



Examining How Islamic Coping Reduces Internet Misuse through Emotional Self-Regulation

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Abstract

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Problematic internet use (PIU) has emerged as a serious psychological concern, particularly among youth during the COVID-19 pandemic. While prior studies have explored emotional and behavioral factors contributing to PIU, limited research has examined how culturally grounded religious coping strategies influence these patterns. This study offers a novel contribution by investigating the mediating role of emotion regulation difficulties in the relationship between Islamic religious coping and PIU among Muslim undergraduate students in Indonesia. A quantitative approach was applied to a sample of 304 participants using the Iranian Religious Coping Scale (IRCOPE), Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-18 (DERS-18), and Generalized Problematic Internet Use Scale 2 (GPIUS-2), all adapted into Indonesian. Path analysis revealed that Islamic religious coping significantly reduced emotion regulation difficulties, which in turn were positively associated with PIU. Notably, religious coping did not directly impact PIU but exerted an indirect effect through emotional regulation. These findings underscore the relevance of culturally specific, faith-based strategies in managing excessive internet use and contribute to the broader integration of Islamic psychological constructs within contemporary behavioral research. This study advances the field by modeling a culturally contextualized pathway from religiosity to digital behavior, with implications for culturally informed interventions.

INTRODUCTION

During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, internet access became an alternative to traditional classroom settings. Students participated in online classes, webinars, and virtual seminars to enhance their skills (Nagaur, 2020). The internet also served as a platform for disseminating global information and guidance on how to combat COVID-19 (Kiraly et al., 2020). According to Singh et al. (2020), individuals' engagement with social media during the pandemic fulfilled a psychological need inherent to human nature. This condition contributed to the significant increase in internet usage during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research by Sun et al. (2020) found a 23% rise in the prevalence of severe internet addiction during the COVID-19 period. Similarly, Ilesanmi et al. (2021) reported a 64.3% increase in problematic internet use among adolescents during lockdown. Interviews with two students further revealed that internet usage had escalated, with durations reaching up to 12 hours per day during the pandemic. This surge in use had additional consequences, such as sleep deprivation and heightened anxiety during periods of internet absence. According to Odaci and Kalkan (2010), individuals who use the internet for more than five hours a day and experience discomfort when not online may be classified as having problematic internet use (PIU).

Problematic internet use is a global concern, characterized by a lack of control over internet activity that results in negative consequences in one's life. It involves excessive or compulsive internet behavior, preoccupation with being online, and a loss of self-regulation. The consequences of PIU may include neglect of social life, relationships, personal health, work or academic responsibilities, and disruptions in sleep and eating habits, all of which pose disadvantages to individuals (Spada, 2014). Caplan (2010) identified four dimensions of PIU: preference for online social interaction (POSI), mood regulation, impaired self-regulation, and negative outcomes.

Previous research has shown a strong connection between internet activity and emotional or psychological states (Gros et al., 2020). This is supported by Günaydın et al. (2021), who identified emotion regulation difficulties as a contributing factor to problematic internet use. Maladaptive emotion regulation strategies can reinforce and sustain excessive internet usage (Wartberg & Lindenberg, 2020). Emotion regulation difficulties refer to deficiencies in recognizing, understanding, and managing emotions, including the inability to modify emotional responses based on goals or to inhibit behavior driven by emotion. Gratz and Roemer (2004) defined six dimensions of such difficulties: non-acceptance of emotional responses, difficulty engaging in goal-directed behavior, impulse control issues, limited emotional awareness, restricted access to emotion regulation strategies, and lack of emotional clarity.

Pettorruso et al. (2020) noted that individuals who struggle with emotion regulation are at higher risk for PIU, often using it as a compensatory mechanism. In this context, religious coping is considered a potential strategy for cognitive reappraisal within emotion regulation (Dolcos et al., 2021). Religious coping involves relying on one's faith during difficult times (Francis et al., 2021). Aflakseir and Coleman (2011) identified five dimensions of religious coping: religious practice, benevolent reappraisal, active religious coping, negative feelings toward God, and passive religious coping. Jong (2020) highlighted that such coping behaviors—such as prayer—are employed to navigate stressful circumstances.

Studies have shown that effective religious coping can alleviate distress and anxiety by promoting acceptance of suffering, adherence to divine will, reduction of guilt, and emotional regulation (Chatard et al., 2020; Rosmarin & Leidl, 2020; Vishkin &

Tamir, 2020). Rossi and Rossi (2017) found a negative correlation between religious coping and emotion regulation difficulties, particularly regarding emotional clarity and acceptance of negative emotions. From an Islamic perspective, religious coping involves reliance on God, which helps reduce anxiety and depression and restore hope (Achour et al., 2017).

Achour et al. (2017) described Islamic coping techniques, including faith in God, prayer, remembrance (dhikr), patience, forgiveness, self-restraint, positive thinking, and community support. Among these, prayer functions as a psychological and emotional catalyst, enhancing decision-making and spiritual well-being. Shahabi et al. (2017) further emphasized the importance of religion in addressing emotion regulation issues. Dossi et al. (2022) suggested that religiosity not only relates to emotion regulation but also serves as a preventive strategy against internet addiction.

Naz and Sharma (2018) observed that Muslims with stronger religious commitment tend to have lower internet addiction scores and reduced motivation to use the internet as a coping mechanism. Irman et al. (2019) found that dhikr relaxation—a technique rooted in Islamic practice—can effectively reduce PIU among students, particularly when used by school counselors. This technique regulates emotions linked to internet addiction and addresses underlying anxieties. According to Vishkin (2014), belief in God's presence during hardships brings comfort and stability to individuals.

Tull and Aldao (2015) argued that adaptive emotion regulation strategies promote emotional understanding and acceptance, as well as enhanced self-efficacy. Conversely, individuals who struggle with regulation may repeatedly turn to the internet as a source of relief from negative emotions. This repeated use can escalate from occasional to habitual, contributing to tolerance and addiction (Young & De Abreu, 2017). Based on these insights, it is hypothesized that Islamic religious coping influences problematic internet use, with emotion regulation difficulties serving as a mediating variable. Additionally, previous findings support the relevance of religious practices, such as dhikr, in mitigating PIU (Irman et al., 2019).

Islamic religious coping may offer an effective support mechanism for individuals facing internet-related problems, either indirectly through emotion regulation or directly. Therefore, this study aims to explore the role of Islamic religious coping in problematic internet use, with a focus on emotion regulation difficulties as a mediating factor. The goal is to provide a foundation for future research on the intersection of religiosity and PIU. Despite an expanding body of literature addressing problematic internet use (PIU) and its psychological correlates, few studies have specifically examined the mediating role of emotion regulation difficulties in the relationship between Islamic religious coping and PIU. Most prior investigations have either focused on Western conceptualizations of religious coping or explored religiosity as a general protective factor without disentangling its cognitive-emotional mechanisms, particularly in Muslim-majority contexts. Moreover, existing studies tend to overlook how culturally rooted religious

practices, such as dhikr and tawakkul, interact with emotional regulation processes to influence internet-related behaviors. This limited focus not only constrains theoretical generalizability but also impedes the development of culturally sensitive intervention strategies. Therefore, this study addresses a significant gap by investigating how Islamic religious coping may influence problematic internet use indirectly through its effect on emotion regulation difficulties among Muslim university students. This inquiry is especially timely given the intensification of internet dependency during the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing need for psychological models that integrate faith-based coping within digital behavior frameworks.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive research design using a quantitative approach. The research model applied was a mediation analysis model, which, according to Hayes (2013), represents a causal framework in which an independent variable (X) influences a dependent variable (Y) through a mediating variable (M). In this study, the effect of Islamic religious coping (X) on problematic internet use (Y) was examined with emotion regulation difficulties as the mediating variable (M).

Respondents were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: Muslim students aged 17–29 years, actively participating in online or remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and regular internet users. A total of 304 participants took part in the study, comprising 100 males and 204 females. Data were collected via an online questionnaire that included demographic information and standardized research instruments. Demographic data were used as a basis for additional analysis.

Three measurement scales were used in this study: the Iranian Religious Coping Scale (IRCOPE), the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-18 (DERS-18), and the Generalized Problematic Internet Use Scale 2 (GPIUS-2). IRCOPE, developed by Aflakseir and Coleman (2011) and adapted into Indonesian by Sure (2019), consists of 20 items with a reliability coefficient of 0.881. An example item from IRCOPE is, *“I seek comfort and guidance by reading the Al-Quran.”*

DERS-18, developed by Victor and Klonsky (2016) and adapted by Faiz (2019), contains 18 items and has a reliability coefficient of 0.900. An example item is, *“When I get annoyed, I get out of control.”*

GPIUS-2 was developed by Caplan (2010) and adapted into Indonesian by Ardiansyah (2018). It includes 15 items with a reliability coefficient of 0.850. An example item is, *“I feel that online social interaction is more comfortable than in-person interaction.”*

RESULTS

The results of the data analysis include demographic information such as gender, age, internet usage duration, and the health status of respondents.

Table 1

Demographic Data

Demographic	Description	N	%
Gender	Female	204	67.1%
	Male	100	32.9%
Age	17-20 y.o	215	70.7%
	21-23 y.o	77	25.4%
	24-26 y.o	12	4%
Duration of Internet Use	< 1 Hours/Day	2	0.7%
	1-4 Hours/Day	58	19.1%
	5-9 Hours/Day	91	29.9%
	10-15 Hours/Day	115	37.8%
	>15 Hours/Day	38	12.5%
Respondent's Health Status	Positive COVID-19	23	7.6%
	Negative COVID-19	281	92.4%
Living Region	Sumatera	55	18.1%
	Jawa	206	67.8%
	Kalimantan	19	6.3%
Living Region	Nusa Tenggara	5	1.6%
	Sulawesi	10	3.3%
	Papua	9	2.9%

The total number of respondents in this study was 304, consisting of 204 females (67.1%) and 100 males (32.9%). The majority of participants-215 individuals (70.7%)-were aged 17-20 years, followed by 77 individuals (25.4%) aged 21-23 years, and 12 individuals (4%) aged 24-26 years.

Regarding the duration of internet use, the highest number of respondents-115 individuals (37.8%)-used the internet for 10 to 15 hours per day, followed by 91 individuals (29.9%) who used it for 5 to 9 hours per day, 58 individuals (19.1%) for 1 to 4 hours per day, and 38 individuals (12.5%) for more than 15 hours per day. Only 2 participants (0.7%) reported using the internet for less than 1 hour per day.

In terms of health status, 281 respondents (92.4%) reported testing negative for COVID-19, while 23 respondents (7.6%) had tested positive. Regarding regional distribution, 206 respondents (67.8%) lived in Java, 55 (18.1%) in Sumatera, and 43 respondents (14.1%) in other regions, including Kalimantan, Nusa Tenggara, Sulawesi, and Papua.

Table 2

Empirical Score

Variable	Empirical Score			
	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Islamic Coping Religious	39	70	58.88	6.256
Emotion Regulation Difficulties	13	65	39.86	8.973
Problematic Internet Use	11	53	34.05	6.540

Table 3

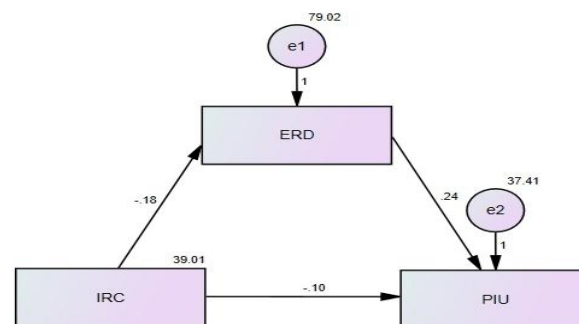
Total Effect Score

	Direct		Indirect	
	IRC	ERD	IRC	ERD
ERD	-,124	,000	,000	,000
PIU	-,098	,324	-,040	,000

The empirical results presented in Table 3 show that Islamic religious coping (IRC) has a significant indirect effect ($p = 0.000$) on emotion regulation difficulties (ERD). Furthermore, IRC also has a significant indirect effect (-0.040) on problematic internet use (PIU) through ERD. The direct effect of emotion regulation difficulties on problematic internet use was stronger (0.324) than the direct effect of IRC on PIU.

Figure 1

Path Analysis



Emotional Regulation Difficulties as Mediator
in Islamic Coping Religious
on Problematic Internet Use
GFI=1.000
CFI=1.000

Table 4

Regression Analysis

Variable	Regression Weights	Stand. Regression weights	Note
ERD ← ICR	.029	-.124	Accept
PIU ← ICR	.072	-.098	Reject
PIB ← ERD	***	.324	Accept

The analysis in Figure 1 shows that the model fits the data well, as indicated by the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI), both of which are 1.000 (exceeding the threshold of >0.90). This indicates that the empirical model

examining the relationship between Islamic religious coping, emotion regulation difficulties, and problematic internet use is consistent with the theoretical model.

Furthermore, Table 4 indicates that Islamic religious coping significantly affects emotion regulation difficulties ($p = 0.029$, $\beta = -0.124$). Meanwhile, emotion regulation difficulties significantly influence problematic internet use ($p < 0.01$, $\beta = 0.324$). However, there is no direct effect of Islamic religious coping on problematic internet use ($p = 0.072$, $\beta = -0.098$).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic religious coping influences emotion regulation difficulties, and emotion regulation difficulties, in turn, influence problematic internet use. However, Islamic religious coping does not have a direct effect on problematic internet use. This suggests that emotion regulation difficulties fully mediate the relationship between Islamic religious coping and problematic internet use. This mediation model offers important theoretical insight by empirically validating a culturally embedded psychological pathway, in which faith-based coping mechanisms contribute to digital behavior regulation through emotional self-management processes.

These findings align with the research of Spada and Marino (2017), who noted that when individuals experience psychological distress, maladaptive coping strategies may trigger negative emotions and lead them to engage in excessive internet use as a means of emotional relief. Similarly, Piri et al. (2020) found that emotion regulation difficulties contribute to problematic internet use among college students, and that this condition is positively associated with maladaptive coping strategies (Casale et al., 2016). However, this study extends existing findings by examining these relationships through the lens of Islamic religious coping—an area that remains significantly underexplored in empirical research despite its cultural and clinical relevance in Muslim-majority populations.

This study found that the influence of Islamic religious coping on emotion regulation difficulties has a negative direction ($\beta = -0.124$), meaning that higher levels of Islamic religious coping are associated with lower levels of emotion regulation difficulties. Supporting this, research by Semplonius, Good, and Willoughby (2014) revealed that greater participation in religious activities is linked to fewer difficulties in emotion regulation. Krageloh et al. (2012) also stated that religious individuals tend to rely on their faith during stressful circumstances, which is associated with active coping, positive meaning-making, and greater acceptance of challenges. The present findings suggest that Islamic practices such as dhikr, prayer, and tawakkul may serve as protective emotional buffers, enabling individuals to reinterpret stressors, calm emotional reactivity, and regulate internal distress in culturally coherent ways.

Additionally, this study found that emotion regulation difficulties positively affect problematic internet use ($\beta = 0.324$). This means that the more difficulties individuals

experience in regulating their emotions, the more likely they are to engage in problematic internet use. This finding is consistent with Amendola et al. (2018), who showed that difficulties in emotion regulation—such as trouble accepting emotional responses, pursuing goal-directed behavior, managing impulses, and accessing regulation strategies—are positively correlated with problematic internet use. The link between these variables may also be explained by the short-term psychological benefits individuals receive from internet use, such as mood enhancement, pleasure, tension release, and the avoidance of negative emotional states. Wang and Qi (2017) further noted that emotion regulation difficulties are significant risk factors for addictive behaviors. This supports the conceptual model in which religious coping indirectly reduces PIU by improving emotion regulation capacities.

Almenayes (2015) argued that it is difficult to generalize the direct relationship between religiosity and internet addiction, as this relationship is complex and influenced by various intrinsic factors, including differing worldviews and interpretations of science and religion. Supporting this, Charlton et al. (2013) suggested that although religion may help reduce vulnerability to internet problems, other mediating variables might explain why this effect is not always statistically significant. Similarly, research by Ekşi and Çiftçi (2017) found no significant correlation between religious beliefs and problematic internet use. These inconsistent findings highlight the importance of examining intermediary mechanisms—such as emotion regulation difficulties—as demonstrated in this study, which provides a more nuanced understanding of how religiosity operates in digital behavior contexts.

This study also found a positive relationship between internet use duration and problematic internet use. The longer individuals use the internet, the more likely they are to experience problematic usage patterns. Vigna-Taglianti et al. (2017) noted that increased internet use—especially involving activities such as pornography consumption, loneliness, and extended hours online—was associated with a greater risk of PIU in both genders. Morioka et al. (2016) likewise found that internet use exceeding five hours per day was significantly related to PIU in adolescents.

Out of 304 respondents, 204 were female, and 100 were male, indicating that females were the dominant internet users in this sample. Andangsari et al. (2017) found that women scored higher on problematic internet use than men, often because they use social media more frequently and are more emotionally reactive. This greater emotional reactivity increases the risk of developing problematic internet habits among female students.

A comparative analysis of the respondents' health status showed no significant differences in Islamic religious coping ($p = 0.927$) or problematic internet use ($p = 0.271$) between COVID-19-positive and -negative participants. However, a significant difference was found in emotion regulation difficulties ($p = 0.040$). Holmes et al. (2020) explained that social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic led to negative emotional

states such as anxiety and stress, while Cruz et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of good emotion regulation to reduce such risks during the pandemic. In this context, the mediating role of emotion regulation takes on heightened significance, as digital engagement became a dominant mode of coping with isolation, and faith-based strategies may have offered vital emotional scaffolding.

Vishkin et al. (2019) found that individuals with higher religiosity tend to adopt more adaptive emotion regulation strategies and avoid maladaptive ones, enabling them to manage their emotions more effectively. Wartberg and Lindenberg (2020) also found that low use of maladaptive emotion regulation techniques predicted a decrease in problematic internet use over time.

This study confirmed that Islamic religious coping influences problematic internet use through the mediating role of emotion regulation difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic. Fatima et al. (2022) found that positive religious coping during COVID-19 supported adaptive emotional regulation, thereby enhancing mental well-being, particularly among young men. Likewise, Pan et al. (2022) showed that positive emotion regulation reduces the likelihood of problematic internet use, which is often associated with increased emotional distress during pandemics. Their mediation model demonstrated that emotion regulation difficulties partially mediated the relationship between perceived COVID-19-related mental health risks and PIU.

By identifying emotion regulation as the mediating variable between Islamic religious coping and PIU, this study contributes not only to the psychology of religion and digital behavior but also offers a culturally contextualized framework that may inform intervention models in Muslim communities. Future research should continue to develop such culturally embedded models to improve mental health and behavioral outcomes in increasingly digital societies.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic represents a significant global challenge with widespread effects on individuals and society. This study revealed that Islamic religious coping influences problematic internet use indirectly, through the mediating role of emotion regulation difficulties, particularly during the pandemic. While Islamic religious coping did not show a direct effect on problematic internet use, emotion regulation difficulties were found to fully mediate the relationship.

These findings suggest that religious coping strategies may be effective in reducing emotion regulation difficulties, which in turn could help mitigate problematic internet use. Thus, emotion regulation plays a crucial intermediary role in this dynamic. The study's implications point toward the potential value of incorporating religious coping strategies as preventive or intervention tools to address emotion regulation difficulties, particularly in managing excessive internet use among youth.

Previous studies have examined religious coping and emotion regulation in the context of various belief systems; however, research focusing specifically on Islamic religious coping in relation to problematic internet use and emotion regulation remains limited. This lack of literature constrained the depth of theoretical discussion in the present study.

Future research is encouraged to further explore the intersection between Islamic psychology, religious coping, and emotion regulation. It is also recommended to increase the diversity and size of the sample, to better generalize findings and enhance understanding of the nuanced roles religion and emotional processes play in internet-related behavioral issues.

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