



Mediated Compassion: The Role of Influencers and Digital Celebrities in Promoting a Culture of Philanthropy in Indonesia

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Abstract

The digital era has transformed philanthropic practices, shifting them onto social media platforms where visibility and performance intersect with traditional values of sincerity. This study aims to analyze the role of influencers and digital celebrities in mediating compassion and shaping a new philanthropic culture in Indonesia. Using a qualitative literature study approach, this research examines scholarly works, reports, and digital campaigns related to philanthropy on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Findings indicate that influencers act as “new moral actors” who expand the reach of philanthropy but also create tensions between sincerity and digital performativity. Digital media serves as both a communication channel and a cultural arena where religious and social values are negotiated. This study concludes that the success of digital philanthropy depends not on virality alone, but on its ability to deepen social solidarity and ethical awareness, requiring a balance between technological logic and humanistic values.

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Introduction

In the context of Indonesian society, which is deeply religious, communal, and rooted in the values of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) (F. Hidayat et al., 2025), the social media revolution has introduced a paradox: on one hand, it opens new spaces for expressions of social concern and philanthropic activities; on the other, it often transforms empathy into a measurable visual performance through “likes,” “views,” and “followers” (Du et al., 2016; Therkelsen, 2011; Walby & Gumieny, 2020). This phenomenon is evident in the growing influence of digital celebrities and influencers who have become central figures in shaping public social behavior, including in promoting charity and humanitarian awareness (Babiak & Yang, 2022; Chen et al., 2023; Gao et al., 2017). However, philanthropic practices in digital spaces do not always reflect altruistic intentions; they are sometimes driven by personal motivations to enhance self-



image and popularity (Abebe & Cha, 2018; Gao et al., 2017). Moreover, technology is often perceived as a product of global culture, resulting in local values such as sincerity, humility, and collectivity being marginalized by algorithmic logics oriented toward efficiency and visibility (Garnham & Smith, 2024; Junaedi et al., 2023; Xue & Chen, 2024). Public digital literacy has not evolved as rapidly as technological transformation, leading to many acts of “digital kindness” that remain superficial and trapped within visual consumerism (Dedebali, 2020; Reyna et al., 2018; Tejedor et al., 2020). From this perspective, it becomes evident that rather than strengthening humanity, technology often risks distancing society from the true meaning of empathy and sincerity, values that have long been the moral foundation of Indonesian philanthropy.

Previous research has paid significant attention to the role of digital technology in social life, though most of it views the issue through a functional and linear lens. Studies such as (Kim, 2006; Lee et al., 2022; Pang, 2023, 2024) see technology as a tool to expand public participation in social engagement, while others (Čekić, 2025; R. Hidayat, 2024; Mossner & Walter, 2024) highlight its negative impacts on empathy and social relations. (Anner et al., 2021; Hasanah, 2021; Lee et al., 2022) emphasize the importance of digital literacy to enhance the effectiveness of online communication. While valuable, these studies rarely address the fundamental question of how social character, religious values, and cultural norms shape technology adoption within the context of digital philanthropy. In Indonesia, acts of sharing, helping, and social concern are deeply rooted in religious and cultural traditions, particularly within Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and local wisdoms that emphasize social solidarity. Within this context, the rise of influencers and digital celebrities as “new moral actors” mediating public empathy should not only be seen as a communicative phenomenon but also as a form of cultural transformation. This research addresses that gap: to explore how Indonesia’s moral and social values interact with the logi of digital media in forming a new culture of philanthropy. Hence, this study does not merely assess the technical impact of technology but seeks to uncover the layered values and meanings embedded in what may be called “mediated compassion.” Therefore, this study offers a novel perspective by investigating digital philanthropy not merely as a technological or communicative shift, but as a deep cultural negotiation where Indonesian religious morality, local wisdom (*gotong royong*), and digital platform logic converge and sometimes clash, a dimension underexplored in existing literature.

This research aims to fill the scholarly gap in understanding the interrelations among culture, religious values, and digital philanthropic practices

in Indonesia. The main objective is to analyze how social and religious values influence the ways influencers and digital celebrities express, promote, and interpret philanthropic activities in online spaces. Conceptually, a society's ability to adopt and interpret technology depends heavily on its value systems that govern interpersonal relationships, including sincerity, social responsibility, and the meaning of kindness. Based on this premise, the study formulates three key research questions: (1) How do digital media infrastructures and online social ecosystems support the dissemination of philanthropic values in Indonesia? (2) How do social, economic, and technological inequalities affect public participation in digital sharing and donation practices? and (3) How do cultural values, social norms, and religious principles shape influencers' perceptions and performances of social concern? The answers to these questions are expected to deepen our understanding of the relationship between technology and empathy, between digital performance and spiritual values. Academically, the study contributes new perspectives to the fields of digital communication and contemporary philanthropy, while practically, it provides a foundation for developing ethical communication practices and digital policies that foster more empathetic and socially just media spaces.

This study is grounded in the argument that the asynchrony between digital technological logic and traditional humanistic values poses a key challenge to building an authentic culture of philanthropy in Indonesia. Indonesian society is inherently oriented toward communal values, solidarity, and spirituality, whereas digital media operate within frameworks of efficiency, personalization, and popularity. This tension often traps digital philanthropy in a dilemma between sincerity and performativity, between genuine goodness and self-presentation strategies. Digital technologies, which prioritize visibility and engagement algorithms, can threaten the social meaning of sharing acts traditionally driven by pure intentions. Therefore, technology adoption in philanthropy requires social engineering and digital ethics capable of balancing technological progress with humanistic values. The success of fostering a meaningful philanthropic culture in the digital era depends not only on technical capability but also on the readiness of social and cultural infrastructures that nurture empathy, honesty, and collective responsibility. Consequently, this research asserts that mediated compassion is not merely a communicative phenomenon but a complex cultural process in which local values, religion, and public morality must negotiate with modern media logics. Understanding this process is vital to ensuring that digital technology becomes a medium of human flourishing rather than merely a stage for performative empathy.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in a comprehensive literature review, also known as library research. This approach is chosen to conduct an in-depth, critical examination of existing scholarship, allowing for the interpretive understanding of complex social phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a form of document-based inquiry, it enables the synthesis of diverse academic and grey literature to construct a holistic conceptual framework for understanding digital philanthropic culture in Indonesia (Bowen, 2009). Data collection was executed through systematic documentation. A wide array of credible sources constituted the research corpus, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, institutional reports from philanthropic organizations, and relevant commentary from reputable online media. The selection process was guided by the principles of purposive sampling for documents, prioritizing materials that were directly relevant, authoritative, and contributed to a nuanced understanding of the intersection between digital media, influencer culture, and philanthropy (Patton, 2014).

To ensure analytical rigor and validity, the study employed source and concept triangulation. Cross-verifying information across different types of documents (e.g., academic theory vs. campaign reports) and interpreting data through multiple theoretical lenses (Couldry, 2012; Papacharissi, 2015) enhanced the credibility and depth of the findings. The analysis followed an iterative process of qualitative content analysis. Guided by the interactive model for qualitative data analysis (Miles et al., 2020), the procedure involved three concurrent activities: first, data condensation through the coding and categorization of key themes and patterns from the literature; second, data display by organizing these themes into structured narratives and comparative matrices; and finally, conclusion drawing and verification, where interpretations were refined and validated against the source material. This methodological approach facilitates a reflective and integrative synthesis, positioning the existing body of knowledge within the specific socio-cultural context of Indonesia to generate new conceptual insights.

General Overview: Digital Philanthropy and the Culture of Compassion in the Social Media Era

Over the past decade, the culture of philanthropy in Indonesia has undergone a significant transformation alongside the advancement of digital technology and the widespread use of social media. This change not only affects how people donate or express empathy but also reshapes the social and cultural meaning of

giving itself. Indonesian society, known for its religious values, communal spirit, and social solidarity, now expresses these values through digital spaces. Philanthropy is no longer confined to traditional religious or social activities but has become part of digital culture, where spiritual values intersect with modern social practices. (Miles et al., 2020) emphasize that this transformation illustrates how Islamic and humanitarian values can adapt to virtual spaces without losing their essential meaning as acts of worship and moral conduct.

The advancement of digital technology has opened new avenues for charitable practices such as zakat, infak, sadaqah, and waqf, which were once conducted directly through religious institutions. Today, various Islamic philanthropic organizations use social media and digital applications to expand their reach and enhance public participation. (Ulfahadi, 2023) explains that the digitalization of philanthropy has created a new form of social participation that is more dynamic, transparent, and interactive, bridging geographical and generational divides. In this context, younger generations play a key role as active participants in building social solidarity through the digital world. Giving is no longer limited by space and time; anyone can contribute directly via online platforms that facilitate donations, share information, and spread kindness. This transformation has also changed how philanthropic institutions interact with the public. Zakat and waqf institutions now use social media as a primary means of disseminating information, strengthening transparency, and building trust.

According to (Arrazaq, 2023), digital media help these institutions overcome geographic barriers and reach a wider audience, particularly among urban and millennial generations. Beyond extending access, platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have become new moral arenas where religious narratives are presented in more visual, emotional, and relatable forms. (Rahmi, 2022) adds that social media not only increases public participation but also enhances accountability among philanthropic organizations, as transparency has become an inseparable part of modern religious practice. The rise of influencers and digital celebrities marks a new chapter in Indonesia's philanthropic landscape. They leverage their moral authority and the reach of social media to campaign for charitable causes and inspire public empathy. (Arrazaq, 2023) describes this phenomenon as a form of mediated compassion, compassion mediated through digital technology. (Mansur et al., 2025) explain that influencers now serve as "new moral actors" in the virtual world, capable of turning empathy into real social movements. However, this role also generates ambivalence: on one hand, they act as bridges between humanity and technology; on the other, ethical questions arise about whether their actions are driven by sincerity or self-promotion. Nevertheless, influencers have proven

effective in mobilizing public participation, especially among younger audiences who are more responsive to visual and emotional narratives on social media.

The COVID-19 pandemic became a crucial moment that accelerated the growth of digital philanthropy. When physical interactions were restricted, people turned to online platforms to continue their social and religious practices, including charitable activities. (Rahmi, 2022) notes that the pandemic served as a catalyst for major change, prompting social institutions to adapt to technology and develop new digital strategies to sustain public engagement. (Triantoro et al., 2021) observe that e-philanthropy grew rapidly during the pandemic, as social media became the only safe space for donations and participation. Beyond expanding the reach of donations, the pandemic also fostered new awareness about the importance of digital transparency, where donors not only seek convenience but also tangible proof of the social impact of their contributions.

The integration of traditional values and digital practices demonstrates Indonesia's ability to adapt technology without losing its cultural roots. Sahabi and (Sahabi & Ajuna, 2022) argue that the values of gotong royong (mutual cooperation) and ukhuwah insaniyah (human fraternity) remain the moral foundation of digital philanthropy. Technology, in this sense, serves as a medium to expand the meaning of empathy and solidarity. (Utomo et al., 2023) add that growing public trust in digital institutions stems not only from technological innovation but also from their ability to embed spiritual and ethical values in a modern context. The phenomenon of mediated compassion also shows how technology can strengthen social cohesion. Noviarita and Ramdhan (2024) explain that digital media create participatory spaces that connect diverse communities through collective empathy. (Safingah et al., 2025) emphasize that digital platforms function not only as fundraising tools but also as arenas for community empowerment. The public is no longer a passive recipient of aid but an active agent of social change through digital collaboration.

Thus, the evolution of philanthropy in Indonesia amid digital transformation reflects a dynamic synergy between traditional values and modernity. Technology opens new spaces for empathy but also poses ethical challenges concerning sincerity and social performativity. The growing role of influencers illustrates how empathy is now shaped by algorithms and digital narratives that influence public perceptions of goodness. Nevertheless, the opportunity to build a civilized digital philanthropic ecosystem remains open. (Arrazaq, 2023; F. Hidayat et al., 2025) emphasize that when technology is harmonized with moral and local cultural values, it can become a moral force that strengthens solidarity and revitalizes intergenerational togetherness. Ultimately, mediated compassion represents the new face of Indonesian

philanthropy in the digital era, a convergence of faith, empathy, and innovation. Through the integration of technology, community collaboration, and active participation of influencers and the public, the practices of sharing and helping now exist in broader, more inclusive, and more contemporary forms. Digital philanthropy is not merely a fundraising tool but a meaningful space for building social and spiritual awareness that unites people in the virtual world.

Digital Infrastructure and the Ecosystem of Empathy: From Platforms to Online Philanthropic Practices

Digital media has become a crucial instrument in fostering a culture of philanthropy in Indonesia, particularly through social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. These platforms facilitate the creation and dissemination of various online charitable initiatives, crowdfunding campaigns, and humanitarian appeals. However, their function extends beyond communication channels; digital media actively shapes how society expresses empathy and participates in social solidarity. Through interactive features and rapid message dissemination, social media has transformed generosity from a ritualistic religious activity into an open, dynamic, and community-connected social practice. Various studies highlight the impact of social media on collective identity construction and community engagement among Indonesian Muslims. Research by (Anoraga & Zuhri, 2024) demonstrates how philanthropic organizations utilize online platforms to reinforce the concept of *umma*, a unified Muslim community, through campaigns on Instagram and popular crowdfunding sites like Kitabisa.com. Analyzing over 51,000 social media posts, they found that digital campaigns not only inform charitable activities but also build ideologies of solidarity and collective participation, framing assistance as a form of religious responsibility. These findings align with Kheryadi and (Kheryadi & Chorbwhan, 2025), who emphasize the role of social media in shaping religious identity and culture, highlighting how digital platforms are instrumental in mobilizing communities, particularly during large-scale social movements. Together, these studies underscore that identity, solidarity, and community participation among Indonesian Muslims are increasingly mediated through digital philanthropic practices.

Beyond content and participation, the algorithmic frameworks and engagement systems implemented by social media platforms significantly affect the distribution and visibility of philanthropic messages. (Zeng & Kaye, 2022) introduced the concept of visibility moderation, a mechanism through which digital platforms regulate user-generated content reach via algorithmic manipulation.

Table 1:
Comparison of Social Media Platforms in Facilitating Digital Philanthropy in Indonesia

Platform	Primary Features for Philanthropy	Dominant User Demographic	Strengths	Limitations	Key Studies/References
Instagram	Visual storytelling, Donation Stickers, Link in Bio, Reels, Stories	Urban, Millennial/Gen Z, Female-skewed	High visual engagement, strong influencer ecosystem, emotional appeal through imagery, integrated donation tools	Algorithm favors aesthetic content, promotes performative activism, limited deep storytelling	Arrazaq, 2023; Pujiati et al., 2025; Anggara et al., 2025
TikTok	Short-form video, Hashtag challenges, Live donation features, Duet/Stitch	Gen Z, Younger Millennials (18-30)	High viral potential, authentic grassroots narratives, algorithm favors novelty and emotion, low production barrier	Short attention span, trend-driven (may lack sustainability), high risk of commodification	Wismashanti, 2023; Zeng & Kaye, 2022; Fauziyah et al., 2023
YouTube	Long-form content, documentary-style campaigns, Live streams, dedicated charity channels	Broad demographic (all ages), higher male viewership for some content	Deep storytelling capacity, builds trust through authenticity, suitable for religious/educational content, strong community via comments	High production barrier, slower virality, monetization may conflict with charity messaging	Anoraga & Zuhri, 2024; Mansur et al., 2025
Kitabisa.com & Dedicated Platforms	Dedicated crowdfunding, campaign tracking, transparency reports, direct bank integration	Donors across ages, NGO partners, institutionally linked users	Built specifically for charity, high transparency, institutional trust, detailed impact reporting	Less organic discovery, relies on external promotion via social media, less emotional immediacy	Nurdiyanti & Suryadi, 2019; Rahmi, 2022; Triantoro et al., 2021

Source: Developed by the author based on literature synthesis, 2025.

As shown in Table 1, each platform creates different opportunities and constraints for philanthropic expression. While Instagram and TikTok excel at emotional virality and youth engagement, YouTube offers depth and trust-building, and dedicated platforms like Kitabisa.com prioritize transparency and institutional accountability. This diversity illustrates that mediated compassion is not a monolithic phenomenon but is shaped by the specific materialities of digital infrastructures. This concept illustrates that algorithms are not neutral; they determine who is seen and who remains hidden, meaning the success of online social campaigns often depends on alignment with platform algorithm logic. Their findings suggest that the effectiveness of online charity campaigns relies not only on goodwill or creativity but also on digital interaction strategies that adhere to platform algorithmic structures.

In addition to technological factors, regulation and digital media governance play a key role in shaping online philanthropic activities. Recent studies highlight challenges arising from content moderation policies that can restrict the flow of philanthropic information, particularly regarding vulnerable groups. (Wismashanti, 2023), for example, discusses the difficulties faced by TikTok content moderation teams in Indonesia in balancing freedom of expression with user protection. In this context, social media operates between two poles: as a space for free expression and as a system governed by censorship mechanisms and algorithms. Hence, a cohesive and adaptive regulatory framework is necessary to ensure that the spirit of philanthropy thrives without being constrained by rigid policies.

Understanding the digital environment is also crucial for comprehending how young Indonesians, particularly Generation Z, engage in philanthropy primarily through social media. Features such as “share,” “like,” and “direct donation” buttons foster a culture of spontaneous participation, where social action can occur with a single click. (Calista & Yenni, 2023) found that social media significantly influences perception and social engagement among Indonesian Gen Z. Although their research focused on climate change awareness, the conclusions are relevant for philanthropic studies, demonstrating that digital interactions shape young people’s social consciousness and empathetic values. Social media allows them to see, understand, and respond to the suffering of others in a direct and emotional way, transforming empathy into concrete action. Furthermore, (Anggara et al., 2025) emphasize that social media functions not only as an information channel but also as a medium fostering emotional connections between donors and beneficiaries, particularly among urban Muslims. This research highlights that emotion-based interactions, such as inspirational stories, humanitarian narratives, and personal testimonials, play a

significant role in increasing donation participation. This reinforces the notion that the success of digital philanthropy depends not only on technological mechanisms but also on the ability to build emotional resonance between messages, media, and audiences.

Overall, these phenomena indicate that social media platforms are at the forefront of shaping Indonesia's philanthropic culture. Social media has become the primary space for people to channel empathy, negotiate social identity, and build solidarity based on religious and humanitarian values. Digital technology not only accelerates the dissemination of goodwill but also creates a new social ecosystem in which philanthropy, identity, and community are intertwined. In this context, understanding algorithmic mechanisms, regulations, and participatory dynamics is key to seeing how digital media transforms acts of generosity in the modern era. Consequently, digital media serves not merely as a communication tool but also as a new moral and social infrastructure that shapes how society understands, feels, and expresses empathy. The integration of technology, cultural values, and religious solidarity produces a more open, participatory, and sustainable philanthropic landscape, a form of mediated compassion that represents the new face of generosity in Indonesia's digital age.

Social Inequality and the Representation of Generosity: Who Is Heard, Who Is Marginalized?

In the context of philanthropic practices in Indonesia, the distinction between "major influencers" and "ordinary users" is crucial for understanding how digital narratives of generosity are formed and controlled. These two groups exert different impacts on meaning-making, public perception, and the distribution of visibility in digital spaces. Major influencers, with massive follower bases and strong digital credibility, can significantly shape public opinion, raise awareness, and drive participation in various philanthropic activities. Conversely, ordinary users, although lacking wide reach, play a vital role in sustaining grassroots participation that is often more spontaneous and authentic. According to (Bungai et al., 2024), the presence of local influencers or public figures greatly increases the visibility of social activities on digital media, especially when they collaborate with communities or philanthropic organizations. In practice, they act as intermediaries capable of turning charitable actions into popular narratives that engage broad audiences.

However, this phenomenon also generates structural inequalities in digital visibility. Large influencers not only bring positive effects in raising public awareness but also indirectly dominate the narrative space of "goodness." With their ability to shape messages, define campaign formats, and attract media

attention, they often become the focal point of digital philanthropy discourse. (Bungai et al., 2024) emphasize that this dominance creates a “new social hierarchy” in cyberspace, where public figures hold greater moral and social legitimacy compared to ordinary users. To visually map the hierarchy and roles of various actors within Indonesia’s digital philanthropy ecosystem, this study develops the following typology based on platforms, motivations, and the ethical tensions they encounter.

Table 2

Typology of Philanthropic Actors in the Indonesian Digital Space

Actor Type	Primary Platform	Key Role	Motivation Drivers	Ethical Tension
Major Influencers	Instagram, YouTube	Agenda-setting, viral campaigns, fundraising	Visibility, social capital, brand building	Sincerity vs. performativity; commodification of charity
Religious Digital Preachers	YouTube, TikTok	Moral authority, religious framing, ethical guidance	Religious duty, community education, spiritual influence	Traditional authority vs. digital fragmentation; ideological purity
Ordinary Users / Grassroots Communities	WhatsApp, Facebook Groups, Kitabisa.com	Grassroots mobilization, local solidarity, peer-to-peer aid	Empathy, mutual cooperation (<i>gotong royong</i>), immediate needs	Authenticity vs. invisibility; limited reach
Philanthropic NGOs	Integrated platforms (websites, social media)	Institutional campaigns, transparency reporting, donor engagement	Accountability, trust-building, social impact	Bureaucratic transparency vs. emotional storytelling

Source: Developed by the author based on literature synthesis (2025).

The typology above confirms the presence of stratification within the digital space, where actors with high social capital and visibility (such as major influencers) dominate the narrative, while grassroots actors despite being more authentic are often marginalized in terms of visibility. This tension between visibility and participation ultimately shapes the attention economy within digital philanthropy, behind the scenes, thousands of ordinary users consistently contribute to charitable activities without media recognition.

Ordinary users, despite limited audience reach, play a significant role in fostering a participatory culture within digital philanthropy. They often initiate small-scale activities such as fundraising for neighbors, community solidarity campaigns, or sharing information on social aid. (Makhrus, 2018), in his study on Sedekah Rombongan, demonstrated how online communities leverage social

media to expand networks of social solidarity and mobilize public participation. This movement shows that philanthropic power lies not only in popular figures but also in the collective capacity of ordinary citizens to create tangible impact through digital collaboration. Interestingly, narratives created by ordinary users tend to be more emotional, personal, and oriented toward immediate community needs, in contrast to influencer campaigns, which are often public and symbolic in nature.

In practice, there is tension between visibility and participation in digital spaces. Access to visibility is a key factor in determining who is recognized as a legitimate and influential philanthropic actor. (Chen et al., 2023) explain that the normative effects of social media can influence how philanthropic messages are disseminated, often favoring those with high reach and engagement. This gives rise to the attention economy, where public attention becomes the primary resource that determines campaign success. Consequently, messages from ordinary users frequently get lost amid the overwhelming visual content dominated by influencers. As a result, small, community-based charitable initiatives often fail to receive proper recognition despite their significant local impact. This phenomenon is further supported by (Zhang et al., 2020), who found that media visibility affects social actions of various entities, including corporations and philanthropic organizations. High public exposure encourages organizations to enhance social legitimacy through tangible post-crisis actions, such as charitable activities or social campaigns. However, this can also create performative pressure, where social actions are undertaken more as image strategies than as ethical commitments. In Indonesia's digital philanthropy landscape, this is observable in campaigns that attract major attention not solely due to their social value but because of the involvement of prominent public figures who increase engagement and public attention. (Gong-li et al., 2023) argue that such "celebrity philanthropy" can produce narrative disparities, rendering ordinary users' social actions invisible and undervalued.

Nevertheless, the potential for democratization in digital media is not entirely lost. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Kitabisa.com provide space for ordinary users to express empathy and participate in social activities without large capital or institutional support. (Nurdiyanti & Suryadi, 2019) emphasize that digital media enables a participatory culture where every individual can act as an agent of social change. Their study shows that digital philanthropy movements create dialogic spaces that strengthen citizen engagement in community development through small donations, awareness campaigns, or cross-regional collaboration. This phenomenon demonstrates that despite the dominance of major influencers, ordinary users retain substantial social power

when united in collective digital action. Furthermore, (Muslikhah & Isbah, 2022) argue that collective actions of ordinary users have the potential to alter hierarchical structures in philanthropic practices, highlighting that digital social movements in Indonesia are moving toward more horizontal and inclusive forms of participation. Citizens are no longer mere spectators of charitable activities but producers of narratives and social agents shaping public discourse on empathy, solidarity, and social responsibility. In this context, digital philanthropy is not only about donations but also a social discourse reflecting negotiations of power and moral legitimacy between digital elites and the general public.

Interestingly, the dynamics between major influencers and ordinary users also mirror broader Indonesian social structures, where social, economic, and symbolic hierarchies influence how individuals gain public recognition. As (Bungai et al., 2024) note, public figures are often seen as “moral intermediaries” representing humanitarian values in digital spaces, while ordinary users function as moral supporters reinforcing the symbolic legitimacy of these actions. In many cases, collaboration between these groups produces synergistic effects, where influencers expand message reach, and ordinary users strengthen the authenticity of the movement. However, without equitable visibility distribution mechanisms, digital philanthropy risks becoming trapped in performative logic and symbolic inequality, where acts of goodness are measured by follower counts rather than social impact. In conclusion, major influencers play a critical role in extending visibility and shaping the main narratives of digital philanthropy, while ordinary users act as driving forces maintaining grassroots authenticity and solidarity. Their interaction reflects the complex dynamics of power, technology, and morality in digital public spaces. (Chen et al., 2023; Muslikhah & Isbah, 2022) both assert that the sustainability of digital philanthropic culture depends on balancing popular representation with community participation. When these groups collaborate effectively, digital spaces can become truly democratic arenas for acts of goodness.

Values, Religion, and Digital Ethics: Negotiating Sincerity in the Performative Era

In contemporary Indonesian society, the concepts of sincerity (*ikhlas*), charity, and intention in religious traditions have undergone significant transformation under the influence of digital culture, particularly through social media and visual culture. Digital platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have become not only spaces for personal expression but also public arenas where religious values are negotiated, displayed, and reinterpreted. This phenomenon demonstrates how spirituality and technology interact within a globally

connected space, yet remain imbued with distinct local and religious values (Fauziyah et al., 2023). Social media enables a “re-negotiation of values,” where influencers or public figures present charitable activities by blending spiritual ideals with visual aesthetics and public engagement strategies. In this context, sincerity is no longer understood solely as a private matter between a person and God; it also appears in performative forms, being seen, commented on, and shared. This creates an ambiguity between spirituality and social image, occasionally leading to the commodification of spirituality, where the essence of charitable intention is reduced to seeking digital approval (Fauziyah et al., 2023). Nonetheless, digital visibility also opens new opportunities for the broader dissemination of kindness, solidarity, and social concern.

Various studies indicate that social media has generated a new paradigm of Islamic digital ethics, attempting to balance spiritual integrity with social responsibility. For instance, (Abd Hannan & Ach Fatayillah Mursyidi, 2023) found that the fragmentation of authority due to online media consumption has produced new forms of moral authority based on participation and transparency. They emphasize that in modern Muslim societies, religious authority is increasingly fluid, no longer confined to traditional clerics, but also encompassing digital preachers, content creators, and online social activists. This shift encourages digital ethics grounded in openness, accountability, and public responsibility as a contemporary manifestation of sincerity (Abd Hannan & Ach Fatayillah Mursyidi, 2023). Similarly, (Pujiati et al., 2025) highlight how Instagram functions as a space for representing religious identity and social charity, where users express religiosity through local cultural narratives and spiritual values. Acts of charity that were once private are now recorded, disseminated, and converted into visual narratives of goodness. Religious influencers play a crucial role in shaping public perception of piety and digital philanthropy, combining modern lifestyles with spiritual values to create a “spiritual brand” appealing to young urban Muslims in Indonesia (Pujiati et al., 2025).

This phenomenon aligns with the concept of cultural dakwah, which stresses adapting religious messages to popular media. (Subchi et al., 2022) argue that influencers’ promotion of charity reflects an effort to integrate spiritual experience with digital communication strategies, simultaneously raising public awareness of social issues and expanding the reach of philanthropic campaigns. On one hand, this exemplifies a new form of mediated sincerity, sincerity facilitated by technology. On the other hand, risks arise when visibility and engagement metrics, such as “likes” and “followers,” become benchmarks for spiritual success.

In the Indonesian socio-religious context, dominated by moderate Islam, digital charity (e-philanthropy) is strongly rooted in the values of zakat, infak, and sedekah. However, (Subchi et al., 2022) note that these practices face ideological challenges from radical groups that reject modernization and view digital media as a threat to the purity of religious intention. Thus, approaches based on Islam wasathiyah (moderation) are crucial to balance outward forms of charity with spiritual depth. Digital philanthropy, in this view, functions not only as an economic distribution tool but also as an instrument for reconstructing Islamic social ethics in a globalized era (Subchi et al., 2022). (Achruh & Sukirman, 2024) further emphasize that digital platforms can effectively strengthen philanthropic ethics by promoting principles of transparency, accountability, and sustainability. Through social media, zakat institutions and individuals can share usage reports, display aid distribution processes, and engage the public directly, turning charity into a democratic and participatory social practice.

Debates about sincerity and intention in digital philanthropy also intersect with questions of public ethics and social responsibility. Can acts of charity displayed on social media still be considered sincere when performed in a digital public space laden with economic and political interests? Researchers like a (Anugrah, 2023) argue that sincerity is determined not only by the form of the action but by the moral awareness and intention behind it. In the digital context, publicizing charity can serve as a means of social education, encouraging others to share, so long as the fundamental intention remains devotion to God and the welfare of the community. Indonesian digital philanthropy demonstrates the close interplay of religion, media, and moral economy. Charitable activities promoted via social media are often accompanied by narratives combining spiritual values, social solidarity, and platform capitalism logic. (Anugrah, 2023) describe this as a new form of religious consumerism, where charity becomes part of a digital lifestyle that is simultaneously religious and modern. Yet, this also opens opportunities to expand the meaning of sincerity as an open, reflective, and public-oriented social process.

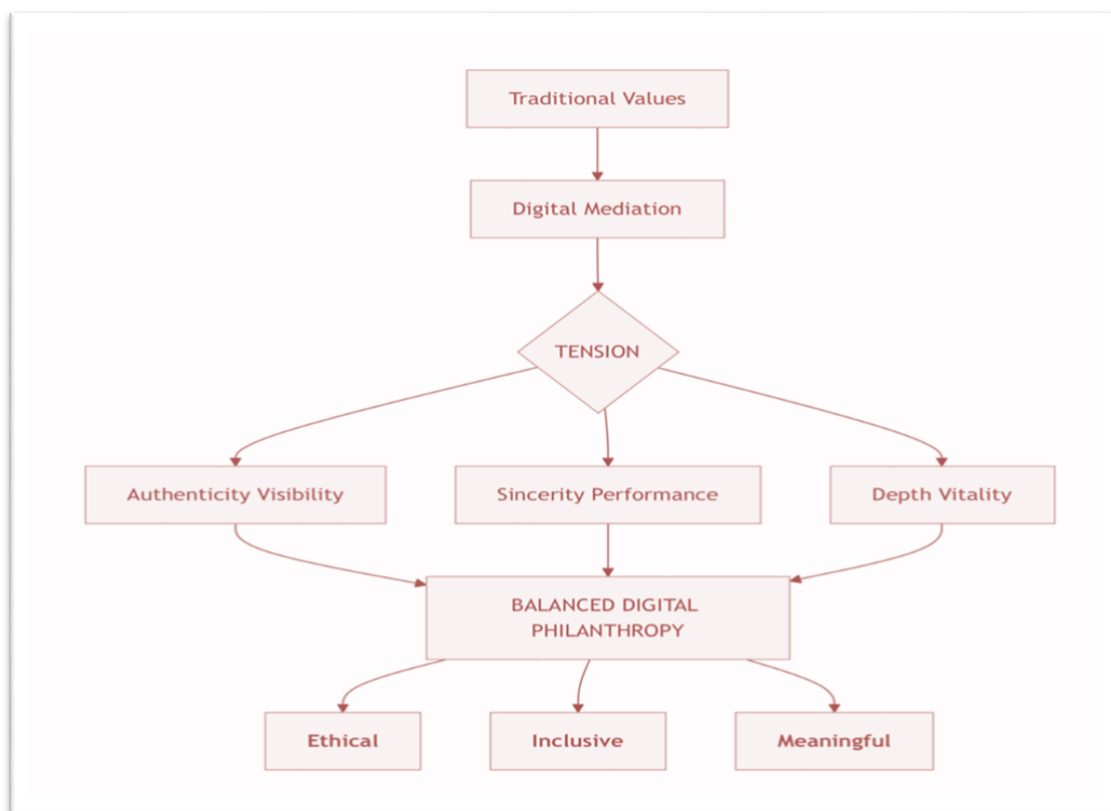
The transition to a digital charity culture also requires fostering sustainable ethical awareness among the public. Digital education grounded in Islamic values can be key to cultivating morally responsible internet users. (Haryanto et al., 2023) suggest that digital character education integrating technological competence with Islamic moral values can strengthen integrity and accountability online. In this way, sincerity evolves from a purely theological concept into part of a digital ethos guiding behavior in cyberspace. Ultimately, negotiating sincerity, charity, and intention in the digital era presents both challenges and opportunities for Indonesian society to reaffirm its spiritual

identity amidst modernity and globalization. Through the integration of Islamic values, local traditions, and digital technology, Indonesia can develop a model of digital philanthropy that is both innovative and ethically grounded. As (Anugrah, 2023) notes, the success of this model is measured not by campaign virality but by how deeply it strengthens moral awareness, expands social solidarity, and uplifts humanity. Consequently, digital philanthropy in Indonesia reflects not only technological advancement but also a living, dynamic spirituality, where sincerity becomes a collective social process encompassing intention, responsibility, and moral consciousness. This transformation demonstrates that in an increasingly connected and competitive world, spiritual values can remain a moral compass guiding the evolution of Indonesian digital culture.

Synthesizing the ethical negotiations discussed above, Figure 1 presents a conceptual model of ‘Mediated Compassion’ in Indonesian digital philanthropy. This model visually represents the dynamic interplay between traditional religious values, digital platform logics, and the resulting ethical tensions that shape contemporary philanthropic practices.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of Mediated Compassion in Indonesian Digital Philanthropy



Source: Conceptual by the author, 2025.

As visualized in Figure 1, mediated compassion exists within a field of continuous negotiation between authenticity and performance, depth and breadth, spiritual sincerity and digital visibility. This conceptual framework encapsulates the central argument of this study regarding the transformation of philanthropic culture in Indonesia's digital age.

Conclusion

This study concludes that digital media has fundamentally transformed the philanthropic culture in Indonesia, positioning influencers and digital celebrities as central mediators of compassion. The main findings affirm that social media functions not only as a communication tool but as a cultural arena where empathy, religious values, and social solidarity are continuously negotiated. The research reveals a key tension between the sincerity rooted in local and religious traditions and the performative logic of digital platforms driven by visibility metrics. Theoretically, this study contributes to the fields of digital communication and Islamic philanthropy by introducing the concept of mediated compassion as a cultural practice shaped by the interaction of technology, morality, and social norms. Practically, it implies that the sustainability of digital philanthropy depends on ethical frameworks that prioritize sincerity, accountability, and inclusive participation over mere viral reach. As a conceptual study based on literature, this research is limited by the lack of primary empirical data. Future studies should investigate the motivations and strategies of influencers through interviews, analyze audience reception, and examine the algorithmic governance of philanthropic visibility. An interdisciplinary approach is recommended to further explore how digital philanthropy can foster authentic social solidarity in an increasingly mediated world.

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