use as an alternative learning resource among students at STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq(Mardawani, 2020; Pinton Setya Mustafa, 2020). The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for the depiction of students' social realities and learning behaviors naturally, without researcher intervention. Through this method, the researcher can explore students' meanings, perceptions, and experiences in utilizing social media to support academic activities. The focus of the study is directed toward how students use platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok as informal learning media(Khair et al., 2025). Thus, this research not only highlights the frequency of use but also examines the educational values and forms of interaction that emerge from such activities. The findings are expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the contribution of social media to the learning process in Islamic higher education institutions.

The primary data sources in this study are active students of STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq from various study programs, particularly those who actively use social media in their daily lives. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, considering their level of activity and the relevance of their experiences to the research topic(Gunawan, 2023). In addition to students, academic advisors were also involved as supporting informants to obtain institutional perspectives regarding the use of social media in the learning process. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and digital documentation(Sugiyono, 2016). The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing the researcher to explore broader and deeper information according to the context that emerged during the process. Meanwhile, observations were used to examine patterns of social media use, forms of interaction, and students' responses to educational content on digital platforms.

The collected data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification(Huberman & Miles, 2002). In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and categorized key information relevant to the research focus. The reduced data were then presented in descriptive narrative form to facilitate interpretation and meaning-making. To ensure the validity of the findings, source and method triangulation were employed by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation to obtain valid and reliable data. The researcher also conducted

member checks with informants to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected their intended realities. Through these procedures, the findings are expected to achieve a high level of credibility and authenticity and serve as a basis for developing social media-based learning policies at STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq.

RESULT DAN DISCUSSION

RESULT

A. Patterns of Social Media Use Among Students of STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq

The research findings show that almost all students of STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq own and actively use social media in their daily lives, both for personal and academic purposes. The most frequently used platforms are YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, followed by Facebook and Telegram, which are used with lower intensity. Data from interviews indicate that most students spend between three to six hours per day accessing social media, with the highest frequency occurring in the evening after classes. The main reasons students use social media are for entertainment, social interaction, and keeping up with current information; however, over time, some have begun to use it for educational purposes. Several students stated that social media serves as a practical alternative for finding additional explanations about lecture materials, especially when classroom explanations are considered incomplete. This indicates a shift in orientation from mere entertainment consumption toward the use of social media as a flexible and easily accessible source of knowledge. Thus, social media is no longer viewed as a distraction to learning but is increasingly regarded as a supporting tool for students' academic activities.

Based on observations and in-depth interviews, students at STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq use social media in various learning-related activities. YouTube serves as the primary source for accessing supplementary materials, such as lecturers' lectures, Islamic studies, academic tutorials, and explanations of contemporary Islamic concepts. Meanwhile, Instagram and TikTok are used to obtain short, inspirational content such as motivational quotes, summarized materials, and light educational insights related to religion. Students also frequently join WhatsApp and Telegram groups to share files, discuss assignments, and coordinate academic or organizational activities. Interestingly, some students admitted that social media helps them understand complex topics through visualization and concrete examples presented in engaging ways. This method is

considered more effective than merely reading textbooks because it combines audiovisual elements with popular, easy-to-understand language. Therefore, social media functions as a medium of learning reinforcement that strengthens formal classroom learning.

Field findings also reveal variations in students' behavioral patterns when using social media for learning purposes. Some students have instrumental motivation, using social media to achieve specific academic goals such as preparing for exams, finding references for assignments, or deepening religious knowledge. Others exhibit integrative motivation, using social media for self-development, broadening global perspectives, and strengthening spiritual and social values. Some students actively follow YouTube channels of scholars, lecturers, or Islamic educational institutions they consider credible, while others prefer podcasts, infographics, or short videos that are easily accessible. These motivational differences reflect the diversity of students' learning styles, which are becoming increasingly personal and autonomous in the digital era. Students with high learning awareness tend to filter beneficial content and avoid distractions from entertainment media. However, for others, social media remains a mixed space where educational and entertainment content overlap. This phenomenon highlights the need to strengthen digital literacy and provide guidance so that students can use social media reflectively and productively in academic contexts.

Social media has also shaped new patterns of academic interaction between students, lecturers, and learning communities. Observations indicate that many students use WhatsApp or Telegram groups to discuss assignments, share notes, and coordinate academic activities. Some lecturers have even begun using social media to post announcements, provide feedback, or share links to digital learning materials. This form of communication makes relationships between lecturers and students more open and flexible, occurring in a digital space that is relaxed yet still educational. In addition, students actively engage in public digital discussions, such as commenting on scholarly YouTube channels or participating in Instagram Live sessions. These interactions encourage the formation of collaborative virtual learning communities. However, ethical challenges remain, such as the use of informal language, lack of digital communication etiquette, and limited lecturer responsiveness. This indicates the need for clear academic digital guidelines and culture to ensure that social media interactions remain productive and ethical.

The findings reveal that the patterns of social media use among STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq students reflect a transformation in learning styles from traditional to digital-collaborative learning. Students no longer rely solely on textbooks or lectures but actively seek additional information independently in the online sphere. Social media serves as a bridge connecting formal education with broader non-formal knowledge, thereby reinforcing the principle of lifelong learning within the context of Islamic education. Nevertheless, productive patterns of use are still limited to students with high academic awareness and digital literacy. Others remain trapped in unstructured, consumptive use. Therefore, the roles of institutions and lecturers are crucial in guiding students to manage social media critically, creatively, and in line with Islamic values. With proper mentorship and strategy, social media can function optimally as a tool to enhance learning quality and strengthen students' intellectual character in the digital era.

B. Types and Forms of Educational Content Utilized

Based on observations and in-depth interviews, students at STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq demonstrate highly diverse preferences in utilizing educational content on social media. YouTube is the most dominant platform, as it provides comprehensive, free learning materials that can be accessed anytime as needed. Students often watch videos on Islamic lectures, Qur'anic exegesis, jurisprudence (fiqh), ethics (akhlaq), as well as contemporary topics such as religious moderation, digital da'wah, and Islamic leadership. This platform offers easily understandable visual formats that can be replayed at any time, thus supporting independent learning. Meanwhile, Instagram and TikTok are chosen for their short, inspiring, and visually engaging content. Students find that short videos such as reels or shorts help them quickly grasp concepts without the need to read long texts. Moreover, storytelling-based or motivational educational content is considered effective in fostering learning motivation and spiritual awareness. This pattern shows that students have a strong tendency toward dynamic, light, and contextually relevant visual-auditory learning forms that align with their daily lives.

The types of educational content consumed by students can be grouped into three main categories: (1) academic-scientific content, (2) religious and spiritual content, and (3) self-development content based on Islamic values. Academic content includes learning videos on research methodology, Islamic educational philosophy, the history of Islamic thought, and

scholarly discussions between lecturers and academic figures. Religious and spiritual content includes short sermons, Qur'an and Hadith studies, and inspirational stories presented visually. Meanwhile, self-development content focuses on study motivation, time management, manners toward teachers, and social media ethics. Students believe that these three categories complement one another in nurturing cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects the core goals of Islamic education. Some students even mentioned that modern da'wah content on YouTube or Instagram often helps them understand Islamic values more contextually and in ways relevant to the realities of the younger generation. Thus, social media functions not only as a source of information but also as a learning environment that strengthens the integration between knowledge and Islamic values.

An interesting phenomenon found in this research is the transformation of students' roles from mere consumers to producers of simple educational content. Many students have begun actively creating and sharing content such as religious infographics, Hadith quotations, lecture summaries, and short reflective videos. This activity indicates that students are internalizing the values of collaborative learning and knowledge sharing. Some even formed small online communities to discuss Islamic and educational issues digitally. In this context, social media becomes both a creative space and a digital laboratory for students to develop critical thinking, writing, and da'wah communication skills. Activities such as producing visual da'wah content, writing reflective captions, or sharing lecture notes online not only strengthen academic understanding but also cultivate essential digital communication skills for the modern era. This phenomenon proves that social media use is not purely consumptive but can be an integral part of active learning and digital literacy grounded in Islamic values.

Overall, the pattern of educational content utilization demonstrates that students at STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq have adapted to an increasingly open and participatory digital learning ecosystem. The diversity of content types and access methods reflects a paradigm shift from conventional learning toward an open learning ecosystem, where social media becomes an integral component of the educational process. However, this study also reveals challenges such as digital literacy gaps, limited ability to curate credible content, and exposure to unverified information. Therefore, guidance from lecturers and institutions is needed so that students can critically select

and utilize content in accordance with responsible Islamic scholarly principles. An integrative approach combining formal classroom learning with social media engagement should continue to be developed so that students can manage educational content reflectively, creatively, and with a focus on strengthening Islamic character. Through this strategy, social media can evolve from mere entertainment into an effective instrument for nurturing a digitally literate, ethical, and visionary academic generation.

C. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Use of Social Media

The use of social media in education cannot be separated from the various factors that drive and facilitate digital-based learning processes. At STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq, social media has evolved into an alternative learning space that complements formal academic activities in the classroom. Students utilize various platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Instagram to access Islamic knowledge, engage in discussions, and interact with lecturers and fellow students. This shift in learning behavior did not occur suddenly; rather, it is the result of synergy between technological advancement, infrastructure availability, and the social as well as academic cultural readiness of the campus community. Therefore, understanding the factors that support the successful use of social media is essential to assess how well the campus environment can adapt to the ever-evolving dynamics of digital education. The supporting factors include:

a. Wide and relatively stable internet access within the campus environment.
b. Availability of personal digital devices (smartphones/laptops).
c. Abundance of educational content in the Indonesian language across various platforms.
d. Social support from peers and the academic community on campus.
e. Ease of collaboration and communication through WhatsApp, Telegram, or Google Classroom groups.

The supporting factors do not merely serve as technical prerequisites for the use of social media but also function as the foundation that determines the direction and quality of digital learning within higher education institutions. In the context of STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq, students' success in using social media productively is influenced by a combination of technological, social, and cultural aspects that interact with one another. Easy access to the

internet, the availability of personal digital devices, and lecturers' openness toward social media–based learning have created an adaptive and collaborative learning ecosystem. These factors enable students to develop independent learning skills, broaden their academic perspectives, and foster a positive sense of digital literacy. Therefore, the presence of strong supporting factors serves as an essential asset for the institution in integrating social media as part of a learning strategy grounded in Islamic values and modern technology.

Although social media offers various conveniences and opportunities to support the learning process at STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq, research findings indicate that several obstacles still limit its optimal use. These inhibiting factors are not only technical but also encompass academic, psychological, and institutional dimensions. On the technical side, limited internet connectivity, data quota constraints, and inadequate digital devices pose challenges for some students, especially those from areas with underdeveloped technological infrastructure. Academically, the lack of digital literacy and insufficient guidance from lecturers in directing the scholarly use of social media lead students to use these platforms more for entertainment than for learning. Moreover, the absence of institutional policies that systematically integrate social media into the learning strategy also hinders its vast potential. The inhibiting factors are as follows:

a. Lack of lecturer guidance in utilizing social media for academic purposes.
b. Low level of students' digital literacy in selecting valid and reliable sources of information.
c. Absence of institutional policies regulating the use of social media in the learning process.
d. Limited internet data, unstable network connections, and other technical constraints..

DISCUSSION

The pattern of social media use among students at STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq reflects a transformation in learning approaches from conventional methods toward technology-based digital learning. This phenomenon aligns with George Siemens' Connectivism Theory (2005), which posits that knowledge is stored and constructed through interconnected networks between individuals and digital information sources. In this context, social media functions as a learning network that enables students to access, share, and construct knowledge collaboratively.

Students are no longer dependent on lecturers as their sole source of knowledge; instead, they actively explore various sources from YouTube, Instagram, and other platforms to enrich their understanding. Thus, social media strengthens the student-centered learning paradigm, positioning students as active agents in the learning process rather than passive recipients of information.

In addition to Connectivism, the use of social media as a learning tool can also be explained through Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes that individuals learn through observation of others' behaviors particularly from credible models or figures. In the context of STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq students, they often learn from and emulate digital da'wah content, lecturers' sermons, and educational videos by Islamic scholars available on social media. When students watch, imitate presentation styles, or reflect on religious messages delivered through videos, the process of social learning occurs simultaneously. This shows that social media serves as an effective space for modeling behavior, where intellectual and Islamic values are transmitted through visual and interactive representations. Hence, social media is not only a source of knowledge but also a medium for internalizing values and shaping character.

The pattern of social media use among students is also closely related to the concept of Self-directed learning. Knowles (1975) defines self-directed learning as a process in which individuals take the initiative to identify their learning needs, set goals, determine resources, and evaluate their own learning outcomes. The findings indicate that students at STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq demonstrate characteristics of self-directed learners through their habits of seeking additional materials, following educational channels, and creating their own learning content. These activities indicate a high level of learning autonomy, where students can navigate digital information without constant lecturer supervision. This also illustrates that social media functions as a learning scaffold that supports lifelong learning. However, its effectiveness largely depends on students' digital literacy and reflective awareness in selecting and interpreting information critically.

In the context of Islamic education, the use of social media as a learning resource can also be linked to the integrative-holistic theory of Islamic education, which emphasizes the unity of knowledge ('ilm), action ('amal), and ethics (akhlaq). When used wisely, social media can serve as a medium that integrates cognitive (knowledge), affective (values and attitudes), and psychomotor

(digital skills) aspects. For instance, students not only gain knowledge from religious videos but also practice it through digital da'wah, sharing motivational content, and engaging in positive online communities. This aligns with Al-Attas' concept of ta'dib education as a process that not only transfers knowledge but also cultivates adab (proper conduct) and spiritual awareness. Therefore, social media can become a medium for modern and contextual Islamic education transformation while remaining grounded in tawhidic values and academic ethics.

Nevertheless, *Cognitive Load Theory* (Sweller, 1988) should also be considered to understand the negative impacts of excessive social media use. Students who are overly exposed to digital information risk experiencing information overload, a condition in which cognitive capacity is overwhelmed by complex and unstructured data. In the case of STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq, some students admitted difficulty focusing due to distractions from non-educational content on social media. This highlights the need for digital curation strategies and academic mentoring to help students filter relevant information without losing academic focus. The theory underscores that while social media has significant potential as a learning resource, it must be balanced with cognitive load management and a mindful approach to distinguishing between entertainment and education.

In conclusion, the pattern of social media use among STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq students represents an evolution of learning that integrates Connectivism Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Self-Directed Learning within the framework of Islamic educational values. Social media facilitates collaborative, reflective, and contextual learning, yet it also demands high digital literacy and sufficient institutional support. Going forward, Islamic educational institutions should design pedagogical strategies based on digital literacy empowerment, ensuring that students become not only passive media consumers but also ethical, productive, and value-driven content creators. With a balanced integration of theory and practice, social media can optimally serve as a 21st-century learning instrument that fosters intellectual growth, spirituality, and social responsibility among students.

CONCLUSION

Social media plays a significant role as an alternative learning resource for students at STAI KH. Muhammad Ali Shodiq, as it facilitates independent, collaborative, and contextual learning processes aligned with the needs of the digital generation. Students utilize social media not only to

seek academic and religious information but also to develop critical thinking, communication, and digital literacy skills. This pattern aligns with *Connectivism* and *Social Learning Theory*, which emphasize the importance of knowledge networks and observation-based learning within the digital ecosystem. However, its effectiveness still depends on students' level of digital literacy and the guidance provided by lecturers in directing the academic and ethical use of social media. Therefore, active involvement from institutions and educators is essential in developing social media–based pedagogical strategies to strengthen Islamic values, enhance academic quality, and foster a reflective and productive learning culture in the era of digital transformation.

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