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Social Media, Religion, and Student Mental Health: Associations with Anxiety and Burnout

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Abstract

Religion can support mental well-being, yet social media exposes students to diverse religious messages whose psychological effects may differ by content type. Prior research often treats religion as a single construct and seldom examines how specific online religious content relates to anxiety and burnout. This study investigated associations between distinct categories of religious content on social media and levels of anxiety and burnout among students at Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIs) in Lampung, Indonesia. A quantitative survey of 1,098 PTKI students assessed exposure to five content types: compassion–tranquility, educational, inspirational–motivational, fear–punishment, and ritual–worship. Anxiety and burnout were measured using the Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SAS-A; α=.91) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student Survey (MBI-SS; α=.86). Hierarchical multiple regression tested linear, quadratic, and interaction effects, adjusting for age, institutional type, platform, frequency, and daily duration. For anxiety (final R^2=.037), motivational content predicted lower anxiety, whereas fear–punishment—and to a lesser extent educational—content predicted higher anxiety. Compassion–tranquility and ritual–worship were non-significant. For burnout (final R^2=.079), the control variables explained most of the variance. Daily social media duration was positively associated with burnout, and platform differences emerged (higher on Facebook, lower on YouTube compared with TikTok). Private PTKI students reported lower burnout than state PTKI students. Although no nonlinear or interaction effects were found for anxiety, burnout showed curvilinear patterns (Compassion^2↑, Fear^2↓) and buffering by motivational content. Overall, associations between religious content exposure and mental health were small yet consistent. Findings suggest value in promoting motivational, skills-oriented messages, limiting fear-based framing, tailoring content to platform dynamics, and encouraging balanced screen time. Future research should incorporate broader psychosocial factors and longitudinal designs to clarify causal mechanisms.

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, social media has become integral to everyday life, particularly for university students who actively engage across multiple platforms (Aduba & Mayowa-Adebara, 2022). Religious content, for examples faith-based motivational messages, calls to worship, and narratives that emphasize sin or divine punishment, is frequently encountered (Abusharif, 2023) and may influence psychological well-being, including anxiety and burnout (Liu & Ma, 2020). While much of the literature generally concludes that religion benefits mental health, the research gap lies in the absence of a content-specific mapping of online religious categories and their associations with students' burnout and anxiety. This study tests whether distinct

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categories of online religious content are differentially associated with burnout and anxiety among students, moving beyond generalized religiosity toward content-specific exposure within algorithm-driven platforms.

Prior evidence indicates that religiosity can relate to improved mental health through mechanisms of meaning-making, social support, and religious coping (Vaingankar et al., 2021), and that individuals experiencing mental-health symptoms often seek religious instruction as part of recovery trajectories (Park, J. I., Hong, J. P., Park, S., & Cho, 2012). Practices such as Qur'anic recitation, ritual prayer, meditation, religious counseling, and other spiritual activities have been linked to reduced distress (Davis & Epkins, 2008; Lang et al., 2020; Mans et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2023). However, most of these findings derive from offline or congregational settings, for example mosque-based study circles rather than from exposure to religious content mediated by social media.

Within digital ecosystems, algorithms determine what users see and how frequently they see it, producing heterogeneous exposure patterns across applications such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok (Costa, 2018; Dijck & Poell, 2013; Fielding et al., 2016; Luik et al., 2025; Munaro et al., 2020). In these environments, religious messages also vary widely, from compassion or motivation-oriented material and devotional exhortations to fear or threat-centered narratives, yet studies seldom differentiate among these types, despite the likelihood of divergent psychological effects. Moreover, certain strands of religious messaging may be associated with heightened distress, particularly when they involve polarized discourse that amplifies communal tension (Naula et al., 2022), provoke social media rumination and self-reflective anxiety (Lannin et al., 2025), reinforce religious-based stigma among marginalized groups (Szymanski & Carretta, 2020), or promote negative religious coping strategies during times of crisis (Cheng & Ying, 2023).

By reassessing the links between specific religious content types and psychological outcomes among university students, this study underscores that religious content does not uniformly confer mental-health benefits. Focusing on the context of Indonesian students, this study evaluates the associations between specific categories of online religious content and levels of anxiety and burnout. The principal contribution is a content-differentiated, platform-aware assessment that moves beyond global measures of religiosity toward what students actually consume online, providing an initial map of content types that tend to align with more favorable or unfavorable mental-health profiles.

Literature Review

Religion is portrayed in the literature as having ambivalent effects on mental health. On the one hand, religiosity and religious practice can function as psychological resources—via meaning-making, social support, and religious coping, for exsamples; Qur'anic recitation, prayer, meditation, and religious counseling, which are associated with reduced distress and enhanced well-being (Davis & Epkins, 2008; Lang et al., 2020; Mans et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2023; Park, J. I., Hong, J. P., Park, S., & Cho, 2012; Vaingankar et al., 2021). On the other hand, exposure to negative portrayals of religion and solitary forms of religiosity (with limited communal support) are linked to less favorable mental-health outcomes than collective practices (Acevedo, 2010; Stroope et al., 2017). Moreover, religiously framed hate speech and bullying have been associated with increased anxiety, depression, and other risks among vulnerable groups (Ibrahim, 2022; Sowe et al., 2014).

In digital contexts, the relationship between social media and mental health among adolescents and emerging adults is complex. A broad set of studies links social-media use to internalizing symptoms (anxiety, depression) through mediators such as social comparison, fear of missing out (FOMO), cyberbullying, and sleep disruption, while also acknowledging that platforms can provide social support, health information, and prosocial interaction

opportunities (Lahti et al., 2024; Saleem et al., 2024; Steinsbekk et al., 2024; Taddi et al., 2024; Walburg et al., 2016; Yue & Rich, 2023). These effects are further shaped by algorithmic curation of content for example, echo-chamber dynamics that structures specific information-consumption patterns with psychological consequences for users (Chang et al., 2025; Laczi & Póser, 2025).

The outstanding research gap concerns a clear mapping of religious content types on social media such as educational, ritual/devotional, motivational, compassion/tranquility, and fear–punishment (including exclusivist content) and how each relates differentially to anxiety and burnout within platform ecosystems. It also remains unclear whether these associations are strictly linear or change at higher levels of exposure, and whether there are cross-content interactions that amplify or attenuate effects. This study addresses that gap by differentiating the categories of religious content that students actually consume on social media and examining their associations with anxiety and burnout, while accounting for cross-platform differences and potential departures from linearity.

Rationale of the study

Several studies have highlighted the psychological impact of exposure to religious content on mental health, particularly anxiety and burnout, demonstrating that positive messages, such as motivational and spiritual reinforcement, may enhance psychological resilience, whereas fear-based narratives have the potential to exacerbate anxiety in certain groups. However, prior research has generally not provided a detailed account of how different types of religious content consumed via social media influence university students, despite this demographic's frequent exposure to diverse forms of religious messaging amidst substantial academic and social pressures. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the associations between exposure to distinct types of religious content on social media and university students' levels of anxiety and burnout. Addressing this gap, the present study hypothesizes that exposure to religious content exerts an influence, albeit a modest one, on students' burnout and anxiety levels, by grouping religious content into five categories, namely: (1) content related to compassion and tranquility, (2) educational content, (3) inspirational and motivational content, (4) fear- and punishment-oriented content, and (5) ritual and worship content.

METHODS

Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional design was employed to examine associations between students' exposure to religious social-media content and mental-health outcomes (anxiety and burnout), in line with the study's objective to analyze how different content types relate to these outcomes among university students. Consistent with quantitative traditions, this approach provided a systematic framework for data collection, measurement, and analysis using standardized procedures (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Hierarchical multiple regression was applied in sequential blocks—entering control variables first, then mean-centered polynomial terms to capture curvature, and finally interaction terms—to evaluate incremental explanatory power and the robustness of the predictive model.

Participants

The sample size for this study's multivariate analysis was determined using G*Power analysis. Power analysis determines the minimum sample size by taking into account the part of a model with the largest number of predictors (Cheah et al., 2020). For G*Power calculation, the researchers applied an effect size of 0.15 (medium effect), a significance level (α) of 0.05, a statistical power (1-β) of 0.80, and five predictor variables—namely, compassion and

tranquility content, educational content, inspirational and motivational content, fear- and punishment-oriented content, and ritual and worship content. Based on these parameters, the suggested minimum sample size was 92 respondents. However, this study involved 1,098 respondents (approximately ten times larger than the minimum requirement).

A purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit 1,098 students from various Islamic Higher Education Institutions (*Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam*, PTKIs) in the Lampung region. This sample size was chosen to ensure sufficient statistical power for correlational and multiple regression analyses in quantitative research, as well as to capture the diversity of students' experiences in accessing religious content through digital media. The selection of PTKI students as respondents was based on their high level of exposure to religious content—through formal coursework, social environments, and digital platforms. Moreover, PTKI students often face academic and social pressures that may contribute to symptoms of anxiety and emotional exhaustion (burnout), making them a particularly relevant population for investigation in this context.

Ethical Consideration

The study ensured that participants received clear information about the study's aims, procedures, and the minimal risks involved. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants beforehand. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants were maintained throughout; no sensitive or personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were analyzed in aggregate. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. The online survey, non-interventional and conducted among adult university students, was designed to minimize any potential harm. The study adhered to the Declaration of Helsinki and applicable institutional and national standards for social-behavioral research. In line with institutional policy at the time of data collection, formal ethics approval was not required for anonymous, minimal-risk survey research.

Instruments

This study employed a set of questionnaire developed to measure exposure to religious content on social media, as well as levels of anxiety and burnout among university students. The instrument consisted of three main components, presented as follows:

Religious Content Exposure Questionnaire assessed students' exposure to five main categories of religious content commonly encountered on social media: (1) compassion and tranquility content, (2) educational content, (3) inspirational and motivational content, (4) fear- and punishment-oriented content, and (5) ritual and worship content. To illustrate, sample items included: "I often watch videos or read articles that convey God's (Allah's) compassion toward His servants" (compassion and tranquility); "I often watch Islamic motivational videos that inspire me to become a better person" (inspirational and motivational); and "I encounter social media content that warns of punishment for those who neglect religious observance" (fear and punishment). Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating greater exposure to the respective content type. Validity and reliability tests were conducted to ensure the suitability of the religious content exposure instrument for research use. Construct validity was examined using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with Principal Axis Factoring and Direct Oblimin rotation. The results indicated a KMO value of 0.921 and a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, $\chi^2(190) = 9{,}750.186$, $p < .001$, demonstrating that the data were appropriate for factor analysis. The EFA supported a five-dimensional structure consistent with the theoretical framework—compassion and tranquility, educational, inspirational and motivational, fear- and punishment-oriented (reverse-scored items), and ritual and worship—with communalities ranging from 0.31

to 0.76. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha showed good internal consistency across all dimensions (α = .707–.759), and all items exhibited corrected item–total correlations greater than 0.30, indicating that the instrument is valid and reliable for subsequent analyses.

Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SAS-A) was used to measure social anxiety. The SAS-A is a widely utilized instrument in psychological research and consists of 18 items rated on a five-point Likert scale. Example items (adapted to the study context) include: "I feel stressed or overwhelmed when trying to understand or interpret religious content on social media", "I worry about receiving criticism or negative judgments when discussing religious content on social media", and "I am afraid that others may disapprove of or dislike the religious content I post on social media". The Indonesian version of the SAS-A has been validated in previous studies, demonstrating strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.91.

Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student Survey (MBI-SS) was used to assess academic burnout across three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, cynicism toward studies, and reduced academic efficacy. The MBI-SS also employs a five-point Likert scale. Sample items adapted to this context include: "I feel emotionally exhausted after consuming religious content on social media", "I find it difficult to concentrate and solve problems in my studies or other activities because I am distracted by religious content on social media", and "I have learned many interesting things during my studies, yet I sometimes feel that the time I spend engaging with religious content on social media could be used more productively". Previous research has established its validity and reliability among student populations. In this study, Cronbach's alpha value was 0.86 on the dimensions measured.

Procedures

This study employed a quantitative approach through an online survey administered to students enrolled at Islamic Higher Education Institutions (*Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam*, PTKIs) in the Lampung region. The questionnaire was developed using the KoboToolbox application. Data was collected between December 2024 and January 2025 by distributing the survey link via social media platforms, academic WhatsApp groups, and student networks from intra- and extra-campus organizations. A purposive sampling technique was applied, with inclusion criteria as follows: (1) active PTKI students, (2) residing in the Lampung region, and (3) willing to participate in the survey voluntarily. Within approximately two months, responses were obtained from 1,098 participants who met the eligibility criteria. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Informed consent was obtained electronically through a consent form presented at the beginning of the online questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Analyses were conducted in IBM SPSS Statistics 24.0. Descriptive statistics summarized respondent characteristics, patterns of religious-content exposure (frequency, platform, duration, and content types), and exposure, anxiety, and burnout scores (means, SDs), alongside scale reliability (α/ω) and preliminary correlations. The effects of exposure on anxiety and burnout were examined using hierarchical multiple regression: Model 1 entered demographic and platform-use covariates; Model 2 added mean-centered squared terms for theoretically motivated exposure dimensions; Model 3 introduced interactions among centered predictors (e.g., fear-based content × motivation; compassion-based content × motivation). Model performance was evaluated using R^2, ΔR^2, and F-change, and we report B, SE, β, 95% CIs, and two-tailed p (α = .05). Assumptions were assessed on residuals: normality (Q–Q plots, histograms; Shapiro–Wilk/K–S on residuals as sensitivity checks), linearity and

homoscedasticity (standardized residuals vs. predicted values, partial regression plots), multicollinearity (Tolerance/VIF), independence of errors (Durbin–Watson), and influential observations (Cook's D, leverage, standardized/Studentized residuals). Missing-data handling (e.g., listwise deletion/pairwise deletion/multiple imputation) was specified, and sensitivity analyses using alternative functional forms and robust standard errors were performed to probe result stability.

Scope and Limitations of the Methodology

This study specifically focused on students enrolled in Islamic Higher Education Institutions in the Lampung region to examine the influence of five categories of religious content on social media on symptoms of anxiety and burnout. This focus reflects an effort to understand the psychological dynamics of students in the context of digital religious content consumption. Nevertheless, several methodological limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design restricts the ability to draw causal inferences, and the absence of control over external variables, such as academic workload or economic conditions, may affect the validity of the observed relationships. Despite these limitations, the findings offer an important initial contribution and provide a foundation for future research employing longitudinal or experimental designs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

A descriptive statistical analysis was undertaken to provide a comprehensive overview of the demographic characteristics of the respondents, thereby establishing the contextual foundation for subsequent inferential analyses. A total of 1,098 participants fully completed the survey instrument. The variables examined included age distribution, type of educational institution, frequency of religious content consumption, preferred digital platforms for accessing such content, and duration of content engagement.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants (n=1098)

Characteristics	N	%
Age (Mean = 19.93; SD = 1.58)		
Institution		
State Islamic Higher Education Institutions	855	77.9
Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions	243	22.1
Frequency of Religious Content Consumption		
Rarely (almost never)	19	1.69
Rarely (only occasionally)	57	5.20
Sometimes (several times a month)	356	32.45
Frequently (several times a week/every day)	504	45.91
Very often (several times a day)	162	14.75
Platform for Consuming Religious Content		
Facebook	24	2.15
Instagram	323	29.41
Youtube	175	15.93
Tiktok	576	52.49
Duration of Religious Content Consumption		
Less than 15 minutes	391	35.63
15-30 minutes	450	40.99
30-60 minutes	139	12.64
1-2 hours	79	7.16
More than 2 hours	39	3.58

Table 1 shows that Participants' mean age was 19.93 years (SD = 1.58). In terms of institutional affiliation, the majority attended State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN; 77.9%), with 22.1% enrolled in Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIS).

Religious content consumption patterns indicated that 45.91% engaged frequently (several times per week or daily), while 14.75% did so very frequently (several times per day). TikTok was the most used platform (52.49%), followed by Instagram (29.41%) and YouTube (15.93%), with Facebook accounting for only 2.15%. This shows that short video-based platforms (such as TikTok) have become the main medium for the dissemination of religious content among students. Engagement duration was generally short to moderate, with 40.99% spending 15–30 minutes per session and 35.63% spending less than 15 minutes. This means that although the frequency of exposure is relatively high, the duration tends to be short to moderate, which is typical of fast and instant digital media consumption. These demographic patterns contextualize the observed digital religious engagement, reflecting generational media preferences and varying levels of exposure that may shape the reception of religious content.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviation, Minimum, and Maximum

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Compassion and tranquility content	16.58	2.35	8	20
Educational content	15.25	2.44	10	20
Inspirational and motivational content	15.83	2.27	8	20
Fear- and punishment-oriented content	8.4	2.40	4	16
Ritual and worship content	15.46	2.25	8	20
Anxiety symptoms	65.45	10.27	30	90
Burnout symptoms	26.85	8.36	10	43

Descriptive statistics (Table 2) show that among the five categories of religious digital content, compassion and tranquility content recorded the highest mean score (M = 16.58, SD = 2.35), indicating a stronger preference for this type of material. Similar mean values were observed for inspirational and motivational content (M = 15.83, SD = 2.27), ritual and worship content (M = 15.46, SD = 2.25), and educational content (M = 15.25, SD = 2.44). In contrast, fear- and punishment-oriented content showed a notably lower mean (M = 8.40, SD = 2.40; scale range 4–16), suggesting relatively limited exposure to this type of material. The narrow standard deviations across categories suggest relatively consistent engagement among respondents. Anxiety symptoms had a mean score of 65.45 (SD = 10.27) on a scale of 30–90, indicating moderate-to-high levels within the sample. Burnout symptoms showed a lower mean of 26.85 (SD = 8.36) within a range of 10–43, though variability remained notable across participants.

Overall, the findings indicate that respondents consume a variety of religious content, with compassion- and tranquility-oriented material being most prominent. The implications of these patterns were examined by estimating hierarchical multiple regression models that assessed the simultaneous effects of the five content types on anxiety and burnout. In addition, the baseline model was extended to evaluate possible non-linearities and theory-driven interactions.

Predictor of Anxiety Among PTKI Students

A hierarchical multiple regression was estimated using four blocks of predictors. Model 1 included age, institutional type, platform of primary use for consuming religious content, frequency and daily duration of religious content consumption. Model 2 added the five standardized dimensions of religious content exposure (compassion–tranquility, educational, motivational, fear–punishment, ritual–worship). Model 3 introduced quadratic terms for

compassion–tranquility and fear–punishment to test non-linear associations, and Model 4 added the interactions Fear×Motivation and Compassion×Motivation.

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Anxiety Symptoms

Predictor Variable	Model 1β	Model 2β	Model 3β	Model 4β
Controls				
Age	0.042	0.054	0.053	0.052
PTKI (PTKIN:0; PTKIS:1)	0.065*	0.063*	0.063*	0.062
Facebook vs TikTok	−0.084**	−0.088**	−0.085**	−0.086**
Instagram vs TikTok	−0.003	0.008	0.011	0.007
YouTube vs TikTok	0.020	0.029	0.026	0.032
Frequency (z)	−0.018	−0.015	−0.024	−0.027
Daily duration (z)	−0.034	−0.030	−0.034	−0.034
Content Dimensions				
Compassion and tranquility content		0.083	0.064	0.067
Educational content		0.079	0.092	0.115*
Inspirational and motivational content		−0.128*	−0.129**	−0.142 **
Fear- and punishment-oriented content		0.126*	0.133*	0.132*
Ritual and worship content		0.074	0.080*	0.070
Quadratic terms (z^2)				
$(\text{Compassion})^2$			−0.046	−0.047
$(\text{Fear})^2$			−0.016	0.051
Interactions (z·z)				
Fear × Motivation				0.111
Compassion × Motivation				0.039
R^2	0.017	0.032	0.035	0.037
Adjusted R^2	0.010	0.022	0.022	0.023
R^2 change	0.017	0.016	0.003	0.002
F / ΔF	2.596*	3.520**	1.509 (ΔF)	1.087 (ΔF)
Sig. ΔF	0.012	0.004	0.222	0.338

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

As shown in Table 3, Model 1 was statistically significant yet modest in magnitude ($R^2 = 0.017$; Fchange(7,1081) = 2.596, p = .012). Within this block, Facebook (vs TikTok) was associated with lower anxiety (β = −.086, t = −2.779, p = .006), and PTKIS (vs PTKIN) showed a marginally higher level of anxiety (β ≈ .062, t = 1.965, p ≈ .050). Age, Instagram, YouTube, frequency, and duration were not significant.

After adding the five content dimensions in Model 2, model fit improved significantly to $R^2 = .032$ ($\Delta R^2 = .016$; Fchange(5,1076) = 3.520, p = .004). In the final specification (Model 4), a consistent pattern emerged: exposure to motivational content predicted lower anxiety (β = −.142, t = −2.791, p = .005), whereas fear–punishment content predicted higher anxiety (β = .132, t = 2.506, p = .012). Educational content also showed a small positive association with anxiety (β = .115, t = 2.095, p = .036). The coefficients for compassion–tranquility (β = .067, p = .147) and ritual–worship (β = .070, p = .093) did not reach conventional significance.

Adding quadratic terms in Model 3 did not improve fit ($R^2 = .035$; $\Delta R^2 = .003$; Fchange(2,1074) = 1.509, p = .222), indicating no evidence of curvilinear effects for compassion–tranquility or fear–punishment within the observed range. Likewise, including interaction terms in Model 4 did not yield incremental explanatory power ($R^2 = .037$; $\Delta R^2 = .002$; Fchange(2,1072) = 1.087, p = .338). Diagnostics indicated acceptable multicollinearity (VIFs for main effects < 3.5; the largest VIF for an interaction term ≈ 5.4, below the conventional threshold of 10) and well-behaved residuals. Overall, the final model explained 3.7% of the variance in anxiety, suggesting small but reliable associations whereby

motivational content appears protective, whereas fear-oriented—and to a lesser extent educational—content relates to higher anxiety levels.

Predictor of Burnout Among PTKI Students

In addition to the anxiety variable, the same procedure was also applied to the burnout variable as a dependent variable. As shown in Table 4, Model 1 (controls: age, institutional type, platform dummies with TikTok as reference, frequency, and daily duration) was significant (R^2=.063; Fchange (7,1081) =10.330, p<.001). Facebook use (vs TikTok) predicted higher burnout (β=.090, p=.003), YouTube (vs TikTok) predicted lower burnout (β=−.105, p=.001), PTKIS (vs PTKIN) predicted lower burnout (β=−.154, p<.001), and longer daily duration was positively associated with burnout (β=.082, p=.008). Adding the five content dimensions in Model 2 produced a small, non-significant increment (ΔR^2=.004, p=.362). Model 3 added quadratic terms, yielding a non-significant change (ΔR^2=.007, p=.130). In the final specification (Model 4; R^2=.079), higher-order terms were significant: Compassion² (β=.117, p=.012), Fear² (β=−.163, p=.004), Fear×Motivation (β=−.165, p=.036), and Compassion×Motivation (β=−.152, p=.026), suggesting curvilinear and buffering effects of motivational content. Multicollinearity diagnostics were acceptable and residuals approximated normality."

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Burnout Symptoms

Predictor Variable	Model 1β	Model 2β	Model 3β	Model 4β
Controls				
Age	−0.054	−0.056	−0.051	−0.051
PTKI (PTKIN:0; PTKIS:1)	−0.158*	−0.157*	−0.155*	−0.154*
Facebook vs TikTok	0.090 **	0.094 **	0.090 **	0.090 **
Instagram vs TikTok	0.029	0.040	0.046	0.053
YouTube vs TikTok	−0.105 **	−0.102 **	−0.110 **	−0.097 **
Frequency (z)	−0.028	−0.040	−0.040	−0.036
Daily duration (z)	0.084 **	0.085 **	0.085 **	0.082 **
Content Dimensions				
Compassion and tranquility content		0.017	0.032	0.019
Educational content		0.044	0.054	0.038
Inspirational and motivational content		−0.092†	−0.092†	−0.078
Fear- and punishment-oriented content		−0.060	−0.045	−0.055
Ritual and worship content		0.031	0.019	0.019
Quadratic terms (z^2)				
(Compassion)²			0.117	0.117 *
(Fear)²			−0.120**	−0.163 **
Interactions (z·z)				
Fear × Motivation				−0.165 *
Compassion × Motivation				−0.152 *
R^2	0.063	0.067	0.074	0.079
Adjusted R^2	0.057	0.057	0.062	0.066
R^2 change	0.063	0.004	0.007	0.005
F / ΔF	10.330***	1.076 (ΔF)	2.037 (ΔF)	2.823 (ΔF)
Sig. ΔF	<0.001	0.362	0.130	0.060

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Discussion

This study examines the relationship between exposure to religious content on social media and the psychological well-being of PTKI students in Lampung, focusing on symptoms of anxiety and burnout. The analysis reveals a small but consistent association, suggesting that certain types of content exert measurable psychological effects, even if not statistically large.

The combined effect of the five content categories on anxiety is relatively modest (final $R^2 = 0.037$), whereas for burnout, the contribution of content appears through nonlinear patterns and interaction effects ($R^2 = 0.079$). These findings indicate that the influence of "religion" on social media is not generic but contingent upon both content type and usage context. This aligns with previous research suggesting that the relationship between religiosity and psychological well-being in digital environments tends to be complex and contextual, with the intensity and nature of social media engagement shaping the direction of its impact (Liu & Ma, 2020; Wood et al., 2016).

The findings indicate that exposure to religious content exerts a small but statistically significant influence on students' anxiety levels. Specifically, motivational and inspirational material is associated with reduced anxiety, whereas fear–punishment–oriented content correlates with heightened anxiety. These results accord with studies suggesting that religiosity and spiritual engagement can function as protective factors against anxiety by strengthening hope, self-regulation, and a sense of meaning (Ellison et al., 2009; Koenig, 2009). By contrast, exposure to religious messages emphasizing threat or punishment may elicit moral apprehension and rumination, mirroring patterns of increased anxiety linked to problematic social-media use (Yang et al., 2023). The modest positive association observed for educational content may reflect its problem-focused orientation, which for some students can trigger new concerns even as it deepens religious understanding.

Extending these results to burnout, the pattern is more complex. No strong linear effect was detected; however, the final model revealed nonlinearities and interaction effects. Compassion–tranquility content (hereafter, "compassion") showed a positive association with burnout at very high levels of exposure, a profile consistent with empathy-driven exhaustion (compassion fatigue). This accords with evidence that, although spiritual well-being and religiosity generally protect against burnout across professional settings, they may also coincide with moral distress under sustained pressure (Carletto et al., 2022; Lizano et al., 2019). In turn, the negative quadratic effect for fear–punishment content suggests that at higher intensities its association with burnout diminishes, consistent with desensitization or habituation to affectively charged messages reported in social-media burnout research (Liu & Ma, 2020). Finally, the negative interactions between motivational content and both fear and compassion indicate that exposure to motivational messages can buffer psychological exhaustion, aligning with the view that spirituality and religiosity foster emotional resilience (Carneiro et al., 2019).

Beyond content dynamics, platform-use characteristics also emerge as salient correlates of burnout. Students who used YouTube more frequently reported lower burnout than peers who primarily engaged with Facebook or TikTok, whereas longer daily use was associated with higher burnout. These patterns accord with the social-media burnout literature, which links greater usage intensity to psychological fatigue and emotional strain (Avcı & Yıldız Durak, 2025; Gundogan, 2025). Long-form, reflective video formats on platforms like YouTube allow for slower and deeper cognitive processing, whereas short-form, fast-paced, and emotionally charged videos on platforms such as TikTok are more likely to induce fatigue due to higher cognitive load and limited emotional pauses.

Descriptive analyses further show that most students reported low-to-moderate levels of anxiety and burnout, indicating that exposure to religious content is not uniformly detrimental. This pattern may be accounted for by internal protective factors, such as personal religiosity, emotion regulation, and spiritual well-being, that have been shown to mitigate stress and burnout (Bal & Kökalan, 2021; Oglesby et al., 2021). Conversely, students with longer daily usage exhibited more pronounced burnout, underscoring the importance of digital literacy and mindful time management in social-media engagement.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the effects of religious-content exposure on students' psychological well-being are conditioned, if not partially mediated by emotional and

contextual factors, notably emotion-regulation capacity, content type, and duration of use. This evidence supports the view that religiosity and spirituality can operate as coping mechanisms that attenuate anxiety and burnout amid intensive social-media engagement (Algahtani et al., 2022; Mohamed et al., 2022). Accordingly, campus-based interventions should prioritize curating religious content that cultivates hope and reflective positivity, limiting exposure to fear-inducing messages, and strengthening digital literacy education as a core component of mental-health promotion for students in PTKIs.

Limitations and Future Suggestions

This study has several limitations, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, and self-report measures are susceptible to recall and reporting biases. Future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to establish causal direction and exposure dynamics, while testing moderators such as religiosity, coping strategies, and social support. Model specification can be improved by incorporating indicators of academic workload and other contextual variables, evaluating content quality and relevance, and adopting flexible methods that capture non-linearity and interaction, for examples; spline-based approaches or generalized additive models).

CONCLUSION

PTKIs are widely exposed to religious content on social media, yet prior studies have typically assessed the impact of religion in the aggregate; this study addresses that gap by differentiating content types and testing their associations with anxiety and burnout. Analysis indicates small but directionally consistent associations, reinforcing that the influence of religion on social media is not generic but depends on content type and platform context. For anxiety, motivational content correlates with lower anxiety, fear and punishment content correlates with higher anxiety, and educational content shows a small positive association; compassion and tranquility content and ritual and worship content are not significant. For burnout, linear contributions of content are weak, but nonlinearities emerge (a positive squared compassion term and a negative squared fear term) alongside interactions indicating that motivational content buffers the effects of fear and compassion. In addition, longer daily use is associated with higher burnout, while YouTube use is associated with lower burnout and Facebook use with higher burnout relative to TikTok.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

AKU served as the lead researcher, playing a pivotal role in the initial stages by overseeing the conceptualization, designing the study, and coordinating primary data collection efforts. MIA provided significant intellectual contribution by refining the research methodology, conducting a critical review of the literature and theoretical discussions, and leading the article finalization process. AY was responsible for crucial aspects of the research design, executing the primary statistical analysis, and interpreting complex data to generate key findings. RJ contributed to the foundational background of the study by performing a detailed literature review and providing essential assistance in field data collection. Throughout the

process, all authors engaged collaboratively in discussions, provided constructive feedback, and thoroughly reviewed and ensured the final quality of the article

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