

TAQWA, SELF-REGULATION, AND SOCIAL MEDIA INTENSITY AMONG MUSLIM YOUNG ADULTS: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

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Abstract

Social media forms part of young adults' everyday communication, work, learning, and social relationships. High levels of use, however, do not necessarily indicate problematic digital behaviour. This study examined the relationships among *taqwa*, self-regulation, and social media intensity among Muslim young adults, with particular attention to the indirect association of self-regulation between *taqwa* and social media intensity. A cross-sectional correlational design was employed. Data were collected through an online questionnaire from 200 Muslim participants aged 18–35 years who actively used social media. The measures assessed *taqwa*, self-regulation, and social media intensity. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, regression analysis, and PROCESS Macro Model 4 with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. *Taqwa* was positively associated with self-regulation ($r = .517, p < .001$). Neither *taqwa* nor self-regulation was significantly associated with social media intensity. The direct association between *taqwa* and social media intensity was not significant, and the indirect effect through self-regulation was also non-significant because the 95% bootstrap confidence interval included zero. The proposed mediation model was therefore not supported. The results suggest that *taqwa* is more closely associated with internal self-regulatory capacity than with the quantity of social media engagement. Social media intensity should be distinguished from problematic social media use because frequency, duration, and involvement may reflect communication, work, education, social relationships, entertainment, or religious activities. Research on Muslim digital behaviour should therefore assess not only how often individuals use social media, but also the purposes, control, content, and consequences of that use.

Keywords: *Taqwa*; Self-Regulation; Social Media Intensity; Muslim Young Adults; Digital Behaviour

A. Introduction

Digital technology has made social media an integral part of young Muslim adults' everyday lives. Social media now serves not only as a source of entertainment but also as a medium for communication, learning, work, information seeking, identity formation, and the maintenance of social relationships. Its use should therefore be understood as a complex form of digital behaviour. High levels of use may reflect academic, professional, social, or religious needs, depending on the purposes and contexts that shape engagement.

Young adulthood is commonly associated with increasing autonomy, identity exploration, personal decision-making, and the management of multiple social demands. Arnett (2000) characterizes the transition from late adolescence into adulthood as an important period in the development of identity and personal responsibility. Although this study includes participants aged 18–35 years, Muslim young adults remain a relevant population because they are navigating choices, values, and behavioral commitments across both social and digital settings.

Self-regulation is one psychological capacity that may shape how individuals manage digital behaviour. It refers to the ability to direct thoughts, emotions, and actions consciously in accordance with personal goals and internal standards. Zimmerman (2000) conceptualizes self-regulation as a process involving planning, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and behavioral control. In social media contexts, this capacity may assist individuals in managing attention, time, impulses, and digital engagement so that these activities remain aligned with personal goals and social responsibilities.

Previous studies have associated weak self-regulation with problematic social media use. Błachnio and Przepiórka (2016), for example, found that impaired self-regulation and self-control were associated with Facebook addiction. Bányaí et al. (2017) likewise reported that problematic social media use was related to several psychological indicators requiring attention in studies of digital behaviour. These findings, however, should not be equated directly with the intensity of social media use. Intensity generally refers to frequency, duration, and degree of involvement, whereas problematic use involves loss of control, functional impairment, and negative consequences in everyday life. High social media use, therefore, does not necessarily indicate poor self-regulation.

Religious values may also be associated with individuals' capacity to regulate their behaviour. McCullough and Willoughby (2009) argue that religion may support self-regulation and self-control through the formation of goals, moral standards, self-monitoring, and motivation to restrain impulses. Within Islamic thought, *taqwa* is closely related to self-restraint and moral awareness. *Taqwa* encompasses more than ritual observance; it involves spiritual consciousness, moral caution, and an orientation towards conduct guided by Islamic values. From the perspective of Islamic psychology, *taqwa* may be understood as an internal value that shapes how individuals evaluate and direct their behaviour.

Theoretically, *taqwa* may be associated with self-regulation because both emphasize awareness, impulse control, and behavioral orientation towards particular standards. Individuals with stronger *taqwa* may be more inclined to monitor themselves, consider the moral consequences of their actions, and align their conduct with their religious commitments. In digital settings, such awareness may influence how individuals manage their time, attention, and engagement with social media.

The relationship between *taqwa*, self-regulation, and social media use, however, cannot be treated as straightforward. Social media intensity is a quantitative indicator that does not necessarily capture the purpose, quality, or consequences of use. Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) explain that social media intensity includes not only frequency and duration but also the degree to which social media is integrated into everyday life. Extensive use may therefore carry different meanings for individuals who use these platforms for entertainment, work, study, *da'wah*, or the maintenance of social relationships.

The present study addresses the limited empirical attention given to *taqwa*, self-regulation, and social media intensity within a single model, particularly among Muslim young adults. Earlier studies have more commonly employed general measures of religiosity or focused on problematic social media use. This study instead treats social media intensity as a contextual form of digital engagement that should not automatically be regarded as maladaptive. This perspective allows for a more careful examination of whether religious values and self-regulatory capacity are associated with the quantity of social media use.

Accordingly, this study examines the relationships among *taqwa*, self-regulation, and social media intensity among Muslim young adults. It also tests whether self-regulation mediates the relationship between *taqwa* and social media intensity. The study contributes to discussions in Islamic psychology and digital behaviour by approaching social media use as a contextual practice whose meaning cannot be inferred solely from its frequency or duration.

B. Methods

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design to examine the relationships among *taqwa*, self-regulation, and social media intensity

among Muslim young adults. The design was selected to test associations among the variables and to examine the indirect association of self-regulation in the relationship between *taqwa* and social media intensity; it was not intended to establish causal effects. Following screening for completeness and eligibility, 200 valid responses were included in the analysis. Participants were Muslim young adults aged 18–35 years who actively used social media. They were recruited through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria were: (1) identifying as Muslim; (2) being between 18 and 35 years of age; (3) having used social media actively for at least one year; and (4) providing informed consent. Responses were excluded when questionnaires were incomplete or participants did not meet the eligibility criteria. This sample size was considered adequate for regression-based mediation analysis because tests of direct and indirect effects require sufficient statistical power (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007).

Data were collected through a self-administered online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. An online survey was considered appropriate because the study targeted active social media users and enabled voluntary and anonymous participation. The questionnaire consisted of three measures: a *taqwa* scale, a self-regulation scale, and a social media intensity scale. *Taqwa* was assessed through indicators of awareness of Allah's supervision, Islamic value orientation, moral caution, and commitment to Islamic moral principles. Self-regulation was assessed through planning, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and impulse control. Social media intensity was measured through frequency of use, duration of use, and engagement in social media activities. All items were rated using a Likert-type response format.

Before the main analysis, the psychometric properties of the measures were examined using corrected item-total correlations and internal consistency estimates. All items showed corrected item-total correlations above 0.30. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.88 to 0.92, indicating good internal consistency across the three measures. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 31 and PROCESS Macro Model 4. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize participant characteristics and the distributions of the study variables. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine bivariate associations among *taqwa*, self-regulation, and social media intensity. Regression-based mediation analysis was then conducted to test whether self-regulation statistically mediated the association between *taqwa* and social media intensity.

Indirect effects were tested using a bootstrap procedure with 5,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals. Bootstrapping was used because it is appropriate for evaluating indirect effects and does not require the sampling distribution of the indirect effect to be normally distributed (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Hayes, 2018). The indirect effect was considered statistically significant when the 95% bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero. Ethical safeguards included informed consent, voluntary participation, respondent anonymity, and the use of data solely for academic purposes.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Results

The study included 200 Muslim young adults aged 18–35 years who actively used social media. Most participants were women, held a bachelor's degree, and were employed. WhatsApp was the most widely used platform, followed by Instagram and TikTok. These characteristics indicate that the sample consisted of young adults for whom social media formed part of their everyday communication and activity patterns.

Table 1.
Summary of Participant Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Percentage
Gender	Women	81.0%
	Men	19.0%
Highest education	Bachelor's degree	64.0%
Primary activity	Employed	49.5%
	University student	29.0%
Social media platforms used	WhatsApp	92.0%
	Instagram	69.5%
	TikTok	38.5%
Frequency of social media use	6–10 times per day	34.5%

Source: Authors' calculations based on survey data (2026)

As shown in Table 1, the sample was predominantly composed of women and respondents with a bachelor's degree. This composition should be considered when interpreting the findings, as the results primarily reflect the characteristics of this particular sample. The high use of WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok also confirms that participants had relevant experience of social media use for the purposes of this study.

Descriptive statistics were calculated to identify the overall distribution of *taqwa*, self-regulation, and social media intensity. *Taqwa* had the highest mean score, whereas social media intensity showed greater variability across participants.

Table 2.
 Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Taqwa	3.70	0.35	2.90	4.00
Self-regulation	3.21	0.40	2.25	4.00
Social media intensity	2.69	0.56	1.00	4.00

Source: Authors' calculations based on survey data (2026)

Table 2 shows that *taqwa* had the highest mean score ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.35$), followed by self-regulation ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.40$) and social media intensity ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 0.56$). The larger standard deviation for social media intensity indicates greater variation in participants' levels of engagement with social media than in their *taqwa* or self-regulation scores.

Prior to the main analysis, the data were examined to assess the basic assumptions of parametric analysis. The regression residuals were approximately normally distributed, the relationships among variables were linear, no multicollinearity was detected, and the residual pattern did not indicate heteroscedasticity. The data were therefore considered suitable for correlation, regression, and mediation analyses.

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the bivariate relationships among *taqwa*, self-regulation, and social media intensity. *Taqwa* was positively and significantly associated with self-regulation. In contrast, neither *taqwa* nor self-regulation was significantly associated with social media intensity.

Table 3.
 Pearson Correlations among Study Variables

Variable	Taqwa	Self-regulation	Social media intensity
Taqwa	—		
Self-regulation	0.517***	—	
Social media intensity	-0.107	-0.047	—

Note. *** $p < .001$.

Source: Authors' calculations using IBM SPSS Statistics version 31 and PROCESS Macro Model 4 (2026)

As shown in Table 3, *taqwa* was positively associated with self-regulation ($r = .517$, $p < .001$). Participants with higher *taqwa* scores also tended to report higher levels of self-regulation. However, *taqwa* was not significantly associated with social media

intensity ($r = -.107, p > .05$), and self-regulation was likewise unrelated to social media intensity ($r = -.047, p > .05$).

Regression analyses were subsequently conducted to examine the direct paths in the proposed mediation model. Taqwa did not significantly predict social media intensity. When self-regulation was included in the model, self-regulation also did not significantly predict social media intensity. Together, taqwa and self-regulation accounted for only a small proportion of the variance in social media intensity.

Table 4.
 Regression Results for Social Media Intensity

Predictor	β	p	Interpretation
Taqwa $\rightarrow$ Social media intensity	-0.107	.131	Not significant
Self-regulation $\rightarrow$ Social media intensity	0.012	.887	Not significant

Source: Authors' calculations using IBM SPSS Statistics version 31 and PROCESS Macro Model 4 (2026)

Table 4 indicates that the total association between *taqwa* and social media intensity was not significant ($\beta = -.107, p = .131$). After self-regulation was entered into the model, self-regulation also did not significantly predict social media intensity ($\beta = .012, p = .887$). The model explained approximately 1.2% of the variance in social media intensity. These findings indicate that *taqwa* and self-regulation made only a limited contribution to explaining differences in social media intensity within this sample.

A mediation analysis was then performed to test whether self-regulation statistically mediated the association between *taqwa* and social media intensity. The path from *taqwa* to self-regulation was significant. However, the path from self-regulation to social media intensity was not significant, and the direct association between *taqwa* and social media intensity after controlling for self-regulation was also non-significant.

Table 5.
 Mediation Analysis Results

Path	B	SE	t	p	Interpretation
Taqwa $\rightarrow$ Self-regulation	0.611	0.072	8.504	< .001	Significant
Self-regulation $\rightarrow$ Social media intensity	0.016	0.114	0.143	.887	Not significant
Taqwa $\rightarrow$ Social media intensity (direct effect)	-0.185	0.135	-1.367	.173	Not significant

Source: Authors' calculations using IBM SPSS Statistics version 31 and PROCESS Macro Model 4 (2026)

As presented in Table 5, *taqwa* significantly predicted self-regulation ($B = 0.611$, $SE = 0.072$, $t = 8.504$, $p < .001$). Self-regulation, however, did not significantly predict social media intensity ($B = 0.016$, $SE = 0.114$, $t = 0.143$, $p = .887$). The direct association between *taqwa* and social media intensity, after accounting for self-regulation, was also not significant ($B = -0.185$, $SE = 0.135$, $t = -1.367$, $p = .173$).

The bootstrap test of the indirect effect confirmed that self-regulation did not statistically mediate the association between *taqwa* and social media intensity because the 95% confidence interval included zero.

Table 6.
Bootstrap Test of the Indirect Effect

Mediation path	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	Conclusion
Taqwa → Self-regulation → Social media intensity	0.010	0.077	-0.151	0.150	Not significant

Source: Authors' calculations using IBM SPSS Statistics version 31 and PROCESS Macro Model 4 (2026)

Table 6 shows that the indirect effect of *taqwa* on social media intensity through self-regulation was 0.010, with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval ranging from -0.151 to 0.150. Because the interval included zero, the indirect effect was not statistically significant. Self-regulation therefore did not mediate the association between *taqwa* and social media intensity in this sample.

The findings show that *taqwa* was positively associated with self-regulation but was not significantly associated with social media intensity. Self-regulation was also unrelated to social media intensity and did not function as a statistical mediator in the proposed model. These results indicate that social media intensity should not be interpreted directly as a reflection of either *taqwa* or self-regulation among Muslim young adults.

2. Discussion

Taqwa was positively associated with self-regulation among Muslim young adults. This relationship is theoretically coherent because *taqwa* involves moral awareness, reflective judgment, and the restraint of conduct in accordance with Islamic commitments. It concerns more than ritual observance. Individuals who orient their conduct toward *taqwa* may be more likely to assess their actions, consider their

consequences, and restrain impulses that conflict with their moral commitments. These dispositions are closely related to planning, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and behavioral control.

McCullough and Willoughby (2009) argue that religious commitments can support self-regulation by providing moral standards, self-monitoring practices, and goals that guide behaviour. Indonesian studies have also associated religiosity with self-control and lower tendencies toward problematic behaviour among adolescents and young adults (Aviyah & Farid, 2014; Basri, 2014). Prasetya et al. (2019) likewise relate religious values to emotional and spiritual capacities that shape behavioral orientation. The present result supports the proposition that *taqwa* is associated with an internal capacity for self-regulation. It does not establish that *taqwa* produces self-regulation or that religious commitment generates behavioral control in every domain of life.

No significant association emerged between *taqwa* and social media intensity. Religious commitment was therefore unrelated to how often, how long, or how extensively respondents engaged with social media. This pattern is unsurprising in a context where social media is used for communication, employment, education, social connection, entertainment, information seeking, and religious activity. A person with strong religious commitments may use digital platforms intensively for work, family communication, learning, or da'wah. Frequency and duration alone cannot establish whether such use reflects poor self-control or weak religious orientation.

The distinction between social media intensity and problematic social media use is central to interpreting this result. Ellison et al. (2007) conceptualised intensity as the extent to which social media is integrated into everyday life, including frequency, involvement, and subjective attachment. Problematic social media use refers to a different condition: impaired control, disruption of daily functioning, and negative psychological or social consequences (Bányai et al., 2017; Błachnio & Przepiórka, 2016; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). The dependent variable in this study measured the quantity of engagement, not compulsive use, harmful consequences, or functional impairment. The absence of a relationship between *taqwa* and intensity should therefore not be interpreted as evidence that *taqwa* is unrelated to digital conduct.

Self-regulation was also unrelated to social media intensity. Earlier Indonesian research has usually examined social media addiction or problematic use rather than

ordinary intensity. Adityaputra and Salma (2022) reported a negative association between self-regulation and social media addiction among Generation Z university students. Awalia et al. (2022) found that self-regulation predicted social media addiction tendencies among university students. Roudhotina and Uyun (2022) identified self-control as a mediator between Islamic religious coping and problematic internet use among Muslim students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their outcome variables captured maladaptive patterns of digital engagement, whereas the present study measured frequency, duration, and involvement.

Self-regulation may be more relevant to the avoidance of compulsive, harmful, or disruptive digital practices than to the number of social media use itself. Frequent use can coexist with maintained academic or occupational responsibilities, emotional control, and deliberate online decision-making. Conversely, relatively infrequent use may still be problematic when it involves compulsive checking, emotional dependence, distress, or interference with everyday obligations. Similar levels of use may therefore represent very different behavioral patterns.

The mediation model was supported only at its first stage. *Taqwa* was significantly associated with self-regulation, but self-regulation was not associated with social media intensity. The indirect effect was consequently non-significant. The failed mediation model is attributable primarily to the absence of a relationship between self-regulation and social media intensity, rather than to the association between *taqwa* and self-regulation.

This pattern refines how *taqwa* may be positioned in research on Islamic psychology and digital behaviour. Its relevance may lie less in reducing the amount of digital activity and more in shaping moral evaluation, self-monitoring, content selection, online etiquette, and resistance to harmful forms of engagement. Research based solely on frequency and duration risks treating all intensive social media use as equivalent, despite substantial differences in purpose, context, and consequences.

Future studies should distinguish ordinary social media intensity from problematic social media use. Measures of digital behaviour should include motives for use, content exposure, perceived control, emotional outcomes, interference with work or study, and the quality of online interaction. Longitudinal and mixed-methods research may clarify how *taqwa* and self-regulation operate across everyday digital practices.

Qualitative inquiry could further examine how Muslim young adults use social media for communication, work, da'wah, entertainment, identity formation, and social connection.

Several limitations should be considered. Taqwa was measured through self-report and may have been affected by social desirability bias. The sample was predominantly female and highly educated, limiting the generalizability of the results. The social media intensity measure did not differentiate motives, activities, content, interaction quality, or psychological consequences. Finally, the cross-sectional design cannot establish temporal order or causal relationships among *taqwa*, self-regulation, and social media intensity.

D. Conclusion

This study examined the relationships among *taqwa*, self-regulation, and social media intensity among Muslim young adults. Taqwa was positively associated with self-regulation, indicating that respondents with stronger spiritual and moral orientation also reported greater capacity for planning, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and behavioral control. However, neither *taqwa* nor self-regulation was significantly associated with social media intensity, and self-regulation did not statistically mediate the relationship between *taqwa* and social media intensity. These results show that the proposed mediation model was not supported by the data.

The study clarifies that social media intensity should not be treated as a direct indicator of weak self-regulation or limited religious commitment. Frequency, duration, and level of engagement may reflect work, education, communication, social relationships, information seeking, entertainment, or religious activities. Taqwa may therefore be more closely associated with internal processes of moral evaluation and self-monitoring than with the quantity of digital engagement. For research on Muslim digital behaviour, this distinction is important because social media intensity and problematic social media use represent different constructs and should not be interpreted interchangeably.

The findings are limited by the cross-sectional design, reliance on self-report measures, the predominance of female and highly educated respondents, and the restricted measurement of social media intensity. Future studies should distinguish routine intensity from problematic social media use and include motives for use, perceived control, content

exposure, online ethical conduct, emotional outcomes, and interference with everyday responsibilities. Longitudinal and mixed-methods designs may provide a more precise account of how *taqwa* and self-regulation relate to digital practices over time.

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