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Parasocial Relationship with Psychological Well-Being among Followers of Digital Dakwah Content of Generation Z

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Abstract :
This study aimed to examine the relationship between parasocial relationship and psychological well-being among Generation Z followers of digital dakwah content in Samarinda City. The study employed a quantitative correlational approach involving 200 respondents aged 17–27 years who actively use social media and follow digital dakwah content on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Data were collected through online questionnaires administered using Google Forms, consisting of the Parasocial Relationship Scale and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale. Data analysis was conducted using Pearson Product Moment correlation and simple linear regression analysis with SPSS software. Prior to hypothesis testing, normality and linearity tests indicated that the data met the assumptions for parametric statistical analysis. The results showed that parasocial relationship had a significant positive relationship with psychological well-being ($r = .512$, $p < .001$, $N = 200$). Regression analysis further demonstrated that parasocial relationship significantly predicted psychological well-being ($\beta = .512$, $t = 8.421$, $p < .001$), contributing 26.2% of the variance in psychological well-being ($R^2 = .262$; Adjusted $R^2 = .258$; $F = 70.91$, $p < .001$). These findings indicate that emotional attachment to digital dakwah figures may positively contribute to the psychological well-being of Generation Z by providing emotional support, perceived companionship, psychological comfort, and motivation through digital religious content. Practically, this study suggests that digital dakwah practitioners and social media content creators should develop supportive, empathetic, and psychologically engaging religious content to promote positive mental well-being among young audiences in the digital era.

Keywords:
parasocial relationship, psychological well-being, digital dakwah, generation Z, social media

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1. Introduction

Social media development has transformed how Generation Z interacts, accesses information, and fulfills emotional as well as spiritual needs, especially among Generation Z, who grew up in an internet-based and digital communication environment. Examples of social media platforms include TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube are now not only used as a means of entertainment but have also developed into spaces for exchanging information, education, as well as religious activities through digital preaching content. This phenomenon indicates that social media has become an important part of young people's lives, including in fulfilling their spiritual and emotional needs (Abidin, 2021). Recent studies also indicate that social media increasingly functions as a space for emotional connection, identity formation, and psychological support among Generation Z users (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). In Samarinda City, the high use of social media among adolescents and young adults reflects a shift in patterns of religious information consumption from conventional face-to-face approaches toward more flexible and accessible digital media.

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Digital dakwah content delivered in communicative, personal, and interactive ways allows the formation of emotional closeness between audiences and the dakwah figures they follow. This closeness may develop into a Parasocial relationship describes a perceived emotional bond in which audiences experience a sense of closeness with media figures despite having no direct reciprocal interaction (Liebers & Schramm, 2019). Rubin et al. (1985) further explained that parasocial relationships involve imagined interpersonal interactions and emotional attachment toward media figures without reciprocal communication.

In the context of social media, parasocial relationships emerge when followers feel personally connected to public figures whose content they regularly consume. Recent research by Lotun et al. (2024) further suggests that parasocial relationships may help fulfill individuals' emotional and psychological needs through perceived companionship and emotional attachment.

This phenomenon is not only found among fans of entertainment celebrities or lifestyle influencers, but is also increasingly developing among followers of digital dakwah content. Wijaya et al. (2022) stated that digital dakwah has become an important medium for religious learning and emotional engagement among Indonesian youth. However, research on parasocial relationships within the context of digital religiosity and dakwah content remains limited, particularly in Indonesian psychological studies.

Research concerning parasocial relationships has largely centered on entertainment-oriented media figures rather than religious digital creators, leaving the psychological dynamics between religious digital figures and their followers relatively underexplored. Schramm et al. (2024) also reported that recent parasocial relationship studies have increasingly shifted toward digital media contexts, although research involving religious digital figures remains limited. Therefore, the present research extends parasocial relationship research into the context of digital dakwah by examining its association with psychological well-being among Generation Z followers.

he phenomenon of parasocial relationships with digital dakwah figures is important to examine because it may affect the psychological condition of individuals, especially Generation Z, who tend to have high levels of social media usage. Generation Z is considered vulnerable to psychological pressures associated with social media exposure, including social anxiety, loneliness, identity crises, and low life satisfaction (Twenge, 2020). Hendrikse and Limniou (2024) also found that intensive use of platforms such as TikTok and Instagram may influence psychological well-being and emotional dependency among young adults.

Kircaburun et al. (2019) suggested that intensive social media use among young adults may strengthen emotional attachment, online interpersonal dependency, and the tendency to seek emotional validation through digital interactions. In such situations, digital dakwah figures are often perceived as sources of motivation, emotional support, and psychological as well as spiritual reassurance. Therefore, emotional attachment toward digital dakwah figures is assumed to be associated with individuals' psychological well-being.

According to Ryff (2014), psychological well-being reflects positive psychological functioning, including self-acceptance, autonomy, life purpose, and the ability to maintain healthy social relationships. A good level of psychological well-being plays an important role in helping individuals cope with life pressures and maintain mental health.

Oliver et al. (2022) explained that meaningful online interactions and emotionally supportive digital experiences may contribute to eudaimonic well-being, including personal growth and purpose in life. Similarly, Wolff and Shen (2024) argued that digital social

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interaction and online engagement may contribute to individuals' perceived social support and psychological well-being.

For Generation Z, psychological well-being has become an increasingly important issue because this generation faces various social and digital challenges, including social media pressure and the need for online social validation. Erfani and Abedin (2018) emphasized that digital media engagement may influence emotional experiences and psychological conditions through continuous online interaction. Several earlier investigations have shown that parasocial relationships affect an individual's emotional and psychological condition. Zhang et al. (2023) found that social media usage may influence psychological well-being through emotional and social interaction processes. Chung and Cho (2017) explained that parasocial relationships on social media can enhance users' sense of social connection and emotional closeness with media figures.

The study by de Bérail et al. (2019) also found that parasocial relationships can provide emotional support and reduce feelings of loneliness among digital media users. Stever and Lawson (2013) explained that repeated exposure to media figures may strengthen imagined friendship and emotional attachment among audiences. However, most previous research has still focused on parasocial relationships in the entertainment context, such as K-Pop fandom, celebrities, beauty influencers, and general content creators.

In Indonesia, research on parasocial relationships within the context of digital preaching is still relatively limited. Several studies focus more on the effectiveness of digital preaching from the perspective of communication, the dissemination of religious messages, and the use of social media in preaching activities. Meanwhile, research that specifically examines the link between parasocial relationships and the psychological well-being of followers of digital preaching content, particularly among Generation Z in Samarinda, is still scarce.

In fact, the city of Samarinda, as one of the developing cities with a high level of internet and social media usage, has the characteristics of an urban society that is close to digital culture, including in activities of consuming religious content through social media.

Based on this review, there is a research gap regarding the relationship between parasocial relationships and psychological well-being among followers of digital dakwah content from Generation Z in Samarinda City. Earlier investigations have not extensively examined how emotional attachment to digital dakwah figures can be related to an individual's psychological well-being in the context of a digital urban society. Therefore, this research is important to conduct to provide empirical understanding regarding the role of parasocial relationships in the psychological life of Generation Z who actively consume digital dakwah content.

This study is anticipated to make a meaningful contribution to the advancement of studies in social psychology, media psychology, and religious psychology in Indonesia, particularly related to the phenomenon of digital preaching among Generation Z. In addition, this research can also serve as a source of information for digital preaching practitioners in understanding the psychological impact of the content delivered to the audience. Thus, the research results are expected to provide a new approach in understanding the relationship between digital media, religiosity, and the psychological well-being of urban communities.

From this study, researcher hope to examine the relationship between parasocial relationships and psychological well-being among followers of digital dakwah content from Generation Z in Samarinda City. This study aims to test whether emotional attachment to digital dakwah figures has a positive relationship with individuals' psychological well-being. With this research, it is expected that an empirical picture of the psychological dynamics of

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Generation Z in the context of social media use and consumption of digital dakwah can be obtained.

2. Methods

A quantitative correlational approach was applied to investigate the association between parasocial relationship and psychological well-being among Generation Z followers of digital dakwah content in Samarinda City. The independent variable was parasocial relationship, defined as the emotional attachment individuals develop toward digital dakwah figures on social media. The dependent variable was psychological well being based on Ryff's concept, which includes self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth.

The participants in this study were 200 Generation Z individuals aged 17-27 years who actively used social media and followed digital dakwah content on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling. Data were collected through an online questionnaire administered using Google Forms with a five-point Likert scale. The parasocial relationship instrument was adapted from Horton and Wohl's parasocial interaction concept, which includes dimensions of emotional attachment, perceived intimacy, imagined friendship, and psychological closeness toward digital dakwah figures. Psychological well-being was measured using the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale (RPWB), which consists of six dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Prior to data collection, instrument testing was conducted to evaluate validity and reliability. Item validity was examined using corrected item-total correlation, while reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to ensure internal consistency of the scales. Invalid items were removed before the final analysis was conducted. The final parasocial relationship scale consisted of 18 valid items out of 20 initial items, while the psychological well-being scale consisted of 22 valid items out of 24 initial items.

The data preprocessing stage included checking response completeness, removing invalid responses, and coding the data prior to statistical analysis. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, normality and linearity tests, Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis, and simple regression analysis to examine the relationship and contribution of parasocial relationship to psychological well-being. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS software. The results of the validity and reliability tests are presented in the table below.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Test

Variable	Number of Items	Valid Items	Dropped Items	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha
Parasocial Relationship	20	18	2	0.312 – 0.721	0.873
Psychological Well-Being	24	22	2	0.327 – 0.756	0.891

The validity test showed that all retained items had corrected item-total correlation values above 0.30, indicating acceptable construct validity. Reliability testing demonstrated that both instruments had good internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients above 0.70.

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3. Result

This study involved 200 Generation Z respondents in the city of Samarinda who actively follow digital dakwah content through social media. Based on the results of descriptive analysis, most respondents showed parasocial relationship and psychological well-being levels in the moderate to high categories.

Table. 2 Respondent Characteristics (N=200)

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	78	39.0%
	Female	122	61.0%
Age	17–20 years	64	32.0%
	21–24 years	91	45.5%
	25–27 years	45	22.5%
Dominant Platform	TikTok	109	54.5%
	Instagram	58	29.0%
	YouTube	33	16.5%
Social Media Duration	1–3 hours/day	41	20.5%
	4–6 hours/day	104	52.0%
	> 6 hours/day	55	27.5%

Based on Table 2, most respondents were female (61.0%) and aged between 21–24 years (45.5%). TikTok was identified as the dominant platform used to access digital dakwah content (54.5%). In addition, the majority of respondents reported spending 4–6 hours per day on social media (52.0%).

Table 3. Assumption Test Results

Test	Variable	Result	*Sig.*	Interpretation
Normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov)	Residual	0.200	> .05	Normal
Linearity	Parasocial Relationship – Psychological Well-Being	0.000	< .05	Linear

The assumption test results indicated that the data were normally distributed and demonstrated a linear relationship between parasocial relationship and psychological well-being. These findings suggest that the data fulfilled the assumptions required for parametric statistical analysis.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variables	*r*	*p*	*N*
Parasocial Relationship – Psychological Well-Being	0.512	< .001	200

Results indicated that higher parasocial relationship scores were associated with higher psychological well-being scores among Generation Z followers of digital dakwah content (r = .512, p < .001, N = 200). This finding indicates that higher levels of parasocial relationship were associated with higher psychological well-being.

Table 5. Simple Linear Regression Analysis

Variables	*B*	*Std. Error*	*Beta*	*t*	*Sig.*
Parasocial Relationship → Psychological Well-Being	0.512	0.061	0.512	8.421	< .001

Simple linear regression analysis indicated that parasocial relationship significantly predicted psychological well-being among Generation Z followers of digital dakwah content (B = 0.512, SE = 0.061, β = 0.512, t = 8.421, p < .001). These findings suggest that higher levels of parasocial relationship were associated with higher psychological well-being.

Table 6. Regression Model Summary

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R	*R²*	*Adjusted R²*	*F*	*Sig.*
0.512	0.262	0.258	70.91	< .001

The regression analysis showed that parasocial relationship significantly predicted psychological well-being, explaining 26.2% of the variance in psychological well-being among Generation Z followers of digital dakwah content (R^2 = .262, *Adjusted* R^2 = .258, F = 70.91, $p < .001$).

This indicates that the respondents have a fairly good emotional attachment to digital dakwah figures as well as relatively positive psychological well-being. Before hypothesis testing was conducted, the data were first tested using normality and linearity tests. The test results indicated that the data were normally distributed and exhibited a linear relationship, thereby satisfying the required assumptions for parametric analysis. Furthermore, hypothesis testing was performed using simple regression analysis to determine the relationship between parasocial relationship and psychological well-being.

Table 7. Hipotesis Test Result "Path Estimates"

Path	Estimate	*SE*	*Z*	*p*
Parasocial Relationship → Psychological Well-Being	0.512	0.061	8.421	< .001

Based on Table 7, parasocial relationships showed a positive and significant relationship with psychological well-being among Generation Z followers of digital dakwah content in Samarinda City (B = 0.512, SE = 0.061, β = 0.512, t = 8.421, $p < .001$). These findings indicate that higher emotional attachment to digital dakwah figures was associated with higher levels of psychological well-being. Additionally, the findings of the study suggest that parasocial relationships in the context of digital dakwah can serve as a form of emotional and spiritual support for Generation Z in the era of social media.

4. Discussion

The present study demonstrates that emotional attachment toward digital dakwah figures is positively associated with psychological well-being among Generation Z followers of digital dakwah content in Samarinda City (r = .512, $p < .001$). Furthermore, the regression analysis showed that parasocial relationships contributed 26.2% to psychological well-being. The contribution value of 26.2% indicates that parasocial relationships play a meaningful yet partial role in psychological well-being. These findings suggest that emotional attachment to digital dakwah figures plays an important role in enhancing the psychological well-being of Generation Z. Individuals who develop stronger emotional connections with digital dakwah figures tend to feel more emotionally supported, motivated, calm, and socially connected.

Descriptively, 68% of respondents were categorized as having moderate to high levels of parasocial relationship, while 72% demonstrated moderate to high levels of psychological well-being. These findings indicate that most Generation Z respondents actively build emotional closeness with digital dakwah figures through social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. As digital natives, Generation Z tends to intensively engage with social media in their daily lives and frequently seeks emotional validation, social connectedness, and psychological comfort through online interactions. This generation is also considered more vulnerable to loneliness and emotional distress due to the intensive use of digital media. Consequently, repeated exposure to digital dakwah content may strengthen emotional attachment and perceived companionship with digital dakwah figures.

The findings of this study are consistent with the research conducted by Chung and Cho (2017), which reported that parasocial relationships on social media could increase

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individuals' sense of social connectedness and emotional satisfaction. Similarly, de Bérail et al. (2019) found that parasocial relationships were associated with reduced loneliness and increased emotional comfort among digital media users. The similarity between earlier investigations and the present research lies in the role of parasocial relationships as a source of emotional attachment and psychological comfort. However, this study differs from earlier investigations in terms of context. Earlier research predominantly examined parasocial relationships in entertainment settings involving celebrities, K-Pop idols, or beauty influencers, whereas this study specifically focuses on digital dakwah content and religious figures. Therefore, this study extends parasocial relationship research into the context of digital religiosity, which remains relatively underexplored in Indonesian psychological research.

Unlike entertainment-based parasocial relationships, emotional attachment toward digital dakwah figures may involve spiritual identification, moral values, and religious reassurance. In this context, followers may perceive digital dakwah figures not only as media personalities but also as trusted spiritual companions who provide advice, emotional regulation, and psychological reassurance. Keum et al. (2023) also reported that social media engagement may provide psychological benefits and emotional support for emerging adults depending on the nature of media interaction. The one-sided intimacy formed through repeated media exposure may create imagined friendship and perceived companionship, causing followers to feel understood, emotionally supported, and psychologically connected despite the absence of direct interaction. This finding supports Horton and Wohl's parasocial interaction theory, which explains that repeated exposure to media figures can create perceived intimacy and emotional attachment that audiences experience as real interpersonal relationships.

Psychologically, digital dakwah content may contribute to psychological well-being through several mechanisms. Religious messages delivered in communicative and relatable ways may help individuals regulate emotions, reduce anxiety, and develop emotional calmness. Followers may also experience emotional dependency and media attachment toward digital dakwah figures because the content provides motivation, moral guidance, and feelings of being understood. In addition, digital dakwah content may strengthen several dimensions of Ryff's psychological well-being, particularly self-acceptance, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and personal growth. Exposure to religious advice and motivational messages may encourage individuals to better understand themselves, develop positive emotional functioning, and gain a clearer sense of meaning and direction in life.

Furthermore, repeated exposure to relatable religious messages may create perceived companionship and imagined interpersonal closeness, which can reduce feelings of loneliness and social isolation.

The condition of Samarinda City as a developing urban area with relatively high levels of internet and social media usage may also influence these findings. Most respondents reported accessing digital dakwah content more than three times per week, with an average social media usage duration of 4-6 hours per day. High exposure to digital dakwah content enables Generation Z followers to continuously interact with religious messages and digital dakwah figures. This phenomenon reflects a shift in religious learning patterns from conventional face-to-face approaches toward more flexible, accessible, and interactive digital-based practices.

Nevertheless, parasocial relationships may also carry potential negative consequences when developed excessively. Strong emotional dependency on digital figures may lead individuals to become overly reliant on online validation and reduce direct social interaction.

Although parasocial relationships significantly contributed to psychological well-being, the contribution remained moderate, indicating that psychological well-being is also

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influenced by other psychosocial factors. The remaining unexplained variance suggests that factors such as religiosity, family support, peer relationships, coping strategies, social support, and mental health conditions may also affect psychological well-being among Generation Z. Therefore, parasocial relationships should not be viewed as the sole determinant of well-being but rather as one of several contributing psychosocial factors.

These findings are also closely related to the characteristics of Generation Z as digital natives who spend a considerable amount of time interacting through social media platforms. Intensive engagement with social media may increase emotional attachment and perceived closeness toward digital dakwah figures. Through repeated exposure to religious content, Generation Z followers may experience feelings of emotional support, companionship, and psychological reassurance. This condition reflects how social media has transformed not only communication patterns but also the ways young individuals seek spiritual guidance and emotional fulfillment in the digital era.

Practically, the findings of this study imply that digital dakwah practitioners and content creators should pay greater attention to the psychological impact of religious content delivered through social media. Digital dakwah content that is empathetic, supportive, and emotionally engaging may function not only as a medium for religious education but also as a source of emotional and psychological support for Generation Z audiences.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the use of a cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between parasocial relationship and psychological well-being. As a result, the findings of this study only reflect associative relationships at a single point in time. Second, the study relied on self-report questionnaires administered through online platforms, which may increase the possibility of response bias and social desirability bias. Third, the participants were limited to Generation Z followers of digital dakwah content in Samarinda City, thereby restricting the generalizability of the findings to broader populations or different cultural contexts. In addition, this study only examined parasocial relationship as a predictor of psychological well-being, while other psychosocial factors such as religiosity, social support, coping strategies, personality traits, and mental health conditions were not explored. Therefore, future studies are recommended to employ longitudinal, experimental, or mixed-method approaches and incorporate additional psychological variables to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of parasocial relationships in digital religious contexts. Overall, this study contributes to the development of media psychology, cyberpsychology, and religious psychology by extending parasocial relationship research into the context of digital dakwah among Generation Z.

5. Conclusions

This study shows that parasocial relationships have a positive and significant relationship with psychological well-being among followers of digital dakwah content of Generation Z in Samarinda City, with an estimated value of 0.512 and significance < 0.001. The study results also show that parasocial relationships contribute 26.2% to psychological well-being. These findings indicate that emotional attachment to digital dakwah figures can have a positive impact on the psychological well-being of Generation Z, particularly in providing emotional support, motivation, and psychological calm in the era of social media.

This research contributes to the development of media psychology and religious psychology studies in the context of digital preaching. However, this study is still limited to Generation Z in the city of Samarinda and uses a quantitative approach. Therefore, Future studies are encouraged to incorporate additional variables and use more in-depth methods to

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obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the parasocial relationships among followers of digital preaching content.

6. CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

Sillakhudin: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing – Original Draft, and Writing – Review & Editing. **Meyritha Trifina Sari:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Writing – Review & Editing, and Project Administration.

7. Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares that there are no financial conflicts or personal relationships that could influence the work reported in this study.

8. Declaration of Generative AI and Assistive Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used supportive tools such as Grammarly to ensure grammatical accuracy and improve the overall quality of the writing.

9. Funding

This study did not receive any specific financial support from public, commercial, or non-profit funding agencies. All stages of the research, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and manuscript preparation, were independently conducted by the author. The author also confirms that no external party had any involvement in the design, implementation, or publication of this study.

10. Ethical Approval

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of psychological research outlined in the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* established by the American Psychological Association and the Code of Ethics of the Himpunan Psikologi Indonesia (HIMPSI). Prior to data collection, all participants were provided with clear information regarding the objectives, procedures, potential benefits, and possible risks of the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Informed consent was obtained from all participants as an indication of their voluntary agreement to participate in the research. Furthermore, the confidentiality and anonymity of participants' identities and data were strictly maintained and used solely for academic and research purposes.

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