



SIMULACRA AND SPIRITUALITY: EXPLORING NEW AGE RELIGION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Social media is one form of new media that plays a significant role and holds considerable power in communicating information to the public. The prevalence of online religious interaction through social media has become a significant aspect of religious life in the digital era. This study aims to provide a description of the interaction of religious tolerance on social media, which enables individuals to share information, opinions, and views, thereby creating a space where religious understanding continues to evolve and change. The concept of "New Age Religion" refers to the faith and religious movements that emerged and developed mainly in the late 19th century and during the 20th century. Its diversity and focus on personal spirituality, as well as the synergy between various religious and spiritual traditions, made this movement famous. The process of online interaction can be viewed as a form of religious life in the digital era, thereby transforming the concept and understanding of religion in the new era of social media. Baudrillard argues that many aspects of life, including religion, have turned into simulations or hyperreality in postmodern society. In the context of religion, this means that religious experiences are often no longer directly related to the original spiritual "reality", but rather to representations and symbols created by the media and popular culture.

Keywords: *New Age Religion, Spirituality; Social Media, Baudrillard's perspective.*

INTRODUCTION

Social media, one type of new media, is very effective in disseminating information to the public. Religious interaction through social media has become an important component of religious life in the digital era (Saumantri & Zikrillah, 2020). Religious interaction through social media has the power to change people's concepts and understanding of religion in the new era of social media (Darmawan et al., 2020). Religious interaction through social media can also help individuals build more inclusive and open religious communities (Bahtiar, 2019). Social media can help create peace and tolerance in an increasingly pluralistic society by providing space for interfaith discussions, sharing experiences and opinions, and building interfaith cooperation. Online religious interaction allows people to gain new information and broaden their religious insights about the perspectives of different religions (Rahman et al., 2015). In addition, online religious interaction allows people to build a wider network of religious communities spread throughout the world (Ratcliff et al., 2017). They can also engage in interfaith discussions, share their religious experiences, and work together to promote peace and tolerance throughout the world (Prasojo et al., 2020). Therefore, religious interaction carried out online through social media can have an impact on individuals' understanding of religion in addition to increasing their understanding of religion today (Fakhrurroji et al., 2020).

In reality, social media can also function as a place to spread extreme and radical ideas that are contrary to the principles of peace and tolerance (Neumaier, 2020). Religious interactions via the internet can function as a way to strengthen filter bubbles, where people tend to be exposed only to perspectives that are in line with their own beliefs, which causes intolerance towards different perspectives (Pons-de Wit et al., 2015). This can cause divisions in society and limit the space for interfaith conversation. In addition, social media also risks spreading incorrect information or hoaxes, which can cause conflict between religious groups (Bakar et al., 2018). In addition, religious interactions that are carried out online also have the potential to increase beliefs in religious extremism and radicalism (Zakaria et al., 2018). By easily obtaining various types of religious beliefs, people are also vulnerable to deviant beliefs that can harm physical and mental health (Simangunsong, 2016).

Religious interaction with the new symbol of "tolerance" on the internet creates a new idea of religion on social media. It is very important for individuals to remain critical in filtering the information received and ensure that religious interaction on the internet is not used to spread radicalism, intolerance, or religious conflict (Retpitasari & Oktavia, 2020). Religious interaction in the digital era through social media, through the symbol #tolerance, has great potential to enrich the concept of religion in the new era by increasing a more tolerant and inclusive understanding of religious differences (Witro et al., 2023). Individuals can share their experiences, knowledge, and personal

stories about religion in the online environment. This can broaden their understanding and encourage constructive interfaith conversations (White et al., 2015). Social media can cause polarization, the spread of misinformation, and religious radicalism (Nugraha et al., 2020). Therefore, the power of polysemy in new media can be a very effective tool to encourage diversity, tolerance, and religious discussion if used wisely and responsibly (Muhyani, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Religious Interaction in Indonesia

Religious interaction in Indonesia is highly complex and diverse, reflecting the country's rich cultural and ethnic diversity. Although Indonesia is the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, it also has many adherents of other religions, such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Religious and cultural diversity are components of Indonesia's diversity and tolerance (Mazya et al., 2024). Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Indonesian constitution, and society is generally tolerant of other religions. Different religious groups cooperate and respect each other in many places. However, this can vary depending on location and conditions (Ratcliff et al., 2017). Another factor related to religious interaction is the celebration of various traditions, which often brings Indonesian people together to celebrate different religious events. For example, Muslims celebrate Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, while Christians celebrate Christmas and Easter.

Another level of religious interaction in Indonesia is education, including religious dialogue. In Indonesia, numerous efforts have been made to facilitate conversations between different religions. There are organizations and institutions where people are taught to share their understanding of tolerance and other religions. In addition, many schools and universities regularly have lessons about other religions to teach people about tolerance and understanding (Prasojo et al., 2020). Social issues and conflicts between religions initially appear to be very positive. For example, Indonesia has a history of religious conflict. However, over the years, these conflicts have been rooted in differences in beliefs, especially political or social. Other differences, such as economic, political, and social, are affected by the many factors that can be caused by inter-religious conflict, and have a major impact on the government (Pons-de Wit et al., 2015).

Public views on religious issues are heavily influenced by media positions and representations. Sensational or biased media can exacerbate tensions, while positive media can promote tolerance and understanding (Tudor, 2021). Overall, religious relations in Indonesia reflect the country's diversity and social dynamics. Many efforts are made to better understand each other and live together well despite obstacles.

New Age Religion in Social Media

The concept of "New Age Religion," also known as "New Age Religion," refers to a faith and religious movement that emerged and developed primarily in the late 19th century and throughout the 20th century. Its diversity and focus on personal spirituality and the synergy between different religious and spiritual traditions have made this movement popular. Here are some of the key concepts of the New Age Religion concept, including the merging of traditions. New Age religions often incorporate elements from diverse religious and spiritual traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism, as well as teachings from Western religions such as Christianity, and even New Thought or Theosophy. This results in a very eclectic set of beliefs that are not tied to any particular tradition (Fakhruroji et al., 2020). Next Personal Spirituality: An emphasis on individual spiritual experience is a hallmark of New Age religions. Through spiritual practices, meditation, and personal reflection, individuals are encouraged to explore and discover their own spiritual significance. According to Anwar and Mujib (2022) in (Azmi & Omar, 2024), social media can have a positive impact on well-being, especially when used for religious purposes. Religiousness plays a very important role in people's lives (Saumantri, 2023).

The development of self-awareness and the pursuit of personal transformation are typically included. This movement may have an accepting and tolerant attitude towards a variety of religious beliefs and practices. The main goal is to achieve balance and harmony, and he often emphasizes that there are fundamental similarities between the various spiritual traditions (Neumaier, 2020). Sensitive issues require great care to maintain peace and social harmony in a pluralistic society, therefore, the form and content of information are not only determined by its information value, but also by the need to avoid conflict and maintain national stability (Sabri, 2021).

In new-age religions, a deep connection between humans and nature is often emphasized. Beliefs such as universal energy, the healing power of nature, and the importance of living in harmony with the environment are included in this. Practices such as energy healing, the use of crystals, and working with auras are often found here. Besides, the focus of this movement is typically on promoting change and transformation for the benefit of the individual. There is a belief that spiritual practices and deeper understanding can bring about profound changes in the self and improve the quality of life (Pons-de Wit et al., 2015).

Simulation Jean Baudrillard

Jean Baudrillard, a French philosopher and sociologist renowned for his theories on simulation and hyperreality, presents a distinct perspective on religion. Although Baudrillard's approach to religion is not as explicit as that found in other works on religion, his ideas can be used to analyse religion in a contemporary context. Baudrillard argues that many aspects of life, including religion, have become

simulations or hyperrealities in postmodern society (Pons-de Wit et al., 2015). In the context of religion, this means that religious experiences often no longer relate directly to genuine spiritual "reality" but rather to representations and symbols created by the media and popular culture (Barroso, 2022). For example, religious rituals or icons may be part of the media or culture that are perceived as real, yet lack any deep spiritual substance. Crisis of Meaning: According to Baudrillard, the postmodern world is experiencing a crisis of meaning as simulations and images replace reality. In the case of religion, this may mean that the role of religion as a source of meaning and direction in human life has been lost and replaced by inadequate images and representations. Religion may have more to do with aesthetic and cultural values than with deep spiritual experiences (Wolny, 2017).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative literature review approach as its primary research method. The literature review involves a systematic process of identifying, analyzing, and synthesizing scholarly sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. This method is particularly suited for exploring theoretical foundations, uncovering research gaps, and shaping future research directions.

The review process began with the formulation of a clear research problem, followed by the collection of relevant literature from credible sources, including peer-reviewed journals, academic books, and institutional reports. The selected materials were evaluated critically in terms of their relevance, methodological rigour, and contribution to the field.

Subsequently, the literature was organised and synthesised using thematic, chronological, and methodological approaches to identify key patterns, relationships, and inconsistencies within existing studies. This form of synthesis enables the researcher to interpret findings in a contextual manner, drawing meaningful insights that support argumentation and theoretical development.

The qualitative literature review offers several advantages, including efficient use of time and resources, the ability to map current research trends, and the opportunity to identify underexplored areas. However, limitations include the potential for selection bias, restricted access to certain sources, and challenges in generalizing the findings across broader contexts. Despite these constraints, a well-structured literature review serves as a robust foundation for theoretical advancement and future empirical investigation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study's findings suggest that religious experiences on social media have shifted from a collective, spiritual dimension to a fragmented, personal consumption. In the digital space, religious practices such as meditation, spiritual sermons, or scripture quotations are often packaged into visual/audio content that is "sold" to followers as part of lifestyle branding. It suggests that religion is no longer simply a belief system, but rather a symbolic product that can be consumed according to audience preferences, reinforcing Baudrillard's argument about the commodification of spiritual meaning.

Baudrillard discusses how every aspect of life, including religion, can be turned into a consumer good. In such a situation, religion can be seen as something that is consumed or sold like any other good. For example, spiritual practices or religious symbols can be seen as merchandise in the religious tourism sector or as a product of popular culture. This changes people's experience and understanding of religion (Saumantri & Zikrillah, 2020). Representation and Symbolism: According to Baudrillard, representation and symbolism have become more important than reality in the modern era. This is seen in religion through media, iconography, and symbols. It is possible that religious symbols dominate over deep and personal religious experiences.

Religion may be more about appearances and images than genuine spiritual experiences. Baudrillard observes that individual identities are becoming increasingly complex and unstable in a rapidly fragmenting world. It may have an impact on religion, as people can combine elements from different religious traditions to create unique and diverse spiritual identities. It shows that religion becomes more akin to a "choice" or "lifestyle" rather than a consistent and strong structure (Schellenberg, 2024). From Baudrillard's perspective, it is understood that religion may undergo significant changes in modern society, where religious aspects are often shaped by processes of simulation, commodification, and shifts in meaning within a broader cultural context.

Although social media provides a space for interfaith dialogue, the tolerance displayed is often symbolic and superficial. For example, hashtag campaigns like #religiousharmony or #tolerance are largely reduced to "simulations of concern" without any in-depth discursive engagement. It suggests that signs and symbols of tolerance have become part of a hyperreality, where genuine spiritual meaning is replaced by appearance or image. Social media fosters a highly personal form of religiosity that is free from institutional authority. Spiritual practices no longer require formal structures, such as places of worship or religious scholars, as sources of authority. Instead, users freely combine elements from various religions, forming a

hybrid spirituality that reflects new age religion. This fragmentation creates a confusion of meaning as religious values are reconstructed individually without collective reference.

Technology has created its own social space for people's lives, where social media becomes a medium for people's consumption as a medium of communication or in forming its social space and its delivery techniques through signs and images, which are none other than signs that are not justifications for the reality that is displayed but become representations of reality. The world of representation or signification, thus, requires an inseparable relationship between a sign of reality and its reference, the relationship of which is usually iconic. There is no reality in itself because a meaning is always projected in it in the form of reality.

Baudrillard firmly stated that the current changes in society are the impact of a consumer culture where there are no longer any boundaries and cultural spaces; everything becomes blurred and unclear. Cultural transformation through social media has had a negative impact on the meaning of culture. The context of Baudrillard's thinking is particularly relevant to cultural identity, given the pervasive presence of mass media culture in society.

Cultural reproduction refers to how the original culture is represented in a new environment, where the previous culture serves as a guideline for adaptation and survival. Meanwhile, the reproductive aspect of culture is a new tendency to explain changes in the current era. What happens in media culture, especially on social media, is a form of cultural productivity that continues to evolve without limits, and this also occurs in postmodern culture.

According to Tversky (2019), humans strive to respond to reality and the world around them, with the intention of facilitating communication with one another. Social media, as a communication medium, does not foster a dialogue; rather, it becomes a passive audience, influencing people in their lives. There are at least three drivers that motivate humans to understand their world: the desire to maintain their lives, to discover the underlying order of reality, and the desire to realize their existence as human beings. Humans can transcend all kinds of realities, leading to possibilities that are imagined through the observation of the reality they experience.

Media culture provides the material for the creation of identities, through which people insert themselves into techno-capitalist society, producing new and global forms (Strelitz, 2002). The various media, including radio, film, social media, music, and print media such as magazines, newspapers, and comic books, emphasize both sight and sound, or combine the two senses to evoke emotions, feelings, and ideas. Media is an industrial culture, organized on a mass production model and produced for a

mass audience according to types (genres), following established formulas, codes, and rules (Kellner, 1995). It is, therefore, a form of commercial culture, and its products are commodities that seek to extract private profits generated by large corporations in the interest of accumulating capital.

Mass culture is also a high-tech culture that utilizes the most advanced technology. Mass culture is part of a vibrant economic sector that is profitable and has won global fame. Therefore, media culture is a form of techno-culture that combines culture and technology into new forms and configurations, producing a new type of society that is governed by the principles of media and technology. McLuhan said that media technology has created a revolution in society because society has become very dependent on technology, and the social order is formed based on the ability of society to use technology. Users often project a religious image on social media—such as praying, wearing religious symbols, or sharing sacred quotes—that sometimes doesn't reflect the spiritual reality they live in. This activity aligns with the concept of simulacrum, where religious appearance becomes more important than the spiritual experience itself. This phenomenon creates a crisis of authenticity, turning religious identity into a performative project rather than a reflection of genuine faith.

In a technological society, machines finally have an autonomous position. It is not that machines adapt to humans, but because of their mechanical structure, humans must adapt to machines (Weidner, 2020). Thus, alienation will occur in human life. Humans lose their identity because they have to live in a technological world with a mechanical culture. Social media algorithms indirectly reinforce filter bubbles in religious contexts. Users are more frequently exposed to content that aligns with their own beliefs, leading to confirmation bias and reducing the opportunity for genuine interfaith dialogue. This increases the potential for intolerance, as representations of other religions are filtered by algorithmic logic that is commercial, rather than educational or inclusive.

The state of humans as conscious beings can be understood as existence as actors in culture (Habib, 2025). Human life, in its cultural context, is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, making it an interesting topic to discuss. On the one hand, humans are immanent in it, meaning that humans live and grow in a cultural environment that surrounds them. Humans behave and act according to the norms and principles that are prevalent in their culture. On the other hand, humans are transcendent in their culture. Within certain limits, as they mature, humans are able to express their humanity by being creative, finding new norms and principles, changing or improving existing orders, and even, with available materials, creating new cultures. Humans are creatures who, in principle, are never satisfied, and they always dream of a better or even a perfect world (Wolny, 2017). This is a culture that is likely to continue evolving over time. This change is also reflected in the current human lifestyle, which continues

to evolve and is closely tied to the era when social media emerged as a primary medium for human information in culture (Salahudin et al., 2021). Social media is now a culture that is formed and produced to meet human needs (Dahlin, 2024).

Table 1: Conventional Religion vs. New Age Religion Digital

Aspects	Conventional Religion	New Age Religion Digital
Source of Authority	Religious Institutions	Self/Influencer
Media of Expression	Rituals, Holy Scriptures, Religious Figures	Video, Captions, Quotes, Hashtags
Purpose	Salvation, Afterlife	Streaming, Comments, Pop Spiritual Content
Form of Interaction	Contact, Sermons, Discussions	Harmony, Healing, Personal Balance
Representation	Sacred Symbols	Spiritual visual aesthetics + personal branding

Human self-identity is closely related to human self-subjectivity and is virtually inseparable (Drummond, 2020). However, one can view subjectivity as referring to the condition of a person and the process by which one becomes a person, namely, how one is formed as a subject or actor of culture. As a subject, a person will be bound to social processes that create oneself as a 'subject for' oneself and others. The concept of self-identity refers to the beliefs one holds about oneself, while the hopes and opinions of others form social identity. Both of these identities are formed in narratives or resemble stories. In viewing cultural identity, many are expressed in various forms of representation that can be recognized by others and oneself.

Social media itself is a form of modern cultural identity that always represents the current human culture, which is individual, where the values of religious, social, and political culture (Evolvi, 2021), become a commodity for personal and group interests, and there are no more universal values for Giddens (1991), identity as a project. Giddens meant that identity is something that is created, something that is always in process, a movement of departure rather than its arrival. Identity projects shape one's self-perception at this time, drawing on both past and present perspectives, as well as what is thought and desired. In social media culture, individual human identities become a source of pride, and a person's fame makes them known. In this way, the behaviour and actions of a person on social media become public, allowing them to be imitated and become an icon. Identity is interpreted as a way of describing oneself to others.

Examining the issue of identity, according to Barker, is exploring how we become someone, how the self is produced as a subject, and how the human self becomes identified with certain images (Saumantri, 2023). Meanwhile, Indonesia's openness in importing and accepting foreign cultures periodically since the country entered the

era of modernity raises the issue of how national identity is threatened by the flow of English words and Western icons that flow in, then, at the micro level, identity is wrapped in the boundaries of a person with consumer culture, a culture that is partly created through advertising. The simulation effect of mass media and advertising functions like a mirror, interpreted as more than just consumption. In the influence of consumer culture in Indonesia, objects that are consumed also acquire symbolic value. Consumption becomes the main form of self-expression and the main source of identity.

Social media has become a reality in the manifestation of mass culture, which includes texts, practices, and certain cultural experiences both sociologically and historically (Kraidy, 2017). Mass culture is not something that exists by itself. It is a reality that has social relationships with various other realities in the social and cultural development of modern society. This assumption can be a hypothesis that the discourse on mass culture has a very close relationship with mass media. In mass media, social media has become a medium of communication and information in the development of today's society. The impact of social media has influenced behaviour and characteristics related to cultural identity, which is believed to have value and meaning in terms of cultural symbols.

The world tends to be identified and interpreted through objects, so that "the self" is covered by symbols that are consumed in a discursive process (Evolvi, 2021). Self-definition through objects appears as a process of identity formation, a form of identity that is oriented towards more rationalistic traits. The mobility of technology as a communication system and urban settings as a place for shopping for the identity that is to be formed. Social media becomes a space for the formation of cultural identity. Humans who always interact with each other continue to experience changes, especially in the consumption culture of modern society today, which emphasizes the economic dimension, symbolization, and use of material objects as communicators do not just use them and the two market principles, namely supply, demand, capital accumulation, competition, and monopoly that operate in lifestyle, objects, and cultural commodities (Abdillah; & Zulhazmi, 2021).

Social media culture contributes to a common view of the world and its deepest values; it defines what is considered good or bad, positive or negative, moral or barbaric (Bakar, 2019). Media stories and images provide the symbols, myths, and resources that help shape a shared culture for large numbers of people in different parts of the world (Alvinto et al., 2023). Social media culture provides the materials for the creation of identities, through which people insert themselves into techno-capitalist society and produce new and global forms. Various media such as radio, film, social media, music, and print media such as magazines, newspapers, and comic books emphasize both sight and sound or combine the two senses and play on emotions, feelings, and ideas.

Capitalism has actually become the most important force today, not only in organizing the world into a global order but also in transforming society into different places, leading to the formation of statuses with symbols of modernity that affirm authentic values (Habib, 2025). Social media is very relevant in the formation of identity in today's era, where humans no longer think about the values they consume or watch but more about satisfaction and interests. Finally, the identity of a cultured human being becomes a commodity that is ready to be bought and sold to anyone who has capital.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study views religious interactions on social media through the lens of the concept of "New Age Religion" and Jean Baudrillard's simulation theory. Social media plays a significant role in shaping the way humans interact religiously in the digital era, facilitating interfaith dialogue, sharing experiences, and promoting tolerance. However, social media also brings challenges, such as the spread of extremism, radicalism, and hoaxes that have the potential to trigger conflict. In the context of religion, the concept of "New Age Religion" emphasizes personal spirituality, synergy across religious traditions, and an attitude of tolerance toward various beliefs. On the other hand, Baudrillard's theory shows that religion in the postmodern era often loses its spiritual reality and is replaced by representations and symbols formed by popular culture. Social media also influences human identity, which is now more often based on consumerism and symbols of modernity, reflecting a shift in cultural and religious values that are more oriented towards personal interests than deep spiritual meaning. Therefore, it is important to use social media wisely, create an inclusive space, strengthen interfaith understanding, and prevent misuse that can damage social harmony.

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