

The State, Religion, and Social Media: A Critical Review of Islamic Counseling Policy in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Advances in information technology, particularly the internet and social media, have significantly changed communication and interaction within society. The ease of accessing information has made the global community resemble a global village. Digital technology has both positive and negative impacts that must be addressed wisely. Religious counsellors, as the frontline of the Ministry of Religion, are required to transform. Directorate General of Islamic Education Decision No. 1172 of 2024 provides guidelines for the implementation of religious counselling on social media. This study explores the opportunities, challenges, and alternative solutions for the implementation of the aforementioned decision. Using a descriptive quantitative research method, it can be concluded that religious counsellors must transform themselves to be willing and able to use social media for preaching and counselling. The role of digital technology brings benefits in various aspects, including religious counselling; however, social media must be used wisely so that religious counselling can run smoothly and provide benefits to society at large

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1. Introduction

As part of the Ministry of Religious Affairs system, religious counsellors play a very important role, both within the ministry and in the community. Religious Counsellors have the duties, responsibilities, authority, and rights to conduct religious guidance or counselling activities and development through religious language. As such, Religious Counsellors serve as the vanguard of the Ministry of Religion in disseminating Islamic religious education to the community amidst various challenges and obstacles of the modern era.

Currently, Islamic religious counsellors play an important role in community empowerment. As the leading sector in guiding the Islamic community, Islamic religious counsellors have heavy responsibilities and face increasingly complex issues. Regulation No. 9 of 2021 of the Minister of State Apparatus Empowerment and Bureaucratic Reform explains that religious counselling is a process of behavioural change carried out through the dissemination of information, communication, motivation, counselling, education, facilitation, and advocacy, both

verbally, in writing, and through practice, with the aim of developing the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour of the target group so that they understand, are motivated, and are able to correctly practise religious teachings while also demonstrating active concern and participation in social or religious development using religious language or teachings. From this, it can be concluded that religious counsellors are expected to change community behaviour through a communication-based approach.

The duties and responsibilities of religious teachers are enormous, especially in today's digital age, and the challenges they face are not insignificant. Advances in digital technology have also significantly changed people's behaviour. Rapid and unstoppable developments in science and technology, as well as the growth of fundamentalist and radical Islamic discourse on the one hand and liberal Islam on the other, pose challenges for religious teachers.

Internet facilities have provided easy access to various information, knowledge and entertainment. However, these conveniences have given rise to new problems in society, such as declining morality and weakening national character in Indonesia. The ease of surfing the virtual world has had a positive impact on society by deepening religious teachings and understanding, as well as facilitating discussions to compare religious teachings.

Everyone can connect with others around the world, build social relationships, and share experiences quickly and easily through social media and instant messaging apps (Rokhman dan Pristiwati, 2023). However, on the other hand, social media has made individuals increasingly isolated from social life, thereby affecting their religious rituals. For example, religious lectures can now be followed via YouTube streaming. On the one hand, this makes things easier, but on the other hand, it can lead to misunderstandings about religion, resulting in hate speech, hoaxes, and misinterpretations of Allah's verses.

Based on this phenomenon, the Ministry of Religious Affairs feels it has a great responsibility in creating a religious life that is true, comfortable, safe, and peaceful. Therefore, through the Director General of Islamic Guidance of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, a mandate was given to religious counsellors to play an active role in social media. Through Decision No. 1172 of 2024 by the Director General of Islamic Education, the government, in this case the Ministry of Religion, has taken a groundbreaking step by utilising social media as a new platform for religious outreach. This decision is relatively new, so there has not been much research conducted on this regulation. However, this paper will examine the implementation of Decision No. 1172 of 2024 to identify potential obstacles and challenges and propose alternative solutions to ensure the optimal implementation of this regulation.

Several previous researchers have studied similar themes, including those written by Ivani Puji Safitri and Muhammad Rifa'I Subhi. The study titled 'The Implementation of Infographics on Social Media as a Tool for Islamic Guidance and Counseling Services.' In this study, it can be concluded that the implementation of

infographics on social media can be an effective tool for Islamic guidance and counseling services. The use of visually appealing content, the ability to convey messages in an easily understandable manner, and widespread accessibility make infographics an effective tool for disseminating religious teachings, providing guidance, and expanding Muslims' understanding of Islam in the digital age. Therefore, it is important for Islamic religious counsellors to leverage the potential of infographics to disseminate religious values and provide guidance to the community through social media. (Counceling As-Syamil, vol 04, no 1, 2024, hal. 32-43. E-ISSN:2808-7151. P-ISSN:2808-7445). Then Abdul Karim with the title, 'Dakwah through Media: A Challenge and Opportunity.' Abdul Karim concluded that dakwah through media is very effective because society has been integrated with technology. However, dakwah through media also has challenges in terms of shaping values and morals. Other researchers are Putri Andriyana and Bob Andrian who wrote about, 'Religion, Media and Society in the Digital Age.' In their article, the authors explain that the role of digital technology brings various benefits in terms of access to information and social interaction, but it is essential to ensure that the use of digital technology benefits society as a whole. Meanwhile, Abdul Rahman, in an article titled 'Challenges and Opportunities for Religious Counsellors in the Digital Age,' explains that changes in human behaviour can be caused by communication during counselling activities. Therefore, communication skills and digital literacy are essential for a religious counsellor. This is to ensure that activities supporting the community in the digital age can run smoothly. The four studies highlight that the changes experienced by society are inevitable due to the unstoppable advancement of information technology. The presence of social media should not be avoided but rather leveraged as an opportunity for religious counsellors to assist and simplify their counselling tasks, thereby enabling them to effectively support the community.

Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study collected data through triangulation. The object of this research is the Director General of Islamic Guidance Decision No. 1172 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of Islamic Religious Counselling on social media. A qualitative descriptive approach is used to analyse the regulation and to understand the message it conveys. In addition, this research also aims to identify obstacles and challenges and to find alternative solutions so that this regulation can be implemented effectively.

The data analysis procedure consists of four stages, namely data collection, data reduction, selection, focusing, simplification, abstraction, and transformation of raw data obtained from field notes and transcripts in the research. Then, a data model (data display) is created, which is a collection of organised information that allows conclusions to be drawn and actions to be taken. This activity is important to understand what is happening and to determine the next steps, namely conclusions (Susari, 19) Finally, before conducting the analysis, conclusions are drawn from the collected data in the form of articles, documents, and notes. The data analysis process involves organising, sorting, grouping, coding, and categorising the data.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the implementation of the Director General of Islamic Guidance Regulation No. 1172 of 2024 concerning the Guidelines for Islamic Religious Counselling on social media. This approach allows the researcher to explore in depth the meanings, contexts, and dynamics within the regulation, including the opportunities, challenges, and alternative solutions relevant to Islamic religious counsellors in the digital era. The object of this research is the aforementioned regulation, regarded as a strategic response to the transformation of digital society and the shifting practices of religious expression in virtual spaces. The primary data is drawn from regulatory documents, academic articles, and relevant publications, supported by literature triangulation with prior studies, including works by Safitri and Subhi (2024), Abdul Karim (2023), Andriyana and Andrian (2022), and Abdul Rahman (2023). Data collection techniques involve documentation studies and literature review. The data is then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model (1994), which includes four stages: (1) data collection, (2) data reduction through selection and simplification, (3) data display in narrative form, and (4) conclusion drawing and verification. To ensure data validity, source triangulation is applied by comparing various written sources. This method aims to produce a comprehensive understanding of the transformation of Islamic religious counsellors in the digital preaching landscape.

3. Results and Discussion

Islamic Religious Teacher

In the Regulation of the Minister of State Apparatus Empowerment and Bureaucratic Reform of the Republic of Indonesia No. 9 of 2021 on Functional Positions for Religious Counsellors, it is stated that Religious Counsellors, hereinafter referred to as Religious Counsellors, are civil servants who are given full duties, responsibilities, authority and rights by the competent authorities to provide religious guidance or counselling, develop religious guidance and counselling, and promote development. Meanwhile, religious guidance or counselling is a process of behavioural change carried out through the dissemination of information, communication, motivation, counselling, education, facilitation, and advocacy, whether verbally, in writing, or through practice, with the aim of developing the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour of the target community so that they are aware, motivated, and able to understand, to practise religious teachings correctly while also having concern and active participation in social or religious development using religious language or teachings.

As the spearhead of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in disseminating Islamic teachings amid the dynamics of development and progress in Indonesian society, Islamic religious teachers play a very important role. As the leading sector in providing guidance to the community, Islamic Religious Counsellors face significant responsibilities, as the issues they encounter grow increasingly complex. The primary

duties of Islamic Religious Counsellors include conducting and developing religious guidance and development activities through religious language. Their functions are as follows: 1) informative and educational functions. Islamic Religious Counsellors position themselves as da'is (preachers) who are obligated to preach Islam, convey religious guidance, and educate the community to the best of their ability in accordance with the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). 2) Consultative function. Islamic Religious Counsellors make themselves available to help think through and solve the problems faced by the community, whether personal, family, or community issues in general. 3) Advocacy function. Islamic religious counsellors have a moral and social responsibility to defend their community against various threats, disturbances, obstacles, and challenges that undermine faith, disrupt worship, and corrupt morality.

To reinforce the duties of Religious Counsellors, the Ministry of Religious Affairs issued Ministerial Circular Letter No. SE. 2 of 2024 on the Implementation of the Duties of Religious Counsellors and Headmen in Supporting the Government's Priority Programmes. The circular states that in order to support the Government's Priority Program to strengthen economic resilience, improve public health, and preserve the environment, Religious Counsellors and Imams play an active role in socialising and educating the public on: preventing and accelerating the reduction of stunting rates, addressing poverty, economic empowerment, and environmental conservation.

Social Media

Erwin Thaib explains that social media is a process of interaction between individuals by creating, sharing, exchanging and modifying ideas or concepts in the form of virtual communication or networks. From year to year, social media continues to evolve with various variations and promises many conveniences and comforts, so it is not surprising that many people feel comfortable spending a lot of time connected to social networks.

Based on data obtained from databoks.co.id, it is explained that in 2024, the total number of social media users will be 191 million (73.7% of the population), with 167 million active users (64.3% of the population) and internet penetration reaching 242 million (93.4% of the population). The most popular social media platforms are YouTube with 139 million users (53.8% of the population), Instagram with 122 million users (47.3% of the population), Facebook with 118 million users (45.9% of the population), WhatsApp with 116 million users (45.2% of the population), and TikTok with 89 million users (34.7% of the population). The data also indicates that in terms of age, social media users are predominantly aged 18-34 years (54.1%), with females accounting for 51.3% and males 48.7%. In terms of usage frequency, the average Indonesian spends 3 hours and 14 minutes per day on social media, with 81% accessing it daily. The most common activities include sharing photos/videos (81%), news/information (73%), entertainment (68%), and online shopping (61%).

The characteristics of social media according to the Public Relations Centre Team of the Indonesian Ministry of Trade in the social media optimisation guidebook are

as follows: a) social media can be easily accessed by anyone with a device connected to the internet, b) social media content has a number of functional aspects, such as identity, interaction, relationships, sharing, reputation, groups and presence, c) content is shared with many people and is not limited to specific individuals, d) content is delivered online and in real-time, e) content can be received online quickly and may also be delayed depending on the interaction time set by the user, f) social media enables users to act as creators and actors, allowing them to self-actualise (Mahmudah, 2019: 32).

Anik Suryaningsih explains that there are several benefits of social media, including a) facilitating the learning process, b) facilitating interaction with others, c) increasing knowledge and insight (Suryaningsih: 2020: 2). An Indonesian media website mentions the benefits of social media in the following table:

Aspect	Benefits
Comunication	Facilitating interaction, removing geographical barriers
Information	Easy access to news, articles, and educational content
Business	Effective marketing, increased brand awareness, interaction with customers
Creativity	A place to express yourself, channel your talents, and build a community
Advocacy	Mobilising social support, raising awareness, encouraging change

Meanwhile, the negative impacts of social media are:

Aspect	Negative Impact
addiction	Disruption of activities, decreased productivity, mental health issues
social comparison	Feelings of inferiority, envy, depression
misinformation	Spread of hoaxes, hate speech, online bullying
privacy	Misuse of personal information
social isolation	Lack of face-to-face interaction, feelings of loneliness

Social media, with all its pros and cons, cannot be ignored. As a technological innovation, social media is essential for simplifying daily life. To ensure that social media only has a positive impact on society, a wise approach to using it is necessary. Here are some tips for using social media wisely: limit the time spent on social media, choose the content you consume wisely, interact positively and constructively, protect your privacy, prioritise face-to-face interactions, report content that violates the rules, and be a responsible social media user.

Decision of the Director General of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia No. 1172 of 2024

According to Jalaludin, there are several functions of religion in society, namely, 1) educational function, 2) salvific function, 3) peace function, 4) social control function, 5) solidarity-building function, 6) renewal function, 7) creative function, and 8) sublimative function. Given the significant role of religion in society, it is imperative that the government enact regulations to ensure that national harmony is maintained. (Ramdani, 2017:279)

The role of Islamic religious counsellors as the frontline of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs in spreading and delivering Islamic teachings needs serious attention, especially in this era of globalisation with the unstoppable advancement of information technology. Therefore, the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, through the Directorate General of Islamic Guidance, has compiled guidelines for conducting Islamic religious counselling on social media. This regulation aims to optimise the dissemination and propagation of Islamic teachings with a broader, more effective, and efficient reach. One of the efforts is to conduct religious counselling on social media, and to provide guidelines for Islamic religious counselling on social media, it is necessary to develop implementation guidelines.

This regulation explains that Islamic religious teachers have an important and strategic role in spreading Islamic values by utilising information and communication technology. In this context, social media presents a great opportunity for Islamic religious teachers to convey their message in a more effective and modern way that reaches a wider audience. However, da'wah strategies on social media must be managed carefully, taking into account factors such as relevance, accuracy of information, as well as Islamic ethics and values that must be upheld. This is because social media also presents significant challenges, such as hate speech, hoaxes, disinformation, provocation, radicalism, and unproductive debates.

Therefore, this regulation aims to establish administrative order and accountability in the dissemination of Islamic teachings on social media and to ensure procedural certainty in the implementation of Islamic teachings on social media. The scope of this regulation has also been stipulated as follows: objectives, targets, implementation, duties of the implementation team, platforms, forms of publication, types of publication, materials, provisions, monitoring, and evaluation.

This Director General's Decree states that social media platforms that can be used to facilitate Islamic religious education include TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. The schedule for conducting religious education on social media is also regulated, ranging from annual to daily publications. Religious education on social

media can be published in the form of flyers/infographics, short or long videos, twibbons, and/or animations.

For the method of publishing religious guidance on social media, this regulation explains that religious guidance on social media can be published using methods such as inspirational quotes, Islamic studies, religious Q&A, religious quizzes, religious activities, socialisation of religious programmes and/or myths/facts that are part of local wisdom. The content that can be published in religious education on social media community, studies related to marriage and family, understanding of religious sects or offshoots, halal product certification), Hajj and Umrah, fiqh studies, religious moderation, reading and writing the Qur'an, and other Islamic studies relevant to the needs and developments of the times. Regarding publication regulations, monitoring, and evaluation of outreach activities, these are also well-regulated within this regulation.

Implementation Analysis of Islamic Counseling Policy in Indonesia

Islamic religious teachers play a very important role as the frontline of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in providing religious guidance to the community. Technological advances have made it easy for people to access information anytime and anywhere. This presents an opportunity for religious teachers to provide understanding, guidance, and counselling to the community at large. With a population of approximately 280 million, Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world and the most populous in ASEAN. This presents both an opportunity and a challenge for Islamic religious counsellors in carrying out their duties.

Indonesia has 633 major ethnic groups and 1,331 tribes and sub-tribes, as well as 652 regional languages and 6 religions that are embraced and believed in. Such a great gift from Allah SWT to Indonesia, which if not managed properly will become a source of tension that could lead to conflict and divide the unity of the nation. Conflicts are often rooted in the differences that individuals bring into interactions. These differences include physical characteristics, intelligence, knowledge, customs, beliefs, and so on (Abidin dan Saebani, 2013: 271) This also poses a challenge for Islamic religious teachers to maximise their potential.

Advances in information technology have changed the way people interact and access knowledge and information, so that preaching in the current era is no longer limited to religious gatherings, prayer rooms or mosques. Various social media platforms have opened up wide access to share preaching content on a massive scale. Platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter can be used to disseminate religious teachings and services that can be widely accessed by people from diverse backgrounds.

With just a mobile device and a data plan, Islamic religious teachers can preach and provide guidance to the wider community. This certainly makes things easier, as it can be done anytime and anywhere, as well as being more cost-effective. Moreover, many young people today study and seek religious truth through social media, which certainly provides fertile ground for religious teachers to play their role in introducing Islam in its entirety.

The increasing interest in religion among the public today certainly requires creativity from everyone to be able to create interesting Islamic content. This is aimed at ensuring that Islamic messages and values are conveyed properly and accurately. This opportunity also presents a chance for religious educators to continue improving their skills in creating content across various digital platforms, while also mastering religious materials. Creativity in producing religious content is essential to avoid boredom and to make it easier for people to understand Islamic values. Direct interaction between religious educators and their audience can be achieved through question-and-answer sessions, discussions, and live studies via streaming features.

As a product of technology, digital media is like a double-edged sword: on one hand, it brings benefits, but on the other, it also causes harm. Rapidly advancing information technology provides various conveniences in every aspect of human life, but its existence also threatens humanity's existence. Heartbreaking news dominates the media when someone takes their own life due to being trapped in online loans, children get involved in theft and robbery just to own a smartphone, not to mention the widespread online gambling that has infiltrated all segments of society, from the poor to the educated and respected.

Information technology is indeed inevitable; almost everyone needs the convenience promised by information technology. With the various conveniences it offers, technology has made humans dependent on it. Additionally, technology has transformed separate nations into a small global community. As McLuhan stated, technology will bring us back together as one community, shifting us from separate nations to a 'global village.' This means that in the modern era, the distance between nations has become increasingly close, almost as if there were no borders, like a village. For example, if you want to see the Eiffel Tower in Paris, you no longer need to fly to France; simply press the enter button on your device, and the tower that symbolises Paris will appear clearly before your eyes.

The rapid development of information technology has inevitably had a major impact on changes in people's behaviour, and moral and national character issues can also weaken or even deteriorate due to the abundance of negative content such as pornography and sexual exploitation. Religious purity can also be contaminated by fundamentalist and radical ideologies that are easily accessible online, leading many to be exposed to radicalism, extremism, and takfiri ideologies. This poses a unique challenge for Islamic religious counsellors in fulfilling their duties. Therefore, a greater role is needed for religious counsellors to maximise their responsibilities in their positions.

In addition to providing great opportunities, the presence of social media also poses its own challenges for Islamic religious teachers. Da'wah activities, which previously could only be carried out face-to-face, can now be easily conducted online with a wider audience reach, which will certainly ease the task of religious teachers.

Some of the challenges and obstacles faced by religious counsellors in carrying out their duties in this digital age include the delivery of guidance material on digital platforms. Limitations in formats such as captions, stories and tweets can result in

superficial material being delivered, which can lead to misunderstandings. Additionally, the freedom to upload content on social media means that the information shared is unfiltered and its accuracy cannot be guaranteed, leading to the spread of hoaxes, defamation, and incorrect information about religion. This can result in misunderstandings about Islam and may even foster hatred, debates, and divisions both within and between religions.

Another challenge that arises for religious instructors on social media is the emergence of celebrity preachers. The popularity and financial promises of social media make everyone interested in going viral with millions of subscribers so they can earn a lot of money. This is what makes some people blind to get it in bad ways, including by "selling" religion. This phenomenon can be seen from the many contents that raise religious issues in order to increase ratings and popularity by ignoring religious rules and community peace. Shows containing hatred, insults and insults often decorate social media in the name of religion.

The next obstacle is the lack of interaction between religious counselors and their audience when conducting guidance through social media. The monologic nature of the guidance causes viewers to become quickly bored and switch to other, more engaging content. The final challenge that may arise in the process of religious counseling for the public is the disruption caused by algorithms and irrelevant or unhelpful content. This occurs because people tend to prefer watching entertainment content over religious materials. As a result, social media algorithms are more likely to promote unbeneficial content rather than content that is actually useful.

After the challenges and opportunities have been properly identified, the next step is to make maximum efforts to ensure that the Decree of the Director General of Islamic Community Guidance No. 1172 of 2024 on the Implementation Guidelines for Islamic Religious Counseling on Social Media can be effectively implemented by Islamic religious counselors. The various obstacles encountered when conducting da'wah and counseling on social media should be recognized so that they can be anticipated and addressed promptly. At the same time, the various opportunities available on social media should be optimally utilized so that the implementation of guidance and counseling for the community can be carried out comprehensively.

As a regulation, the government certainly hopes that this Decree of the Director General will be implemented effectively to yield optimal results. As a regulation, it is also expected to have a positive impact on the sustainability of a system. Likewise, the Decree of the Director General of Islamic Community Guidance No. 1172 was issued so that Islamic religious counselors under the Ministry of Religious Affairs can carry out their duties more effectively. One of the efforts to achieve this is through the utilization of social media platforms. This aims to make the implementation of guidance and counseling easier and to reach a wider geographical area.

As a new regulation, it requires earnest efforts to ensure proper implementation and to generate a positive impact. Intensive measures need to be taken so that the government's objectives in issuing this regulation can be successfully achieved. Several efforts that can be undertaken to ensure this regulation is effectively enforced and yields positive outcomes include: first, having the sincere intention (niyyah) for

the sake of Allah (lillahi ta'ala). Intention serves as the fundamental foundation for every activity, including religious counseling. The world of social media offers dazzling allure and worldly grandeur, which can potentially divert the intentions of religious counselors from the true purpose of their mission

Being active on social media can be enchanting and distracting for its users. In carrying out their mission, religious counselors should deepen their closeness to Allah SWT. Active engagement on social media can lead them to neglect their worship routines, such as reciting the Qur'an, performing congregational prayers at the mosque, and other acts of devotion. With a sincere intention solely for the sake of Allah, any temptations arising from social media can be resisted. Otherwise, instead of producing soothing and enlightening content, religious counselors may slip into creating content that provokes and divides the community. Therefore, one must not allow a good intention to preach for Allah's sake (lillah) to be diverted toward other objectives.

Second, enhance religious understanding. Islamic religious counselors serve as the frontline representatives of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in conveying Islam as a rahmatan lil 'alamin (mercy to all creation). They are also responsible for disseminating government programs and responding to various problems emerging within society. Therefore, it is crucial for counselors to have a strong awareness of the need to continually deepen their religious knowledge. Understanding Islamic values must be continuously improved in line with the growing public consciousness toward implementing religious principles comprehensively (kaffah).

The rapid advancement of technology and information also presents numerous inquiries from the public to religious counselors. Thus, counselors are required to regularly update their knowledge and information. In addition, effective communication skills are essential in conducting community counseling. A combination of strong communication abilities and sufficient religious understanding is highly beneficial in countering negative content such as hoaxes, slander, and divisive narratives intended to sow discord within the nation.

Third, be smart in using social media. The progress of technology and information forces everyone to adapt to ongoing changes, including new methods of communication and preaching. Utilizing social media has become a necessity to support the implementation of dakwah and the spread of Islamic values comprehensively. Today's religious counselors should not rely solely on outdated methods such as lectures and sermons at mosques and prayer rooms. Therefore, the Ministry of Religious Affairs encourages all its counselors to adapt to these changes. To support this government initiative, each counselor must understand and be able to implement the relevant regulations effectively.

The emphasis of Decree of the Director General of Islamic Community Guidance No. 1172 of 2024 is for all religious counselors to utilize social media for counseling purposes. Hence, it is essential for all counselors to recognize the importance of social media as a tool to ease and expand the reach of their duties. Furthermore, religious counselors must also be willing to enhance their capabilities in using social media effectively.

Some key aspects that counselors need to be aware of when using social media

include: a) Being discerning in selecting social media platforms, as each has unique characteristics in terms of user demographics and algorithm behavior. Therefore, choosing a platform that aligns with one's personal dakwah style is critical. b) Understanding the dakwah audience. As with platform selection, knowing the target audience is essential for successful counseling. Tailoring messages to the needs and relevance of the public ensures the content remains current and effective. c) Creating creative and engaging content. In today's digital era, religious counselors also function as content creators. To avoid producing boring content that may lose followers, counselors are expected to develop engaging and interactive material, such as using live streaming for Q&A sessions, producing short videos, infographics, podcasts, animations, and more. d) Maintaining consistency (*istiqamah*), which is a crucial factor in successful social media dakwah. Especially in terms of scheduling, regular content posting ensures continued audience engagement. This requires significant commitment and patience so that the content remains fresh and the counselor consistently active. e) Collaborating with others. To overcome content fatigue and limitations, counselors can collaborate with fellow counselors, educators, community leaders, or Muslim influencers. Such synergy helps compensate for individual shortcomings and results in more appealing and innovative content. Partnering with Muslim influencers who have a large following can also significantly increase the reach and effectiveness of the counseling efforts.

Fourth, conduct comprehensive outreach to religious counselors at both the central and regional levels. To ensure the success of the decree's implementation, the Ministry of Religious Affairs must actively promote understanding of the goals, rules, and technical aspects of the regulation. In addition to socialization efforts, the success of this policy also depends on the Ministry's commitment to providing ongoing support and training to Islamic religious counselors. Training should cover the use of digital media, its potential, challenges, and impacts, as well as platform-specific guidance and creative content development for dakwah.

Given Indonesia's archipelagic nature, many religious counselors may face challenges in effectively using social media due to limited digital skills or poor connectivity. Therefore, ongoing mentoring and evaluation are necessary to assess the effectiveness of policy implementation. This process is essential for identifying any challenges counselors face in the field. Whenever issues arise, timely solutions can be found through these mentoring sessions to ensure the successful and meaningful implementation of Decree No. 1172 for the advancement of Islamic dakwah in Indonesia.

4. Conclusion

Today, social media has become an inevitability, as all aspects of life are increasingly integrated with technology and information. Nearly every facet of daily life economic, social, political, and even religious is heavily dependent on social media. The flood of information flowing through these platforms is so massive that it makes the world feel smaller, with no clear boundaries of time and space. Every component of the nation has a vested interest in maintaining harmony and peace within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, including the

Ministry of Religious Affairs. With its vital role, the Ministry of Religious Affairs is responsible for safeguarding religious harmony in Indonesia. To that end, various initiatives have been undertaken, one of which is the issuance of the Director General of Islamic Community Guidance Decree No. 1172 of 2024 concerning Guidelines for Islamic Religious Counseling on social media. This regulation essentially 'requires' religious counselors to utilize social media for their da'wah and counseling activities. Such a mandate can be successfully implemented and generate a positive impact only if there is a shared commitment from all parties namely the government (in this case, the Ministry of Religious Affairs), religious counselors, and other stakeholders to collectively improve the methods and approaches used in religious counseling. This study found that the challenges and opportunities involved in using social media for religious counseling can be anticipated and addressed. Therefore, the Director General's Decree can be effectively implemented and contribute meaningfully to the sustainability of Islamic da'wah and religious counseling

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