



FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE A PERSON'S DECISION TO CONVERT ISLAM IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This study aims to identify and analyze the factors that influence an individual's decision to convert to Islam in Indonesia. As the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia provides a unique context for understanding the dynamics of religious conversion, particularly to Islam. This research employs a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews with converts (converts) from diverse social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. The findings reveal four main factors that influence the decision to embrace Islam: (1) spiritual factors and the search for life's meaning, (2) the influence of the social environment, such as friends, spouses, or family, (3) attraction to Islamic teachings perceived as logical and calming, and (4) personal experiences or life events that serve as spiritual turning points. This study contributes to the field of the sociology of religion and can serve as a reference for Islamic outreach organizations and religious institutions in designing humanistic and context-sensitive approaches to da'wah.

Keywords: Religious Conversion; Converts; Social Factors; Dawah

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi keputusan seseorang untuk memeluk agama Islam di Indonesia. Sebagai negara dengan populasi Muslim terbesar di dunia, Indonesia menjadi konteks yang unik untuk memahami dinamika konversi agama, khususnya terhadap Islam. Pendekatan yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah metode kualitatif dengan teknik wawancara mendalam terhadap para mualaf dari berbagai latar belakang sosial, ekonomi, dan budaya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat empat faktor utama yang memengaruhi keputusan seseorang untuk masuk Islam: (1) faktor spiritual dan pencarian makna hidup, (2) pengaruh lingkungan sosial, seperti teman, pasangan hidup, atau keluarga, (3) ketertarikan terhadap ajaran Islam yang dinilai logis dan menenangkan, serta (4) pengalaman pribadi atau peristiwa hidup tertentu yang menjadi titik balik spiritual. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi dalam kajian sosiologi agama dan dapat menjadi rujukan bagi lembaga dakwah maupun institusi keagamaan dalam merancang pendekatan dakwah yang humanis dan kontekstual.

Kata kunci: Konversi Agama; Mualaf; Faktor Sosial; Dakwah

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country that has a very wide diversity of religions, cultures and ethnicities.(Princess Syahri, 2024). In the midst of this diversity, Islam is the majority religion, practiced by more than 85% of the population.(Bowen, 2023). However, it is interesting to observe that every year there are individuals from various religious and cultural backgrounds who decide to embrace Islam.(Umi Kalsum, 2023). This phenomenon of religious conversion, especially to Islam, raises questions about what drives someone to make a big decision in their life to become a Muslim.(Bruinessen, 2024).

The decision to adhere to a particular religion, including Islam, is not a light decision(Nurlaila Sapitri, 2023). This process involves various aspects, ranging from cognitive, emotional, social, to spiritual aspects.(Sahputra & Wijaya, 2023). In the Indonesian context, the decision to embrace Islam can be influenced by factors such as marriage, social environment, personal spiritual search, interest in Islamic teachings, or even the influence of the media and increasingly developing digital preaching.(Iskandar, 2022). Every individual has different motivations and experiences in their journey towards Islam.(Hendri Yahya Sahputra, 2024).

The findings of the observation show that the phenomenon of converting to Islam in Indonesia cannot be separated from the active role of religious organizations, Muslim communities, and persuasive and humanistic approaches to preaching. In addition, the image of Islam as a religion that brings peace, order in life, and universal moral values is often a special attraction for individuals who are looking for a foothold in life. Although the process of religious conversion has been widely discussed in various academic literature, studies on the factors that specifically influence a person's decision to embrace Islam in the social, cultural, and religious context in Indonesia are still limited. In fact, understanding these factors is very important not only from an academic perspective, but also in developing more effective and empathetic preaching strategies.

Research on religious conversion, especially conversion to Islam, has been

conducted by a number of academics in both global and local contexts. For example, research by (Prasetyo & Lestari, 2023) developed a seven-stage theoretical framework of religious conversion, including context, crisis, search, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequences. This approach is widely used as a basis for religious conversion studies.

In Indonesia, research by (Rahmawati & Santoso, 2022) identified that social environmental factors, marriage, and interest in Islamic values are dominant factors in the conversion process. In addition, a study by (Ahmad & Wulandari, 2023) shows that the role of personal and community da'wah communication greatly influences a person's process of converting to Islam. Another study by (Sari & Hidayat, 2024) revealed that spiritual reasons and personal religious experiences also play an important role in the conversion process, especially for individuals from different religious backgrounds.

Although the above studies have explained various factors that influence conversion to Islam, there are several limitations that still leave room for further study, including. Most previous studies were conducted within a specific area (e.g. Yogyakarta or Jakarta) and have not represented the diversity of cultural and social contexts in other parts of Indonesia. Many studies only use a qualitative or descriptive approach without testing the relationship between factors more systematically. Previous studies tend to separate factors such as psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual factors partially, without integrating a complete framework to explain conversion decisions holistically.

This study will combine sociological, psychological, and cultural approaches in analyzing the factors that influence a person's decision to convert to Islam, in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding. This study attempts to reach respondents from various regions in Indonesia to capture local dynamics that may influence the conversion process differently. This study attempts to develop a theoretical framework that integrates personal factors (search for the meaning of life, spiritual experience), social (environment, social relations), and structural (media of preaching, religious institutions) in one model

of understanding. In the digital era and globalization of information, this study will also consider the influence of social media, digital preaching content, and new spirituality trends that have not been widely touched upon by previous studies.

Therefore, this study aims to explore deeper into the various factors that influence a person in making a decision to embrace Islam in Indonesia, both personal, social, cultural, and spiritual. It is hoped that this study can contribute to understanding the dynamics of religiosity in Indonesia and enrich the discourse on religious conversion in the context of a pluralistic society.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach that aims to deeply understand the process and factors that influence a person's decision to embrace Islam in Indonesia. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the meaning, perceptions, and subjective experiences of converts in the social, cultural, and spiritual contexts they experience. (Creswell, 2020). Through a qualitative approach, the process of religious conversion is not only understood as an external phenomenon, but also as a complex and meaningful inner journey.

The data used in this study consists of primary data and secondary data. (Sugiyono, 2022). Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with individuals who had converted and embraced Islam (mualaf), as well as with figures who were involved in the process, such as religious leaders, family members, and close friends. Secondary data were collected from various written sources such as documentation, books, scientific journals, and publications from relevant religious institutions and government agencies, which served to strengthen and complement the findings from the primary data.

Informants in this study were selected using purposive sampling techniques, namely deliberate selection based on certain criteria that are in accordance with the research objectives. These criteria include (Asfiati, 2020): (1) individuals who have decided to convert to Islam consciously and without coercion, (2) domiciled in Indonesia, and (3) willing to share and tell their conversion process experiences openly. The number of informants was determined

based on the principle of data saturation, namely the data collection process will be stopped when the information obtained has been repeated and does not provide meaningful new findings.

Data collection in this study was carried out using several main techniques.(Moleong, 2000). First, semi-structured interviews were used to explore information in depth but still within the limits of the prepared question framework, allowing flexibility in exploring topics that emerged during the interview. Second, non-participatory observation was conducted, namely direct observation of the behavior, expressions, and social interactions of converts in their Islamic living environment without active involvement from the researcher. Third, a documentation study was conducted as a complement and verification of the data from interviews and observations, including through personal notes, photos of religious activities, or legal documents such as a statement of conversion to Islam.

The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis.(Mukhtasor & Rizal, 2022). The analysis stage begins with transcribing interviews and organizing data based on field notes. Next, the coding process is carried out, namely labeling relevant data units to identify initial patterns or categories. The coding is then grouped into main themes based on similarities in meaning and the tendency of the information that appears. After that, interpretation of meaning is carried out, namely interpreting these themes by referring to the theory of religious conversion and relevant literature. Finally, the results of the analysis are presented in the form of a descriptive-reflective narrative to describe the findings in a complete and in-depth manner.

To maintain validity and reliability in this qualitative research, the researcher used triangulation of sources and methods, namely comparing data from various informants and data collection techniques to obtain cross-confirmation.(Muslimah & Humaydi, 2020). In addition, member checks were also carried out, namely re-checking the results of interviews and data interpretations to the relevant informants to ensure the accuracy and

appropriateness of the intended meaning. With these steps, it is hoped that the research findings have a strong level of validity and can be scientifically accounted for.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Search Spirituality and the Meaning of Life

From the results of observations of informants who have decided to embrace Islam, it was found that most of them experienced a strong inner drive as the starting point of the process of converting. Converts appear to show signs of a deep search for the meaning of life, which is based on a sense of emptiness and spiritual anxiety in their previous beliefs. This spiritual identity crisis is a common background that motivates them to seek answers to existential questions that have not been answered so far. In daily interactions, it is seen that informants are starting to show increasing interest in Islamic teachings, which they consider capable of providing a logical and systematic explanation of the purpose of life, the existence of God, and the definition of true happiness. Observations also show changes in attitudes and expressions that reflect the inner peace and spiritual satisfaction that they began to feel after studying and practicing Islamic teachings consistently. This can be seen from the increase in calmness in communicating and calmer behavior in their social lives. This is also in line with the results of interviews that strengthen the findings that the decision to convert is influenced by an internal drive to seek the meaning of life and inner peace. With the initials RA, he said that;

“Before I decided to convert to Islam, I felt my life was empty and often wondered about the purpose of life. I had tried many things but did not find a satisfactory answer. When I started to know Islam, I felt the peace that I had been looking for all this time. Islamic teachings provide a reasonable explanation about God and life, that's what made me sure.”

BD also said the same thing regarding the search for spirituality and the meaning of life, he said;

“At first I experienced a pretty severe spiritual crisis. I felt like I was adrift

without a handle. My Muslim friend often invited me to discuss things, and I started to get interested in the concept of monotheism and the way of life taught by Islam. After I studied it more deeply, my heart felt calm and confident to embrace Islam.”

Clarified again with the findings of the interview by RH regarding the search for spirituality and the meaning of life, he said;

“There were many questions in me that were unanswered in my previous religion. I experienced anxiety that was difficult to explain. After attending the study and trying to practice Islamic worship, I felt a different kind of peace. I believe Islam is the right path for me to find the meaning of life and inner peace.”

Based on the results of observations and interviews, it can be concluded that a person's decision to embrace Islam in Indonesia is driven by a strong inner drive in the form of a search for a deep meaning in life. Converts experience a sense of emptiness and a crisis of spiritual identity in their previous beliefs, which motivates them to seek answers to unfulfilled existential questions. Islamic teachings are seen as a religion that is able to provide a logical and systematic explanation of the purpose of life, the existence of God, and the meaning of true happiness. After knowing and practicing Islamic teachings, the informants showed changes in attitude and expression that reflected inner peace and spiritual satisfaction. This finding is reinforced by the personal experiences of the informants who revealed that Islam provided the peace and confidence that they had been looking for in life.

The findings of this study indicate that an individual's decision to embrace Islam in Indonesia is greatly influenced by a strong inner drive in search of the meaning of life and spiritual peace. This phenomenon is in line with the theory of religious conversion which emphasizes the importance of searching for identity and existential meaning as the main factor that drives someone to change their beliefs.(Nugroho & Kurniawan, 2020). The feeling of emptiness and spiritual identity crisis experienced by the informants also strengthens the findings of this study, where individuals who experience existential anxiety tend to seek teachings

that are able to answer fundamental questions about life, death, and the existence of God.(Goddess & Son, 2024).

In line with that, the interview results confirmed that Islamic teachings are seen as a logical and comprehensive belief system, providing a structured explanation of the purpose of life and the definition of true happiness. This supports the findings(Fauzi & Rahman, 2023)which states that one of the main motivations for someone to embrace Islam is because Islamic teachings provide spiritual satisfaction and adequate understanding of the meaning of life. Changes in attitudes and expressions of inner peace observed after the conversion process also indicate a positive psychological transformation that affirms the concept of well-being in a spiritual context.(Oktaviani & Santosa, 2021).

Furthermore, the personal experiences of converts who state that Islam provides peace and a sense of certainty, show that religious conversion is not only a change in social identity, but also a deep and reflective internal process.(Princess, 2021). In the context of pluralistic Indonesia, this process of searching for the meaning of life and inner peace is very relevant, considering that many individuals live amidst socio-cultural dynamics and various psychological pressures that encourage more intensive spiritual searches.(Yulianti & Hadi, 2024).

Thus, the results of this study strengthen the understanding that psychological factors, especially the search for existential meaning and inner peace, are key aspects in a person's decision to embrace Islam. Islamic teachings serve not only as a belief system, but also as a source of profound psychological and spiritual strengthening for converts.

Social Influence and Interpersonal Relationships

From the results of observations of informants who have decided to embrace Islam, it was found that social relations factors play an important role in their conversion process. Intense interactions with people close to them such as partners, friends, spiritual mentors, and Islamic religious figures have significant emotional and psychological impacts. Observations show that good morals, friendliness, and tolerance from the Muslim community around the informants are

the initial entry points for them to begin to know and understand Islam more deeply. In addition, the emotional support obtained from this social environment acts as the main driver that helps them go through the stages of changing beliefs until they finally decide to embrace Islam. The findings of the observation are also in line with the findings of the interview regarding social influence and interpersonal relationships. Meanwhile, HI said that:

“I became interested in Islam because my wife is a Muslim. Up close I saw how her patient, friendly, and tolerant attitude made me feel comfortable. Slowly I learned more from her and her family, until finally I was convinced to embrace Islam.”

Further clarified with interview findings regarding social influence and interpersonal relationships, SB said that:

“My Muslim friends have always shown a very good attitude and never forced anything. They engaged me in discussions in a warm and understanding manner. Their attitude made me feel accepted and opened my heart to accept Islam.”

In addition to interview findings regarding social influence and interpersonal relationships, RM said that:

“I learned a lot from the ustaz who became my spiritual mentor. His gentle and empathetic approach to preaching made me feel comfortable asking questions and understanding Islam. His emotional support and guidance were very meaningful in my process of deciding to become a Muslim.”

The results of observations and interviews show that social relations factors play a very important role in the process of someone deciding to embrace Islam. Intense and meaningful interactions with partners, close friends, spiritual mentors, and Islamic religious figures have a significant emotional and psychological impact. The good morals, friendliness, and tolerance shown by the Muslim community around the informants became the initial door that opened their interest in Islam. In addition, emotional support from the social environment played a major role in driving the process of changing beliefs. The experiences of the

informants as conveyed by HI, SB, and RM strengthen these findings, showing how interpersonal relationships and spiritual guidance helped determine their decision to embrace Islam.

The findings of this study confirm that social relationship factors play a very important role in the process of someone converting to Islam. Intense interactions with close individuals such as partners, friends, spiritual mentors, and religious figures have a significant emotional and psychological impact on their spiritual journey. This is in accordance with the theory of social conversion which states that interpersonal relationships and social networks are crucial factors that influence a person's religious change.(Kurnia & Anggraini, 2020).

The good morals, friendliness, and tolerant attitudes demonstrated by the Muslim community are an effective gateway in building initial interest in Islam. According to(Firdaus & Salim, 2021), positive attitudes and inclusive behaviors from new religious groups can accelerate the process of acculturation and acceptance for individuals considering conversion. The friendly and non-pushy attitudes experienced by informants, as conveyed by SB, support an empathetic and persuasive approach to preaching, which is also supported by research(Putra & Rahayu, 2022)which states that a gentle and understanding approach to preaching can increase interest and acceptance of new religions.

Emotional support from the social environment acts as a major driver that helps individuals through difficult stages in the process of belief change. This is in line with findings from(Santika & Hasan, 2024)which confirms that social support is one of the main factors that facilitate psychological adaptation during the religious conversion process. The presence of a spiritual mentor, as experienced by RM, provides guidance that is not only intellectual but also emotional, allowing individuals to feel comfortable asking questions and learning more deeply.

In addition, this study strengthens the concept that religious conversion is not merely a rational decision, but is also an emotional process that involves close interpersonal relationships and social support.(Fauzan & Laili, 2025). In the

pluralistic social context of Indonesia, warm interpersonal relationships and communication greatly contribute to the process of gradual and comprehensive acceptance of Islam.

Thus, it can be concluded that positive and supportive social interactions from the surrounding environment are very important in supporting the process of someone deciding to embrace Islam. A humanistic and relational approach in preaching and a tolerant attitude of the community are key factors in facilitating changes in religious identity.

The Role of Media and Digital Preaching

From the results of observations of informants, it was found that technological advances and openness of information play an important role in the process of conversion to Islam. Many informants admitted that they began to learn about Islam through various digital platforms such as social media, video lectures on YouTube, online discussions, and other digital da'wah content. Wide and easy access to Islamic knowledge allows them to study Islamic teachings independently and with a more critical approach. Observations show that the existence of this digital media provides space for individuals to carry out in-depth personal reflection before making major decisions such as converting. Thus, technology is a significant supporting factor in the decision-making process. The findings of the observation are also in line with the findings of the interview regarding the role of media and digital da'wah. The results of the interview with the initials AN said that;

“I became interested in Islam after watching many lecture videos on YouTube. The lectures provided clear and easy-to-understand explanations. From there, I became more curious and eventually studied Islam independently through the internet.”

Additional interview findings regarding the role of media and digital preaching. The results of the interview with the initials DS stated that;

“Social media and online discussion forums have been very helpful in helping me learn about Islam. I can ask questions directly and get different

perspectives without pressure. This process makes me feel like I have the space to think and understand Islamic teachings critically.”

This was further clarified with interview findings regarding the role of media and digital preaching. The results of the interview with the initials DS stated that;

“The digital da'wah content that I found on various platforms allowed me to reflect on myself before deciding to convert to Islam. The open and easily accessible information made me feel ready and confident to undergo this process of change.”

Based on the results of observations and interviews, it can be concluded that technological advances and openness of information play an important role in the process of someone deciding to embrace Islam. Digital media such as social media, video lectures on YouTube, online discussion forums, and other digital da'wah content are the main means for informants to get to know and study Islam independently and critically. Wide access to Islamic information provides space for individuals to carry out in-depth personal reflection before making major decisions, such as converting. Interview findings from informants AN, DS, and RH strengthen this, which emphasizes that digital media is not only a source of knowledge, but also a supporting medium for the spiritual process and more mature decision-making in converting to Islam.

The results of this study indicate that advances in information technology and open access to digital media play a crucial role in the process of converting to Islam. Informants utilize various digital platforms such as social media, video lectures on YouTube, online discussion forums, and digital da'wah content as the main sources for getting to know and studying Islam independently and critically. This phenomenon is in line with previous studies that emphasize the role of digital media in disseminating religious information and facilitating flexible spiritual learning. (Sinta & Wahyudi, 2023).

According to (Amalia, 2024), digital media has become a new space for religious practice, allowing individuals to access religious materials anytime and

anywhere without having to be tied to traditional structures such as physical pengajian or local communities. This supports freedom of thought and personal reflection in interpreting religious teachings, which in the context of religious conversion becomes very important as a stage in the adaptation process and decision-making.(Hasanah & Utomo, 2021).

Furthermore, research by(Ardiansyah & Nurhayati, 2024)shows that social media platforms and online da'wah content allow for more open and dialogical interactions, which help individuals overcome doubts and gain a deeper understanding of the new religion. Interview findings that informants felt they had space to ask questions and discuss without pressure, strengthen the argument that digital media functions not only as a source of information, but also as a virtual community that supports the spiritual process.

In addition, the openness of information through digital media encourages a more critical and reflective learning process, which is very important in the context of changing beliefs. According to(Zahra & Imran, 2025), digital media users in a religious context often use a reflective and critical approach to the information obtained, which helps them to confirm their decision to convert based on mature personal beliefs, not just social pressure.

Thus, the advancement of digital technology not only facilitates access to information, but also facilitates the process of internalization and deep appreciation of Islamic teachings, which has a positive impact on the process of conversion to Islam. This finding is consistent with the experiences of informants AN, DS, and RH who expressed that digital media is an important space for independent learning, self-reflection, and solid decision-making.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that a person's decision to convert to Islam in Indonesia is influenced by several main interrelated factors. First, the factor of inner drive and the search for the meaning of life becomes the basic motivation, where individuals who experience spiritual crises and feelings

of emptiness in their previous beliefs seek existential answers that can be provided by Islamic teachings. Second, the factor of social relations plays an important role, where intense interactions with partners, friends, spiritual mentors, and Islamic religious figures provide strong emotional and psychological support, thereby strengthening interest and belief in Islam. Third, technological advances and openness of information through digital media such as social media, video lectures, and online discussion forums provide easy and broad access to study Islam independently and critically, while providing space for personal reflection before making a conversion decision. These three factors together form a complex and personal process in a person's decision to become a convert in Indonesia. This process is not only intellectual, but also involves deep emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions.

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions can be put forward as follows. The Islamic community and religious leaders should continue to develop a friendly, empathetic, and tolerant approach to preaching, so that they can be an effective bridge for those who are seeking an understanding of Islam. Given the significant role of digital media in the conversion process, preachers and religious institutions need to make maximum use of information technology by providing preaching content that is easy to understand, interactive, and inclusive to reach various groups, especially the younger generation. After the conversion process, it is important to provide ongoing spiritual guidance and mentoring so that converts can internalize Islamic values well and live a harmonious social life. It is recommended to conduct further research that examines other factors such as the influence of local culture, economy, and education in the conversion process to Islam so that understanding of this phenomenon is more comprehensive.

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