

Netnographic Approach: The Influence of Social Media on Zakat Awareness Among Young Muslim Generations

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ABSTRACT

The low realization of zakat collection in Indonesia, which remains below 10% of its national potential, highlights a significant gap between religious awareness and actual zakat payment practices, particularly among the younger generation of Muslims. This study aims to analyze the influence of social media on zakat awareness among the young generation of Muslims using a netnographic approach. The development of digital technology has changed the way the younger generation interacts, obtains information, and understands religious values, including the obligation of zakat. Through a netnographic approach, this study observes the interactions, conversations, and representations of zakat values on various social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X (Twitter). Data were collected through online observations, upload documentation, and content analysis related to zakat campaigns, Islamic influencers, and digital amil zakat institutions. The results show that social media plays a significant role in increasing awareness and participation in zakat among the younger generation, especially through visual narratives, personal testimonials, and humanitarian value-based campaigns. However, it was also found that this level of awareness is still emotional engagement and has not fully transformed into behavioral engagement (the behavior of paying zakat regularly). This research emphasizes the importance of authentic, educational, and interactive digital-based zakat communication strategies to strengthen zakat literacy in the social media era.

Keywords: Netnography, Social Media, Zakat Awareness, Muslim Young Generation, Digital Communication

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INTRODUCTION

Zakat is one of the pillars of Islam that has a fundamental role in realizing social justice, economic equity, and the welfare of the people. In the context of Islamic economics, *zakat* is not only of spiritual value but also has a strategic social and economic dimension as an instrument of redistribution of wealth from the wealthy to the needy (Nuradi, Khatimah, Alim, & Muhammad, 2025; Nurhaliza et al., 2025). However, reality shows that the level of awareness and compliance of the Muslim community with the obligation of *zakat* is still not optimal, especially among the younger generation (Insani, Ilyas, & Syahputra, 2025; Mohamed & Abdulrohim, 2025). Based on data from the National Amil Zakat Agency (BAZNAS), the potential for national *zakat* reaches hundreds of trillions of rupiah every year, but the realization of its collection is still below 10% of this potential (Aditama, Yulianti, & Muslih, 2025; Aini, Putra, & Husniah, 2025). This shows that there is a gap between religious awareness and actual practice in paying *zakat*.

On the other hand, the development of digital technology and social media has brought about major changes in communication patterns and the spread of religious values among the younger generation (Safitri, 2025; Zhang, 2025). Social media such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X (Twitter) have become new spaces for interaction that shape religious identity, behavior, and understanding (Yolanda, Andary, Tamsil, Zaman, & Wei, 2025; Zhang, 2025). The younger generation of Muslims now get more information about *zakat*, alms, and Islamic philanthropy through interactive and visual digital content. This phenomenon shows that social

media has great potential as a medium for da'wah and *zakat* education. However, the effectiveness of social media in building awareness of *zakat* in depth still needs to be comprehensively researched (Azwar, Abubakar, & Irham, 2025; Zulkifli, 2023).

The development of digital technology and social media has changed the way Muslim people, especially the younger generation, understand and practice religious values (Douglass et al., 2022; Zaid, Fedtke, Shin, El Kadooussi, & Ibahrine, 2022). Social media is now a new space for the dissemination of da'wah messages, including the invitation to pay *zakat* as a form of spiritual and social responsibility. This phenomenon shows a shift from conventional da'wah practices to digital da'wah that is interactive, visual, and easily accessible. However, the level of *zakat* awareness among the younger generation still faces various challenges, especially in terms of understanding the essential importance of *zakat* as an instrument of social justice and economic empowerment of the people. Therefore, this study seeks to understand how social media shapes the awareness of *zakat* among the younger generation of Muslims by using a *netnography* approach that emphasizes online behavioral observation (Puspita, Arinta, & Thaker, 2021; Usman, Nurdin, Ahmed, & Huda, 2023).

The *netnography* approach is a relevant method for understanding this phenomenon because it allows researchers to observe and analyze the behaviors, conversations, and meanings that emerge from online communities naturally. Through this approach, it can be identified how the narrative, symbols, and representations of *zakat* are constructed, shared, and responded to by social media users, especially the younger generation of Muslims. The *netnography* approach does not only see social media as a communication channel, but also as a digital cultural space where Islamic values are transformed and reinterpreted according to the context of the times (Asname & Berrada, 2025).

This research is important because the young generation is a strategic group in the sustainability of the *zakat* movement in the future. Understanding how they build *zakat* awareness through social media will contribute to the development of digital da'wah strategies, Islamic financial literacy, and communication innovations of *amil zakat* institutions. Thus, this research is expected to be able to provide an empirical and theoretical picture of the influence of social media on *zakat* awareness among the young generation of Muslims through a *netnography* perspective.

The concept of *zakat* in Islam has spiritual, social, and economic dimensions that are interrelated. Based on QS. At-Taubah verse 103, *zakat* functions as a means of purification of wealth as well as soul, which emphasizes the vertical relationship between humans and Allah SWT as well as the horizontal relationship between the ummah. *Zakat* awareness is not only reflected in compliance with payment, but also from the understanding, intention, and motivation of individuals in fulfilling these obligations as a form of social responsibility. Hafidhuddin (2019) emphasized the three main dimensions of *zakat* awareness, namely cognitive awareness (understanding the law and wisdom of *zakat*), affective (sense of empathy and social responsibility), and conative (real behavior in paying *zakat*). In the context of the younger generation, this awareness is greatly influenced by the way they access information and form perceptions through digital media, where the values of *zakat* are now disseminated through video content, online campaigns, and social media-based social movements.

Social media as a new communication space has an important role in building religious awareness, including *zakat*. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as an internet-

based platform that allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content. In the context of digital da'wah, social media is an effective means to convey Islamic messages visually, interactively, and contextually. Alavi and Aazami (2021) explain that social media strengthens religious engagement and encourages philanthropic behavior among young Muslims through three mechanisms: education, digital empathy, and social influence. The presence of Muslim influencers and *zakat* institutions on digital platforms makes *zakat* da'wah more relevant to the lifestyle of the millennial generation and Gen Z who are used to inspirational and emotional narratives.

The *netnography* approach, as developed by Kozinets (2010), provides a new perspective on socio-religious research in the digital space. *Netnography* is a classic ethnographic adaptation to understand the culture and behavior of online communities through the observation of interactions, comments, and content shared on social media. In *zakat* studies, this approach is important to trace how the younger generation interprets, expresses, and shares *zakat* values digitally. Through documentation and symbolic interpretation, *netnography* is able to uncover the social dynamics that shape religious collective consciousness in virtual space. In addition, the theories of Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and Uses and Gratifications (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974) are used to explain *zakat* behavior in the digital era, where intentions and actions are influenced by attitudes, social norms, behavior control, as well as the need for information and religious identity obtained through the media.

Several previous studies support the positive relationship between social media and increasing *zakat* awareness. Rahman and Hidayat (2021) found that the *zakat* campaign through Instagram increased the *zakat* participation of Muslim students by up to 25%. Aminah (2022) shows that visual da'wah content on TikTok has a significant effect on the understanding and empathy of *zakat* of the millennial generation, while Kozinets (2015) emphasizes the effectiveness of *netnography* in understanding online religious behavior. However, most of the previous research is still descriptive and has not reviewed much of how digital interaction forms behavioral intentions to give *zakat* sustainably (Alimusa, Herianingrum, Adirestuty, & Hakim, 2025; Widiastuti et al., 2025). This research fills this gap by combining planned behavior theory, use and satisfaction theory, and the concept of digital da'wah to explain how social media interaction shapes the *zakat* awareness of the younger generation of Muslims in a more profound and contextual way.

This study aims to analyze the influence of social media on *zakat* awareness among the young generation of Muslims using a *netnography* approach, by observing interactions, conversations, and representations of *zakat* values on various social media platforms. Specifically, this research seeks to understand how digital narratives and social interactions on social media shape cognitive understanding, emotional engagement, and behavioral intentions related to *zakat* among young Muslims. Furthermore, this study also aims to identify the inhibiting and supporting factors in the transformation of *zakat* awareness into real and sustainable *zakat* payment behavior in the digital era.

The benefits of this research are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of Islamic communication science and digital philanthropy by offering an integrated analytical framework that combines *netnography*, planned behavior theory, and the concept of digital da'wah. Practically, the results of this research can be used by *amil zakat* institutions, da'i, and Islamic organizations to design more

effective, educational, and interactive digital-based *zakat* communication strategies. In addition, this research is also expected to increase *zakat* literacy and optimize the role of social media as a modern da'wah medium to encourage the active participation of the younger generation in *zakat*, both as muzakki and as agents of social change in the community.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with the *netnography* method, developed by Kozinets (2010), to investigate social phenomena in the digital space. This approach was chosen because it explored meanings, symbols, and social interactions that arose naturally in online communities. The focus was on understanding how the young generation of Muslims built awareness of *zakat* through activities and conversations on social media. *Netnography* allowed researchers to observe the dynamics of communication and interpretation of religious meaning without intervening in the digital environment, resulting in authentic and contextual data.

The research was conducted on several social media platforms popular among the younger generation of Muslims, such as Instagram, TikTok, and X (Twitter). The research objects included accounts of *amil zakat* institutions such as BAZNAS, Dompot Dhuafa, and Rumah Zakat; Muslim influencers and content creators active in spreading the message of *zakat*; as well as digital communities discussing *zakat* and Islamic philanthropy. Data consisted of primary sources from online observations of *zakat*-related posts, comments, and user interactions, as well as secondary sources such as articles, institution reports, and social media statistics. Data collection involved online participatory observation, digital content documentation, and semi-structured interviews with digital da'wah account managers or active social media users involved in *zakat* campaigns.

Data analysis followed Kozinets' (2015) *netnography* stages: (1) *entrée*, selecting relevant communities and platforms; (2) data collection of texts, images, videos, and comments related to *zakat*; (3) interpretation, analyzing symbolic meanings, narratives, and social interactions; (4) member checking, confirming results with informants or online communities; and (5) representation, presenting findings as scientific narratives. To ensure validity, the study applied source and method triangulation, adequate community involvement, and a trail audit of digital archives, screenshots, and links used in the analysis. This procedure aimed to comprehensively describe the pattern of *zakat* awareness in the digital space among the young generation of Muslims.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Dynamics of Zakat Discourse on Social Media

The results of netnography observations on three main platforms: Instagram, TikTok, and X (Twitter) show that the discourse on *zakat* among the young generation of Muslims is dominated by three main forms:

1. Visual campaigns of *zakat* institutions (infographics, testimonial videos, and the "Zakat via QRIS" program)
2. Personal da'wah content presented by digital influencers or young ustaz
3. Empathy-based social movements such as #ZakatUntukKemanusiaan, #GenerasiBeriManfaat, and #ZakatMudaBerdaya campaigns.

Analysis of user interactions shows that social media is not only a means of information, but also an emotional space where the younger generation expresses their social concerns and Islamic identity. Many users write reflective comments such as:

"It's not just about the poor, it's about the poor."

"I just found out that there is a scarf, MasyaAllah!"

These findings confirm that social media plays a catalyst for increasing cognitive and affective awareness about zakat through educational and inspirational content.

Interaction and Engagement Patterns of the Young Muslim Generation

From the results of interaction analysis (likes, comments, and shares), it was found that the level of user involvement with zakat content was influenced by the form of presentation of the message.

1. Short video content with an emotional narrative (e.g. testimonials of zakat recipients or humanitarian stories) has the highest level of interaction.
2. Educational informative content (explanation of zakat law, types of zakat, and zakat calculator) has moderate engagement, but plays an important role in strengthening rational understanding.
3. Promotional content of zakat institutions without a personal narrative tends to have low engagement because it is considered too commercial.

This shows that the younger generation tends to be more responsive to messages that contain the value of empathy and humanization of zakat, rather than formal messages that are normative. In other words, social media is effective when used with an emotional and narrative approach, not just instructive.

The Process of Forming Zakat Awareness in Digital Spaces

Based on observational findings and symbolic analysis, zakat awareness among young Muslims is formed through three stages of digital engagement:

1. Awareness Stage (Initial Awareness): At this stage, users are first introduced to the concept of zakat through digital campaigns or posts by Muslim influencers. Such exposure enhances their cognitive awareness of zakat obligations and Islamic philanthropic values.
2. Empathy Stage (Emotional Involvement): After being exposed to social narratives and testimonials from zakat recipients, users begin to develop a sense of empathy and spiritual motivation to contribute. Emotional engagement increases as they internalize the social and humanitarian dimensions of zakat.
3. Action Stage (Actual Practice): Some users proceed to perform zakat through digital platforms such as Zakat Online, Kitabisa, or BAZNAS Digital Payment. However, the findings reveal that a large proportion of users remain at the level of intention and have not yet become consistent behavioral zakat payers.

These findings reinforce Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior, which posits that zakat behavior is influenced by intention and social norms shaped by the digital environment.

The Social and Cultural Meaning of Zakat in the Virtual World

The netnography approach reveals that in the digital space, zakat is not only interpreted as a religious obligation, but also as a symbol of social solidarity and a modern spiritual lifestyle. Many users position zakat as part of religious self-branding, which is a way to display a Muslim identity that is caring, active, and useful.

This phenomenon shows that zakat in the era of social media has transformed into a socio-cultural practice that goes beyond the dimension of personal worship. The younger generation does not only see zakat as a ritual obligation, but as a form of participation in the digital philanthropy ecosystem.

Based on observational findings, zakat awareness among young Muslims is formed through three stages of digital engagement: the initial awareness stage through the introduction of the concept of zakat, the empathy stage through the internalization of the social-humanitarian dimension, and the action stage through the realization of digital zakat payments. These findings strengthen the Theory of Planned Behavior which states that zakat behavior is influenced by intentions and social norms formed in the digital environment.

Interactive interpretation in the digital zakat ecosystem reveals the convergence between Islamic values, digital identity formation, and social motivation. Islamic values provide a basic framework for religious obligations and spiritual purification, while digital identities facilitate religious performativity through the content of shared zakat. Social motivation is manifested in the form of "digital religious capital" in the form of social recognition and validation received through online interactions. The interaction of these three elements creates a virtuosic cycle in which religious practices improve social image in the digital Muslim community.

The theoretical implications of this study extend the Theory of Planned Behavior by showing how the digital environment creates new forms of subjective norms through social media interaction. The emerging concept of "digital religious capital" provides a new theoretical tool for understanding how religious practices acquire social value in online communities. From a methodological perspective, this study develops a netnography framework in Islamic studies by analyzing the translation of religious values in the digital space.

Practical recommendations include the transformation of content strategies towards a narrative approach that showcases the humanist impact of zakat, the development of interactive educational tools such as zakat calculators and quiz features, as well as community building initiatives through online discussion rooms. Structured collaborations with credible Muslim influencers can bridge religious knowledge and contemporary relevance, while zakat digital literacy programs need to be integrated into formal and informal education.

In the end, the netnography approach reveals the socio-cultural meaning of zakat in a virtual space that is not only understood as a religious obligation, but also as a symbol of social solidarity and a modern spiritual lifestyle. The younger generation positions zakat as part of religious self-branding that displays a caring, active, and useful Muslim identity. This transformation shows that zakat in the era of social media has become a socio-cultural practice that transcends the dimension of personal worship, creating new meanings and practices of religious obligations in the context of the contemporary world.

CONCLUSION

The research using a *netnography* approach concluded that social media significantly shapes the zakat awareness of young Muslims across cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions. Social media serves as a dynamic space for religious communication, presenting *zakat* values visually and interactively while emotional narratives and testimonies foster empathy and spiritual motivation. However, consistent zakat behavior remains a challenge due to the absence of sustained digital mentoring. The *netnography* method proved effective in revealing the symbolic meanings and interaction patterns around *zakat* in contemporary Islamic digital spaces, where *zakat* is embraced not only as a religious duty but also as social solidarity and identity expression among youth. This demonstrates social media's potential as a modern *da'wah* medium to enhance *zakat* awareness if managed with a communicative, narrative-driven, and human-centered approach. Future research could explore the design and impact of digital mentoring programs to support long-term zakat compliance among young Muslims.

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