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## **Religiosity and Its Impact on Twitter Use and Viewing of Islamic Reality Television Shows among University Students in Malaysia**

### **Pengaruh Keagamaan Terhadap Penggunaan Twitter dan Tontonan Program Realiti Islamik Dikalangan Pelajar Universiti di Malaysia**

Tengku Siti Aisha Tengku Mohd Azzman Shariffadeen\* &  
Aini Maznina A. Manaf\*\*

#### **Abstract**

Islamic reality shows presents an alternative brand of entertainment for the Malaysian Muslim community. This television genre can also be perceived as an innovative form of *da'wah*. Through watching these shows, television viewers interested in faith-based content can increase their religious knowledge, educate themselves on the Islamic beliefs and practices, and identify with suitable Muslim role models featured on these shows. Thus, a major focus of this study is to examine use of social media and television viewing related to Islamic reality shows among Malaysian undergraduate students. The uses and gratification approach postulates that individual differences, such as viewer religiosity may influence media selection and use. Therefore, we propose that those who perceive religion more positively would be more interested in *da'wah* content, and would therefore be more likely to use Twitter to follow accounts related to the show. A cross-sectional survey is carried out among undergraduate students enrolled in introductory Islamic revealed knowledge and human sciences courses from the International Islamic University of Malaysia (N = 321). Among others, findings indicate that religious individuals are more likely to follow the Twitter account of their favorite Islamic reality show. Also, while viewer religiosity initially influenced frequency of viewing Islamic reality shows, those who tweeted frequently about the show is also more likely to view Islamic reality shows frequently. Finally, those who gratified their relaxation needs by following their favorite Islamic reality show personality on Twitter is more likely to view the show frequently. The repercussions of these findings on the

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role of religiosity and its effects on social media use and television viewing, based on the uses and gratification perspective is discussed in the paper.

**Keywords:** Islamic Reality Shows, Religiosity, Television Viewing, Twitter Following Motivations, Uses and Gratification theory.

**Abstrak**

Program realiti Islamik merupakan alternatif buat penggemar rancangan hiburan berunsur keagamaan di Malaysia. Genre program televisyen ini juga boleh dipergunakan sebagai salah satu cara untuk berdakwah mengenai Islam. Dengan menonton program realiti Islamik, penonton boleh memupuk minat terhadap Islam, meningkatkan pengetahuan tentang Islam, mempelajari ilmu Islam dengan lebih mudah dan mengenali secara lebih dekat pendakwah muda yang terlibat dalam rancangan berkenaan. Oleh itu, salah satu objektif utama kajian ini ialah untuk meneliti penggunaan media sosial dan tontonan program realiti Islamik dikalangan pelajar universiti Malaysia. Bersandarkan teori uses and gratification, tingkahlaku dan latar belakang penonton memainkan peranan penting dalam mempengaruhi penggunaan media dikalangan individu. Dengan itu, kami menyarankan bahawa mereka yang mempunyai persepsi yang lebih positif terhadap agama akan mempunyai minat yang lebih mendalam terhadap agama, dan jesteru itu lebih cenderung untuk menggunakan Twitter untuk mendapatkan maklumat tentang program tersebut. Borang soal selidik telah disebarkan dikalangan pelajar Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia yang sedang mengikuti kursus asas dalam bidang sains sosial dan ilmu wahyu (N = 321). Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa mereka yang berminat dengan agama lebih cenderung untuk mengikut akaun Twitter peserta program realiti Islamik. Juga, frekuensi menonton program realiti Islamik lebih dipengaruhi oleh kadar penggunaan Twitter berbanding dengan kadar keagamaan. Akhir sekali, mereka yang mempunyai persepsi bahawa program realiti Islamik adalah program televisyen yang santai akan lebih cenderung untuk menonton program itu dimasa hadapan. Impak dapatan kajian terhadap teori uses and gratification serta pengaruh keagamaan terhadap penggunaan media sosial dan kecenderungan untuk menonton program realiti Islamik di kaca televisyen akan dibincangkan dengan lebih mendalam.

**Kata Kunci:** Program realiti Islamik, Keagamaan, Tontonan Televisyen, Motivasi Penggunaan Twitter, Teori *Uses and Gratification*.

**Introduction**

Individual media users have a wide array of alternatives when it comes to social media platform; including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. These social media accounts have different characteristics to cater to a wide range of individual needs. Among these different social media platforms, the presence of Twitter in this millennial age has remarkably changed the media landscape, thus shifting the choice of media and its pattern of usage among individual users. Twitter has emerged as one

of the most popular social media globally. It became prominent in 2008 when its usage was associated with high profile public figures particularly in the UK, US and Australia<sup>1</sup>. Twitter can be accessed via its homepage and also through mobile applications, i.e. laptop or mobile phones, which makes it easier to access. Due to its user-friendly feature, where users can communicate through short messages or known as 'tweets' that are limited to 140 characters like a text (SMS) message, many choose to use this service.<sup>2</sup> Users of Twitter normally create their account to follow various people, including individuals they know, celebrities or public figures.

However, despite the proliferation of new media options, television continues to be an important medium among media users, and is especially popular for news and entertainment.<sup>3</sup> As one of the more recent television genre, reality television shows has successfully attracted many people to watch its program and has been a big influence in shaping the community. Reality television show won people's hearts due to the sensational nature of entertainment program it offers.<sup>4</sup> Using a commercial platform, these shows tend to feature real people with new talents and capabilities.<sup>5</sup> Due to this reason, they have strong appeal with the masses and have attracted many loyal viewers.

In Malaysia, the majority of the locally produced reality shows are entertainment based. Among the popular reality shows are *Akademi Fantasia*, *Gang Starz*, *Malaysian Idol*, *Mentor*, *Raja Lawak Mega* and *Kilauan Emas*. Despite the popularity of reality television, these programs have received many critics for its adaptation of Western genres and for popularizing Western culture among its viewers. In 2005, the current Prime Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak (who was the deputy Prime Minister at the time) has expressed his fear of the

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<sup>1</sup> R. Deller, "Twittering on: Audience research and participation using Twitter," *Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 8, no. 1, (2011): 216 – 220.

<sup>2</sup> R. Deller, "Twittering on: Audience research and participation using Twitter," *Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 8, no.1, (2011): 216 – 220.

<sup>3</sup> Mazni Buyong and Rizalawati Ismāil, "Islamic programs in Malaysian free-to-air television channels," Paper presented in *International conference on Islamic civilization and Malay identity*, Malacca, Malaysia, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Juliana Abdul Wahāb. Malaysian reality TV: Between myth and reality. *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 26(2), (2010): 17–32.

<sup>5</sup> Mohamad Muhidin Patahol Wasli and Zaharah Hussīn, "Islamic Reality Television Programme 'Imam Muda'," *The Online Journal of Islamic Education Special Issue of ICIEd* (2014): 1-10.

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society's strong inclination towards adopting Western rather than the Eastern culture.<sup>6</sup> As a response to his concern, local television stations began to introduce reality television program that are Islamic in nature. According to the study by Aini Maznina, Saodah Wok, Rizalawati Ismail, and Siti Sakinah, these shows have become a popular source of religious information and have become widely accepted by the majority Muslim community in Malaysia. A major reason for its popularity may also be due to its novel approach in providing religious information.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, a major concern among researchers is the influence of Islamic reality shows among the television audience in Malaysia. Media scholars often examine the influence of individual differences in the use of media habits and motivations to use such media, such as gender and viewer religiosity. In one research, findings indicate that viewer religiosity specifically influenced media use among Christian viewers.<sup>8</sup> In examining religious TV programs (i.e. Islamic reality shows) would viewer religiosity have a similar effect on TV viewers in Malaysia? A majority of Malaysians are Muslims, and Islam is constitutionally the official religion in Malaysia, with non-Muslims given the freedom to practice their own faith. Therefore, for Muslim TV viewers, their media choices and use maybe dictated by their views on their Islamic faith. Thus, taking into consideration that religiosity maybe a contributing factor to media choice among the Muslim community in Malaysia, religiosity is the main focus of this study. Generally, it is expected that those who viewed religion more positively would be more likely to gravitate towards Islamic reality shows, and would view these shows frequently, and would use social media associated with the show. For instance, research has indicated that viewers of Islamic reality shows may also follow their favorite personality on social media. In one study by Tengku Siti Aisha and Aini Maznina, they found that almost half of the respondents follow *Imam Muda* Asyraf, the winner of the first season of *Imam Muda*, on Twitter.<sup>9</sup> Those who

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<sup>6</sup> Aini Maznina A. Manāf, Saodah Wok, Rizalawati Ismāīl, and Siti Sakinah Abdul Latīf, "The acceptance of TV Islamic reality shows by the Malay community," *Ulūm Islāmiyyah Journal* 10, (2013): 93-116.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> P.S., Bobkowski, "Adolescent religiosity and selective exposure to television," *Journal Of Media And Religion* 8, no. 1 (2009): 55-70.

<sup>9</sup> Tengku Siti Aisha and Aini Maznina A. Manāf, "Following Islamic reality show personalities on Twitter: A uses and gratification approach to understanding parasocial interaction and social media use," *Intellectual Discourse* 25, (2017): 637-659.

used Twitter actively were also more likely to watch Islamic reality shows. Other studies, such as the one by Greer and Ferguson, have indicated that social media use related to a television show may have as strong influence on frequency of viewing certain television programs.<sup>10</sup> Relying on uses and gratification theory, this paper argues that viewer religiosity plays an important role in influencing both social media use and television viewing among followers of Islamic reality shows. Accordingly, the research objectives for this study are as follows:

- To determine the relationship between gender and Twitter use related to Islamic reality shows
- To measure the influence of viewer religiosity on Twitter use related to Islamic reality shows
- To examine the relationship between viewer religiosity, motivations to follow Islamic reality show personalities on Twitter, frequency of tweeting about the show, with frequency of viewing Islamic reality shows

### **Literature Review**

#### **Islamic reality shows and the Malaysian TV audience**

Islamic entertainment produced by Malaysian television stations can be regarded as a new form of *da'wah* for the Muslim population in Malaysia. It offers an alternate form of entertainment for television viewers interested in entertainment programming with a religious twist. One of the latest genres in Islamic entertainment is Islamic reality show. Viewers who seek entertainment, while simultaneously interested in increasing their knowledge on Islam may choose to follow these Islamic reality shows on television. Loyal viewers may also get the latest updates about the show or interact with their favorite personality from the show through social media such as Twitter.

Islamic reality show has become widely accepted by the Malaysian Muslim community. Among the earliest Islamic reality shows are *Akademi al-Quran*, *Akademi Nasyid*, *Adik-Adikku*, *Ustazah Pilihan* and *Solehah*. Despite the different nature of the shows, these shows share the

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<sup>10</sup> C.F. Greer, and D. A. Ferguson, "Following local television news personalities on Twitter". *Electronic News* 5 (3), (2011): 145-157.

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same objective that is to produce role models who could potentially educate the Muslim community.<sup>11</sup>

*Imam Muda*, produced by Astro Oasis in 2010 is regarded as a pioneering show in this television genre. *Imam Muda* has emerged as one of the most popular Islamic reality shows since the inception of these kinds of programs in Malaysia. The premise of the show is to feature ten young men competing for the title of Young Imam (*Imam Muda*), a scholarship to study in Saudi Arabia, and other prizes. They will be tested on their religious knowledge and required to perform certain ritualized duties. Throughout weekly assignments and tasks given, the participants are trained to be leaders and equipped with adequate knowledge on Islam and appropriate communication skills. The participants are portrayed as knowledgeable and pious. The competition among participants has pushed them to perform better than others and the winner is known as the *Imam Muda* young leader. As such, *Imam Muda* contestants are seen as leaders who could educate and teach Muslim community. The emphasis on ‘*adab* and *akhlaq*’ in *Imam Muda* shows by the contestants are “visualized by their sayings and behaviours throughout the program to assist the understanding of Islam in reality”.<sup>12</sup> Many of the *Imam Muda* contestants are treated as positive role model, especially for the youth. For instance, *Imam Muda* Ashraf is one of the popular and perceived as a community leader; he is one of the most likeable contestants and is socially influential due to his positive image and effective communication skills.<sup>13</sup> The *Imam Muda* show ended after three seasons in 2012, but it’s success inspired a host of other similar shows. For example, *Dai’ Pendakwah Nusantara*, used a similar concept, but featured both male and female participants. The show is produced by TV3, and just ended its fifth season.<sup>14</sup> The concept of Islamic reality shows is also extended to

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<sup>11</sup> Mohamad Muḥidīn Patahol Wasli and Zaharah Hussīn. “Islamic Reality Television Programme Imam Muda”, *The Online Journal of Islamic Education*. Special Issue of ICIEd, (2014): 1-10.

<sup>12</sup> Mohamad Muḥidīn Patahol Wasli and Zaharah Hussīn, “Islamic Reality Television Programme Imam Muda”, *The Online Journal of Islamic Education*, Special Issue of ICIEd, (2014): 1-10.

<sup>13</sup> Ainurliza Mat Rahim, Mohd Azmir Mohd Nizah, Nurazirawati Ahmad and Nur Kareelawati Abd Karim, “Imam Muda reality show: An analysis of non-verbal communication of young Imam”, *Elixir Social Science*, 43, (2012): 6898-6904.

<sup>14</sup> Muhammad Fairol, “Muhammad Luqmān Ḥakīm Juara Da’i Pendakwah Nusantara”, 2017. *BH Online*, <https://www.bharian.com.my/hiburan/lain-lain/2017/10/332534/muhammad-luqman-hakim-juara-dai-pendakwah-nusantara>.

target different segments of the Malaysian TV audience. For example *Solehah*, produced by TV Al-Hijrah features an all-women personalities, and *Adik-Adikku*, produced by RTM features only children.

Following the success of *Imam Muda* and other similar shows, personalities featured on the show (and especially its winners) has also achieved instant fame among loyal followers of the show, and they have garnered a huge following in social media. For example, from the *Imam Muda* franchise, two contestants have gone on to become media darlings and are highly popular among followers of Islamic reality shows. The first is *Imam Muda* Asyraf, who is the winner of Season 1; he has 620, 055 Facebook followers and 425, 000 Twitter followers respectively, while *Imam Muda* Hassan Adli, the winner of Season 2 has 490, 376 Facebook followers and 74, 800 Twitter followers.

However, despite its growing influence, only a handful of empirical research has closely examined the effects of Islamic reality shows among TV audiences in Malaysia. In one study, the researchers found that personalities featured on *Imam Muda* shows exhibited good interpersonal communication skills and can potentially be a positive and persuasive role model to the audiences.<sup>15</sup> In another study by Mohamad Muhidin and Zaharah, through a content analysis of 158 messages featured on *Imam Muda* episodes, they found that behavior (*akhlak*) was a central theme depicted in the content and they concluded that these types of shows could potentially assist in educating TV audiences by imparting knowledge about Islam, and encouraging audiences to critically think about religion.<sup>16</sup> Also, another study by Haryati Abdul Karim found that although the media does not single handedly influence their audience, a combination of factors including religious programming, political and social environment can influence and assist audiences in negotiating and recreating their own religious identity, particularly among young Muslim Malaysians.<sup>17</sup> Finally, other researchers found that the Malaysian Malay community is generally receptive to these shows, as they are perceived to

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<sup>15</sup> Ainurliza Mat Rahim, Mohd Azmir Mohd Nizah, Nurazirawati Ahmad and Nur Kareelawati Abd Karim, "Imam Muda reality show: An analysis of non-verbal communication of young Imam", *Elixir Social Science*, 43, (2012): 6898-6904.

<sup>16</sup> Mohamad Muhidin Patahol Wasli and Zaharah Hussin, "Islamic Reality Television Programme Imam Muda", *The Online Journal of Islamic Education*. Special Issue of ICIEd, (2014): 1-10.

<sup>17</sup> Haryati Abdul Karim, "Audience reception of reality TV show 'Imam Muda': Contradictions and contested religious identities among young Malaysian Muslims", *Jurnal Kinabalu*, 13, (2013): 185-204.

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be educational and positive in nature.<sup>18</sup> It is clear that although the intent is to provide religious knowledge and also to educate the masses on religious practices, these shows have demonstrated they can also be appealing and entertaining, to a certain target audience that demands an alternative brand of infotainment shows that focuses on faith-based themes.

As the popularity of personalities featured on the show continues to grow and they become bona fide public figures, it is also important to take note that the effect of Islamic reality show on the audience maybe multi-faceted and complicated, and partly influenced by social media interactions with the audience. For instance, a contestant featured on *Imam Muda*, the public criticized Season 2 when he preached anti-vaccination views on his Facebook page and the controversy resulted in him deleting his Facebook page.<sup>19</sup> This incident may also affect the popularity of the show, as the audience interactions with media personalities associated by the show may also influence how the show is perceived. Furthermore, other media researchers also argue that although Islamic reality shows maybe educational and informative by nature, it may not truly portray a genuine picture of Islam, and religion maybe trivialized by these shows.<sup>20</sup> Overall, these studies have just begun to highlight the effect Islamic reality show has on its audience. Overall, although it has the potential to retain viewership with its novel approach to entertainment and its pull towards the audience in terms of being entertaining and informative, it has yet to be seen if these shows can sustain long-term interest among the Malaysian TV audience, and what are the factors that would influence continued viewing of the show among its viewers.

### **Religiosity and Media Use**

People normally use the media to gratify various needs, such as entertainment, social and diversion needs. There are various factors that determine choices of media among people. Research shows that religiosity

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<sup>18</sup> Aini Maznina Abd Manaf, Saodah Wok, Rizalawati Ismail, and Siti Sakinah Abdul Latif, "The acceptance of TV Islamic reality shows by the Malay community", *Ulūm Islāmiyyah Journal* 10, (2013): 93-116.

<sup>19</sup> Zurairi Abd Rahman, "Do Not Trust An 'Imam Muda' With Your Lives", Malay Mail, *Themalaymailonline.Com*, <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/opinion/zurairi-ar/article/do-not-trust-an-imam-muda-with-your-lives#VJuebMyvFQJ3VlhQ.97>.

<sup>20</sup> Haryati Abdul Karim, "Audience reception of reality TV show, 'Imam Muda': Contradictions and contested religious identities among young Malaysian Muslims", *Jurnal Kinabalu*, 13, (2013): 185-204.

ty influences the media people choose and use in their daily life. For instance, in one study conducted by Bobkowski, among 1,335 of 16-18 year old adolescents who completed Wave 2 of the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) survey, the researcher found that religion is one of the contributing factors that influence television maturity.<sup>21</sup> Others, like Almenayes, make a distinction between religion and religiosity. While referring religion to “a person’s religious domination,” he defines religiosity as “the strength of a person’s religious observance, as signified by their observance of their religion’s rituals, and the extent to which their daily life is guided by the precepts adopted by their religion”.<sup>22</sup> Obviously, religion can be a driving force, which guides individuals in practicing moral behaviors as well as preventing them from committing undesirable behaviors. Past studies have shown that religiosity plays an important role in deterring smoking, use of drugs, and other undesirable behaviors and unhealthy sexual activities.<sup>23</sup> In a similar vein, religiosity also serves a robust predictor to risk behavior, media consumption, community participation and emotional wellbeing.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, religiosity is seen as a result of individuals’ attachment to religious group they belong to. Therefore, the more individuals attach to the values of their religion and the more integrated they are into their religious group (i.e. the greater their religiosity is), the less they are to various chemical and behavioral dependencies.<sup>25</sup> Arguably, as it does in inhibiting undesirable behaviors, religiosity might also play a crucial role in media choice and use among young people.

Media scholars have conducted various studies to examine the relationship between religiosity and media use. Some studies have found that religion does not significantly influence media use. For instance, a study was conducted by Dutke to examine respondents’ religious affiliations among Christians. Attendance at religious services and their political views was found to affect their television viewing habits, soap operas

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<sup>21</sup> P.S., Bobkowski, “Adolescent religiosity and selective exposure to television”, *Journal Of Media And Religion* 8 (1), (2009): 55-70.

<sup>22</sup> J.J. Almenayes, “Religiosity and the perceived consequences of using social media in a Muslim country”, *Journal of Arts & Humanities*, 3 (5), (2014):108-117.

<sup>23</sup> J.J. Almenayes, Religiosity and the perceived consequences of using social media in a Muslim country, *Journal of Arts & Humanities*, 3 (5), (2014): 108-117.

<sup>24</sup> C. Smith, *Soul searching: The religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> J.J. Almenayes, “Religiosity and the perceived consequences of using social media in a Muslim country”, *Journal of Arts & Humanities*, 3 (5), (2014): 108-117.

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and reality shows.<sup>26</sup> However, the level of religiosity did not significantly influence television viewing. Another study carried out by Konig also showed no support for the role of religion on television viewing. In general, the degree of religiosity is not a significant predictor to television viewing among Christians.<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, many research has generally supported the proposition that religiosity plays a role in people's decision on the choice of media and its use. For instance, one study has confirmed that religiosity significantly influenced adolescents' entertainment television program preferences.<sup>28</sup> Adolescents who identify themselves as religious have been found to watch less mature television entertainment shows. In other words, those who consider themselves as more religious were less likely to watch violent programming.

Generally, people watch television religious programs to gratify their various needs. In a study conducted by Abelman, he found 22 motives of viewers for watching religious television programs.<sup>29</sup> Among the motives are information learning, dissatisfaction with other media, spiritual guidance, entertainment, avoiding commercial TV, feeling close to God, religiosity, moral support, topic for discussion and many more. For Muslims, their engagement in religious activities including watching religious television program become their duty in acquiring *'ilm* (knowledge), in line with the Islamic teaching itself that encourages its followers to continuously seek for knowledge. For instance, one study found that viewers claimed their reason for watching religious television program as a substitute for not attending any sermon.<sup>30</sup> In another study, researchers found that the main reason for watching Islamic reality show was to gain knowledge and viewing Islamic reality shows was considered as a positive learning experience.

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<sup>26</sup> L. J. Dutke, Television viewing habits of Christians, (Ph.D dissertation, University of North Texas, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> R., Konig, Religion and watching television (Nijmegen: Tandem Felix, 2009).

<sup>28</sup> P.S. Bobkowski, "Adolescent religiosity and selective exposure to television", *Journal Of Media And Religion* 8 (1), (2009): 55-70.

<sup>29</sup> R. Abelman, "Religious television uses and gratifications", *Journal Of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 31 (3), (1987): 293-307.

<sup>30</sup> Zalida Adam and Mariah Muda, "Malay young adults' perception towards Islamic television programs", Paper presented in *International conference on media and communication*, Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2011.

In this digital age, the involvement of Muslims in religious activities via media can take many forms such as watching religious talks and sermons on television, listening to religious talks and lectures via YouTube, blogs, and even social media such as Facebook. Ostensibly, as the online religious engagement activities have been changing, many Muslim preachers especially the young ones have started to increasingly utilise Twitter as a media in delivering messages about religion. For example, Ahmad Fathan Hidayatullah and Almed Hamzah found that the most popular tweets among scholars and preachers in Indonesia are topics about worship, love, information, and purification of soul.<sup>31</sup> The study also established that the more preachers post tweets, the more followers they attained. Likewise, in the case of *Imam Muda* personality, *Imam Muda* Asyraf obtained a high number of followers as he is active user of Twitter, and frequently tweets on his Twitter account.<sup>32</sup> In summary, in addition to religiosity, social media use related to a particular religious television show is perhaps an important factor in determining future viewing of faith-based shows, particularly among youthful audience.

### Theoretical Framework

Uses and gratification is a theoretical perspective that examines media use and how individuals turn to the media to gratify their various needs, including informational, social, escape, and entertainment needs. Media scholars gave an initial description of uses and gratifications in a paper that encapsulates research on media studies at the time<sup>33</sup>:

*The social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in*

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<sup>31</sup> Ahmad Fathan Hidayatullah and Almed Hamzah, "The impact of Islamic messages on Twitter towards Moslem youth", Paper presented in *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science And Engineering*, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Ainurliza Mat Rahim, Mohd Azmir Mohd Nizah, Nurazirawati Ahmad, and Nur Kareelawati Abd Karim, "Imam Muda reality show: An analysis of non-verbal communication of young Imam", *Elixir Social Science*, 43, (2012): 6898-6904; Tengku Siti Aisha and Aini Maznina Abd Manaf, "Following Islamic reality show personalities on Twitter: A uses and gratification approach to understanding parasocial interaction and social media use", *Intellectual Discourse*, 25 (2017): 637-659.

<sup>33</sup> E. Katz, J.G. Blumler, J.G. and M. Gurevitch, *The uses of mass communication: Current perspectives on gratification research* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1974).

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*(6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones. (p. 20).*

Further, these scholars emphasized that the mass media audience is active, and that media use is goal oriented.<sup>34</sup> Also, the audience may choose a variety of sources to gratify their needs. Therefore, the mass media competes with other non-media sources for needs satisfaction. For instance, to satisfy social interaction needs, an individual may choose to meet a family member for lunch, or to go watch a movie with a friend. It is also important to note that other environmental factors also influence the individuals' active use, and awareness of media use. Also, communication behavior is perhaps mediated by social and psychological factors. The audience member's behavioral response to the media will be filtered through their social and psychological surroundings, such as individual differences (e.g. personality traits, socio-economic status, gender). Others argue that social situations facilitate an environment that necessitates the use of certain media as the most convenient and effective way of gratifying our needs.<sup>35</sup> For example, lonely individuals have a tendency to use the media to satisfy their need for companionship compared to non-lonely individuals.

Additionally, scholars also argue with the advent of new communication technology, new gratifications maybe created.<sup>36</sup> Researchers highlighted that new media use may generate newer types of gratifications that are initiated by the modality, agency, interactivity, and navigability qualities of the new media. For instance, current research on uses and gratification find that the individuals may also be motivated use social media to satisfy these needs, and for those seeking religious content may also turn to social media to satisfy these needs. In one study, using uses and gratification as a theoretical framework, researchers identified four factors that motivated individuals to access faith-based content on Facebook: ministering, spiritual enlightenment, religious information and

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<sup>34</sup> E. Katz, J.G. Blumler, J.G. and M. Gurevitch, *The uses of mass communication: Current perspectives on gratification research* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1974).

<sup>35</sup> S.J. Baran and D.K. Davis, *Mass communication theory* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson, 2003).

<sup>36</sup> S.S. Sundar, and A. Limperos, *Uses and gratification 2.0: Do new technology brings in new gratifications?* Paper presented in *Communication & Technology Division of the International Communication Association (ICA)*, Suntec City, Singapore. 2011.

also entertainment.<sup>37</sup> Another study found a significant connection between motivation to follow religious personalities on Twitter, the parasocial relationships they form with these personalities, and also Twitter use.<sup>38</sup>

Accordingly, this research extends understanding on uses and gratifications by focusing on religiosity as a psychosocial attribute that influence viewing of Islamic reality shows this study. Also, this study aims to focus on the influence of social media use related to Islamic reality show personality on further viewing of the show. Does different motivation to follow Islamic reality show personalities on social media significantly influence frequency of viewing Islamic reality shows on television? Furthermore, among loyal viewers of Islamic reality shows, would viewer religiosity prompt them to further gratify their various needs through media use associated with Islamic reality shows, i.e. social media use and television viewing?

In summary, based on the theoretical framework and previous literature, the following research question and hypotheses are proposed for this study:

- H1 (a): There is a significant relationship between gender and likelihood of following official Twitter account of a favorite Islamic reality show.
- H1 (b): There is a significant relationship between gender and likelihood of following the Twitter account of a favorite Islamic reality show personality.
- H1 (c): There is a significant relationship between gender and frequency of tweeting about Islamic reality shows.
- H2 (a): Religious individuals are more likely to follow the official Twitter account of their favorite Islamic reality television shows.
- H2 (b): Religious individuals are more likely to follow the Twitter account of a favorite Islamic reality television show personality.
- H2 (c): Religious individuals are more likely to tweet about Islamic reality shows.

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<sup>37</sup> P.J. Brubaker and Haigh, M.M, "Audience research and participation using Twitter", *Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 8 (1), (2017): 216-220.

<sup>38</sup> Tengku Siti Aisha and Aini Maznina Abd Manaf, "Following Islamic reality show personalities on Twitter: A uses and gratification approach to understanding parasocial interaction and social media use", *Intellectual Discourse*, 25 (2017): 637-659.

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- RQ1: What is the relationship between viewer religiosity, motivations to follow favorite Islamic reality show personality on Twitter and frequency of tweeting about the show, with frequency of viewing Islamic reality shows?

**Methodology**

**Participants and Procedures**

The main research methodology for the present study is quantitative, employing the use of a cross-sectional survey to examine the influence of religiosity on social media use and television viewing of Islamic reality shows among Malaysian university students. The main sample of this study comprises of undergraduate students taking introductory religious and social sciences courses from the International Islamic University of Malaysia, during Semester I, 2016/2017 session. They were asked to participate in the study during class hour and took 15-20 minutes to complete the research instrument. To increase response rate, these students were also asked recommend their friends or family members who were active Twitter users and also watched Islamic reality shows, that would be interested to also participate in the study. In providing their response to the research instrument, the respondents were also asked to think about a favorite Islamic reality television show, and a favorite personality from the show that they also follow on Twitter. Those who did not own a Twitter account, or did not watch any Islamic reality show were excluded from the study. After eliminating incomplete surveys, the final sample totaled up to 321 respondents. Overall, the respondents are relatively young ( $M = 21.27$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ) and well educated, with most of them having already completed a diploma or matriculation studies (72%). More females (81%) participated in this study compared to males (19%), and a majority of them are single (99%). These respondents are also active users of Twitter based on daily use of Twitter, averaging almost 6 hours per day using Twitter ( $M = 5.78$ ,  $SD = 34.56$ ), and have owned their Twitter account for quite some time ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = 2.19$ ), and with more than one third of the respondents owning a Twitter account for at least six years (39%).

Table 1: Background of respondents in the study

ITEMS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	62	19.3
Female	259	80.7
<b>Age group</b>		
≤ 20 years old	98	30.5
21 – 23 years old	200	62.3
≥ 24 years old	16	5.0
<b>Educational Background</b>		
Secondary school	15	4.7
Diploma/Matriculation	231	72.2
Degree and above	74	23.1
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	317	98.8
Married	4	1.2
<b>General Twitter use</b>		
<i>Duration owning Twitter account</i>		
0-2 hours	52	16.2
2.1-4 hours	56	17.4
4.1-6 hours	87	27.1
More than 6 hours	126	39.3
<i>Daily active Twitter use</i>		
0-2 hours	119	37.1
2.1-4 hours	55	17.1
4.1-6 hours	28	8.7
More than 6 hours	119	37.1
<b>Islamic reality shows</b>		
<i>Favorite Islamic reality television show</i>		
Pencetus Ummah (Astro)	120	39.1
Imam Muda (Astro Oasis)	78	25.4
Akademi Al-Quran (TV 9)	52	16.9
Da'i Pendakwah Nusantara	32	10.4
(TV 3)	25	7.8
Others		
<i>Favorite Islamic reality show personality</i>		
Imam Muda Asyraf (Imam Muda)	46	43.4
PU Rahmat (Pencetus Ummah)	11	10.4
	11	10.4
	6	5.7

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Da'i Wan ( <i>Dai' Pendakwah Nusantara</i> )	32	30.2
Imam Muda Dazrin ( <i>Imam Muda</i> )		
Others		

**Table 1** presents a more detailed background of the respondents who participated in the study based on their demographic profile (gender, age group, educational background, and marital status), general Twitter use, and preference pertaining to Islamic reality shows (i.e. favorite Islamic reality show and favorite personality from the show).

**Measures**

*Twitter use related to the show* is measured using three separate items. First, the respondents are asked to think about a favorite Islamic reality television show, and a favorite Islamic reality show personality from that specific show. Next, the respondents are also asked to indicate if they followed the official Twitter account of the show, and if they followed their favorite Islamic reality show personality on Twitter. Response options for both of these items are either a “Yes” (for following) or a “No” (for not following). Finally, Twitter use related to the show was also measured by frequency of tweets about the show, and is show is measured by asking the respondents to recall the number of times they have tweeted specifically about their favorite Islamic reality show.

*Level of religiosity* is analyzed using a ten-item religiosity scale developed by Nor Diana Mohd Mahudin, Noraini Mohd Noor, Mariam Adawiah Dzulkifli, and Nazariah Shari’e Janon.<sup>39</sup> An example of an item from the scale, “At any point of time in life, I can strengthen my relationship with Allah SWT”. All items are measured using a 5-point Likert scale item, with response items that range from 1 “Strongly Disagree” to 5 “Strongly Agree”. A Cronbach alpha score of .90 indicates that this is a reliable scale.

The scale for *motivations to follow their favorite reality show personality on Twitter* contains a total of 29 items, with the following eight subscales: habit (6 items,  $\alpha = .74$ ), companionship (3 items,  $\alpha = .86$ ), arousal (3 items,  $\alpha = .85$ ), relaxation (3 items,  $\alpha = .85$ ), information seeking (3 items,  $\alpha = .82$ ), escape (3 items,  $\alpha = .84$ ), entertainment (3

<sup>39</sup> Nor Diana Mohd Mahudin, Noraini Mohd Noor, Mariam Adawiah Dzulkifli, and Nazariah Shari’e Janon, “Religiosity among Muslims: A scale development and validation study”, *Makara-Hubs Asia*, 20(2), (2016): 109-121.

items,  $\alpha = .86$ ), and social interaction (2 items,  $\alpha = .75$ ). This scale is adapted from a previous instrument on TV viewing motivation.<sup>40</sup> All items are also measured using a 5-point Likert scale item, with response items that range from 1 “Strongly Disagree” to 5 “Strongly Agree”.

Finally, *frequency of viewing favorite Islamic reality show* is measured by asking respondents to recall the number of times they have viewed an episode of their favorite Islamic reality television show.

### Findings of the Study

For **Hypothesis 1 (a-b)**, two separate chi-square analyses is carried out to test the association between gender and Twitter habits related to Islamic reality television shows (i.e. favorite Islamic reality television show and favorite personality from the show followed on Twitter). For H1a, the chi-square analysis indicates that there is no significant relationship between gender and the likelihood of following a favorite Islamic reality show personality on Twitter,  $X^2 (1, N = 108) = 0.46, p = .66$ . Therefore, H1a is rejected. For H1b, the chi-square analysis also indicates that there is no significant relationship between gender and the likelihood of following an Islamic reality television show on Twitter,  $X^2 (6, N = 307) = 5.90, p = .43$ . As such, H1b is also rejected. Next, to analyze **Hypothesis 1 (c)**, an independent sample t-test is used to measure the mean differences in frequency of tweeting about Islamic reality shows across gender. The results indicate that females were more likely to tweet about the show ( $M = 4.64, SD = 11.38$ ), compared to males ( $M = 2.29, SD = 3.84$ ),  $t (205) = 2.18, p < .05$ . Therefore, H1c accepted.

To test **Hypothesis 2 (a-b)**, two separate independent sample t-tests is carried out to examine the mean differences in religiosity score across those who followed Twitter account of their favorite Islamic reality show personality or otherwise, those who followed the official Twitter accounts of their favorite Islamic reality show, and those who tweeted about the show. For H2a, there is no significant mean difference in religiosity score in terms of those who followed Twitter accounts of their favorite personality from an Islamic reality show ( $M = 4.14, SD = .63$ ), and those who do not ( $M = 4.13, SD = .59$ ),  $t (287) = .12, p = .90$ . Therefore, H2a is rejected. For H2b, the test indicates that there is a significant mean difference in religiosity score across those who followed the offi-

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<sup>40</sup> A.M. Rubin, E.M. Perse, and R.A. Powell. “Loneliness, parasocial interaction and local television news viewing”, *Human Communication Research*, 12 (2), 1985: 155-180.

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cial Twitter account of their favorite Islamic reality show,  $t(289) = 1.89$ ,  $p = .05$ . Those who followed Twitter accounts of their favorite Islamic reality show had significantly higher score of religiosity ( $M = 4.24$ ,  $SD = .61$ ) compared to those who did not follow their favorite Islamic reality show on Twitter ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = .57$ ). In other words, those who perceived religion more positively were more likely to follow their favorite Islamic reality show on Twitter. Therefore, H2b is accepted. Next, to measure the relationship between viewer religiosity and frequency of tweeting about Islamic reality shows for **Hypothesis 2 (c)**, a Pearson's bivariate correlation is used. The test however, indicates that there is no significant relationship between viewer religiosity and frequency of tweeting about Islamic reality shows,  $r(200) = -.03$ ,  $p = .67$ . Therefore, H2c is rejected.

Finally, to analyze **Research Question 1**, and to test the relationship between viewer religiosity, motivation to follow Twitter accounts related to Islamic reality shows, and frequency of tweeting about the show, with frequency of viewing a favorite Islamic reality show on television, a hierarchical regression analysis was carried out. In Step 1, viewer religiosity is entered into the equation. Then, in Step 2, eight motivations for following favorite Islamic reality personality on Twitter are entered in to the equation as one block of predictors. Finally, in Step 3, frequency of tweeting about the show was entered in the equation. The frequency of viewing a favorite Islamic reality show on television served as the dependent variable of the study.

In Step 1, viewer religiosity was a positive, significant predictor to frequency of viewing Islamic reality shows ( $\beta = .17$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In Step 2, only motivation to follow Twitter accounts related to Islamic reality shows due to relaxation purposes emerged as a significant, positive predictor to frequency of viewing Islamic reality shows ( $\beta = .23$ ,  $p = .05$ ). However, viewer religiosity ceased to be a significant predictor at this step. The  $F$  change was significant ( $p < .05$ ). Finally, in Step 3, frequency of Tweeting about the show also emerged as a positive, significant predictor to frequency of viewing Islamic reality shows ( $\beta = .48$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Motivation to follow a favorite Islamic reality show personality on Twitter due to relaxation ceased to be a significant predictor at this step. The  $F$  change was significant ( $p < .001$ ). The final equation accounts for 34% of the variance explained in predicting the frequency of viewing Islamic reality shows.

**Table 2** presents a detailed summary of the regression analysis.

*Table 2: Summary of Regression Analysis for Predicting Frequency of Viewing Islamic Reality Shows*

Predictors	Frequency of Viewing Islamic Reality Shows		
	B	B	SE
<b>Step 1</b>			
Viewer religiosity	1.10	.48	17*
<b>Step 2</b>			
Viewer religiosity	.71	.50	11
(Habit) Twitter following motivation 1			
	-.23	.43	.05
(Companionship) Twitter following motivation 2			
	-.10	.37	.03
(Arousal) Twitter following motivation 3			
	.65	.43	17
(Relaxation) Twitter following motivation 4			
	.86	.45	23*
(Information-seeking) Twitter following motivation 5			
	.06	.37	02
(Escape) Twitter following motivation 6			
	-.64	.35	.18
(Entertainment) Twitter following motivation 7			
	.24	.44	06
(Social Interaction) Twitter following motivation 8			
	-.25	.35	.07
<b>Step 3</b>			
Viewer religiosity	.84	.44	13
(Habit) Twitter following motivation 1			
	-.23	.37	.05
(Companionship) Twitter following motivation 2			
	-.07	.32	.02
(Arousal) Twitter following motivation 3			
	.39	.38	10
(Relaxation) Twitter following motivation 4			
	.54	.39	14
Twitter following motivation 5			
	.03	.32	

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(Information-seeking)				01
Twitter following motivation 6				
(Escape)				
Twitter following motivation 7	-.44	.31	.12	
(Entertainment)				
Twitter following motivation 8	.13	.39	.03	
(Social Interaction)				
Frequency of tweeting about Islamic reality shows	-.18	.31	.05	
	.27	.04	<b>48**</b>	

*Note.*  $N = 171$ .  $R = 0.17$ ,  $R^2 = 0.03$ ,  $F(1, 169) = 5.30$ ,  $p < .05$ , for Step 1;  $R = 0.35$ ,  $R^2 = 0.12$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = 0.07$ ,  $F(9, 161) = 2.07$ ,  $p < .05$ , for Step 2;  $R = 0.58$ ,  $R^2 = 0.34$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = 0.29$ ,  $F(10, 160) = 8.05$ ,  $p < .001$ , for Step 3 \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Discussion and Conclusion**

A major focus of this study is on the influence of viewer religiosity on Twitter use related to Islamic reality shows and viewing of Islamic reality shows on television among Malaysian undergraduate university students. The first set of analyses examined gender difference in the use of Twitter habits related to Islamic reality shows. Overall, the only gender difference in the use of Twitter habits related to Islamic reality shows concerned frequency of tweeting, where females were more likely to tweet about the show compared to males. Post-hoc analysis through several t-tests indicates that although there was no significant gender difference in total use of Twitter (in hours) and duration of owning Twitter, the mean score for active Twitter usage and duration of owning Twitter is higher for females compared to males. Taken together, because of their Twitter use, female viewers were perhaps more likely to express their loyalty to Islamic reality shows through social media use. Future studies could also examine other background and demographic variables that may influence use of other social media platforms related to Islamic reality shows, such as age and religious background. Older adults with some religious background may gravitate towards Islamic reality shows, and it would be interesting to examine if they were also using social media (i.e. Facebook) to express their loyalty and interest in these shows.

The next set of analyses examined the influence of viewer religiosity over the use of Twitter habits related to the show. Religiosity was found to influence two variables concerning Twitter use related to Islamic reality shows: following official account related to the show and also frequency of tweeting about the show. Possibly, those who perceived re-

ligion more positively were maybe more likely to follow official accounts of these shows, to obtain updates about the show but also to acquire other information concerning religion that would interest them. For instance the *Pencetus Ummah* Twitter account (@pencetus\_ummah), the official Twitter account for the *Pencetus Ummah* shows was found to not only highlighting interesting segments of the show, but they also provided updates to other religious programs or content that is featured on Astro Oasis. Further, those who perceived religion positively also tweeted frequently about the show. Taken together, these findings may imply that among viewers of Islamic reality shows, religious viewers were more motivated to tweet about the show to share information related to the show with others. It is probable that for religious viewers, using Twitter as a form of *da'wah* to spread and share positive information about Islamic reality shows is a persuasive and appealing reason to use Twitter.

Finally, the hierarchical regression analysis attempted to identify significant factors that would influence viewing of Islamic reality shows. It is evident that while as an individual difference, religiosity is initially important in determining viewership of Islamic reality shows, it appears to take a back seat when taking into account the viewer's use of social media that is related to Islamic reality shows. This result also mirrors previous findings indicating that religiosity did not significantly influence future television viewing among Christians.<sup>41</sup> Thus, religiosity may initially attract a viewer interested in religious content on television, but to retain viewership, social media use related to the show is more influential. Specifically, motivation to follow Twitter accounts related to the show because of relaxation was able to significantly influence frequency of viewing Islamic reality shows. Therefore, this finding provide empirical evidence for the uses and gratification theory; where motivation often drives use of certain media to gratify the users' needs. Here, for viewers of Islamic reality shows, Twitter use for relaxation provide an outlet for them to express their need for relaxation, and when the need for relaxation is assuaged, the positive interactions experienced in the Twitter use related to the show would also prompt them to continue to gratify their needs with continuously viewing the show. This finding also highlights the importance of presenting religious information through social media in a relaxed manner. Although religion is a serious topic, if presented

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<sup>41</sup> L. J Dutke, Television viewing habits of Christians, (Ph.D dissertation, University of North Texas, 2008); R. Konig, Religion and watching television (Nijmegen: Tandem Felix, 2009).

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carefully in an informative manner that is relaxed, it has the potential of influencing others in a positive way. The Holy Quran has also consistently emphasized that the effectiveness of the *da'wah* very much depends on using the right approach, e.g. using the right choice of words and speaking in a gentle manner. For example, in *Surah Taha*, verse 43-44: "Go, both of you, to Pharaoh. Indeed he has transgressed. And speak to him with gentle speech that perhaps he may be reminded or fear [Allah]".

Finally, the frequency of tweeting about the show emerged as significant, positive predictor to viewership of the show, and this illustrates the persuasive and powerful nature of social media in influencing continued use of traditional media. Therefore, besides featuring informative religious content in an entertaining manner, it is important that viewers continue to feel 'involved' in the show in order to retain viewership. Here, Twitter may perform as a conduit in getting viewers involved with the show as they exchange more tweets about the show, get Twitter notification about the show from the official Twitter accounts, and also interact with other viewers who have similar interest in the show.

This study however, has its limitation. Due to the focus on examining active social media users on Twitter, this study may not have captured an audience that represents the true demographic profile of viewers of Islamic reality shows, such as older adults and housewives. Thus, its results should be interpreted with caution. Hence, future studies should include a wider range of target respondents, or examine users of other social media platforms (i.e. Facebook) in examining the interaction between social media use and television viewing of religious content. Another concern is in terms of social desirability bias, which is a common issue in quantitative study. It is a 'response determinant that refers to the tendency of people to deny socially undesirable traits or qualities and to admit to socially desirable ones'.<sup>42</sup> Thus, in this study, the respondents may have overestimated their perceptions towards religiosity. Future studies can include multiple measures to examine religiosity, such as knowledge on religion, or background on Islamic education. Finally, future studies may benefit by qualitatively examining other motives that may influence continued use of Islamic reality show viewing, such perceived credibility (in terms of religious knowledge and behavior) of per-

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<sup>42</sup> D.L. Phillips and K.J. Clancy, "Some effects of 'social desirability' in survey studies", *American Journal of Sociology*, 77 (5), (1972): 921-940.

sonalities featured on the show, or perceived homophily (similarity) in religious background, between the personalities featured on the show, and its audiences.

In summary, this research has attempted to examine the influence of viewer religiosity on social media use and television viewing. While viewer religiosity may initially attract the interest of viewers towards the show, the main findings have demonstrated the persuasive nature of social media on traditional media viewing. For those interested in faith-based television programs, continued interest in the show appears to be fueled by active involvement in social media and the positive interactions they continue to share with creators of the show, prominent personalities on the show, as well as other fans of the show. Therefore, it is necessary for Malaysian television stations to cater for its Muslim viewers by producing shows that not only provide authentic and accurate information on religion, but also emphasize on positive interactions these shows established with their viewers during the show, and also after the show has ended, through social media accounts related to the show.

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