



Fostering Moderate Awareness Amid Digital Religious Polarization Among Generation Z at MAN 1 Jombang

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Abstract

The rise of social media has transformed the landscape of learning and religious authority for Generation Z, while simultaneously giving rise to increasingly complex polarization of religious narratives in the digital space. This situation presents new challenges for Islamic Religious Education in fostering a moderate mindset among students. This study aims to analyze the pedagogy of Islamic Religious Education in fostering a moderate mindset among Generation Z amidst the polarization of digital religious discourse at MAN 1 Jombang. The research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. Participants include Islamic Religious Education teachers, students, the vice principal for curriculum, and the school committee. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, and were subsequently analyzed using an interactive analysis model. The results indicate that students' digital religious experiences are characterized by the dominance of social media as a source of religious knowledge, the fragmentation of religious authority, and exposure to diverse religious narratives. These conditions were addressed through dialogic, reflective, and contextual pedagogy by strengthening critical digital literacy, the practice of tabayyun, reflective discussions, and the internalization of the value of religious moderation in madrasah learning and culture. This study produced a model for reconstructing Generation Z's moderate consciousness, demonstrating that religious moderation is formed through a dynamic interaction between digital religious experiences, the fragmentation of religious authority, dialogic pedagogy, critical digital literacy, and madrasah culture.

Keywords: Religious Moderation, Digital Religious Polarization, Pedagogy of Islamic Education, Generation Z

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INTRODUCTION

مقدمة

Digital transformation has fundamentally changed the religious landscape for the younger generation. Social media has not only become a space for communication but also shapes the production of knowledge, religious authority, and an increasingly fluid religious identity. Generation Z relies on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and podcasts as primary sources of religious learning, driving a shift in religious authority from formal institutions toward popular, instant, and algorithmic digital authorities (Fajar et al., 2025; Kianpour et al., 2026). In Indonesia, high internet penetration is accelerating this change, so that adolescents' religious practices are increasingly influenced by diverse and often contradictory digital information. As a result, the digital space has become an arena for the contestation of various narratives of Islam, ranging from moderation and conservatism to symbolic extremism, which is widely disseminated

through social media (Schmidt, 2021; Utami, 2024).

Empirical data from 2025 shows that the digital space has become a dominant part of the lives of Indonesia's Generation Z. A survey by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII, 2025) noted that the number of internet users in Indonesia reached 229.4 million, with a penetration rate of 80.66%, while Generation Z was the group with the highest internet access rate, at around 87–88%. In terms of social media usage, TikTok is the most popular platform with a 35.17% share, followed by YouTube at 23.76%, Facebook at 21.58%, and Instagram at 15.94%, with TikTok usage among Generation Z reaching 42.27%. This phenomenon indicates that social media is no longer merely a means of communication and entertainment but has evolved into a space for shaping social identity, participatory culture, value orientation, and even the religious practices of the younger generation. Platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram have now become Generation Z's primary sources for obtaining information, public opinion, and religious references. The high intensity of digital media use has also raised concerns about the social and psychological impacts on the younger generation; consequently, in 2025, the Indonesian government began drafting regulations to impose age restrictions on social media use in response to the massive digital penetration among children and adolescents.

This situation has led to the polarization of digital religiosity among Generation Z. This polarization is reflected not only in differing religious views but also in the emergence of exclusivism, the delegitimization of other groups, and claims of sole truth (Faradhillah, 2024; Grigoropoulou, 2020). Social media algorithms reinforce echo chambers that increase exposure to narratives aligned with users' ideological preferences, thereby narrowing the space for dialogue and amplifying the potential for intolerance (Arifah et al., 2025). Consequently, Generation Z's digital religiosity is no longer merely a personal religious expression but a social practice shaped by the power dynamics of media, digital culture, and the fragmentation of religious authority. This phenomenon demonstrates that the digital space has become an arena for the production of religious meaning that shapes Islamic identity, social relations, and the attitudes of the younger generation toward difference (Evolvi & Giorda, 2021; Khamis, 2024; Zaid et al., 2022).

This phenomenon poses a serious challenge to Islamic religious education in schools and madrasahs. Islamic religious education can no longer focus solely on the transfer of normative knowledge; rather, it must foster students' reflective awareness in navigating the complexities of digital religious discourse (Indriani et al., 2024). Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy views education as a process of forming critical consciousness that encourages students to understand reality in a reflective, dialogical, and emancipatory manner (Freire, 2021; Shih, 2026). In this context, Islamic religious education must foster critical thinking, media literacy, interfaith dialogue, and sensitivity to the values of justice, tolerance, and humanity. In line with this, the concept of religious moderation developed by Azyumardi Azra and reinforced by policies of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs emphasizes a balanced and tolerant approach to religion that rejects extremism (Romli et al., 2025; Singgih, 2023). Meanwhile, Henry Jenkins' theory of digital participatory culture explains that the digital generation plays an active role in producing and interpreting content, including religious narratives (H. Jenkins & Ito, 2015). Therefore, Islamic religious education plays a strategic role in instilling the value of moderation while equipping students with the critical skills to filter, negotiate, and reflect on religious discourse in the digital space.

Religious moderation is a critical issue in the context of Indonesia's multicultural society. Moderation is not merely understood as a "middle ground," but as an ethical awareness aimed

at fostering fair, inclusive, and diversity-respecting interfaith relations (Nasir & Rijal, 2021). However, in the digital age, the value of moderation faces new challenges because the younger generation lives amid a flood of information that is fast-paced, viral, emotionally charged, and largely unverified. Virtual religious authorities on social media also frequently produce simplistic narratives that are more easily accepted by Generation Z than contextual and dialogical approaches to religion (Zaimina, 2025). This situation means that fostering a moderate mindset cannot rely solely on a normative approach but requires pedagogical strategies capable of bridging students' digital experiences with the values of religious moderation in a contextual and reflective manner.

MAN 1 Jombang is a relevant setting for examining this issue because it is situated in an environment with a tradition of moderate Islam while also being exposed to the digital culture of Generation Z. As a madrasah in a region with a strong pesantren tradition, MAN 1 Jombang faces the challenge of students living in two social spheres: a culture of religious moderation rooted in tradition and a digital culture open to various religious ideologies. Preliminary observations indicate that students actively access religious content through TikTok, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, and religious podcasts. Some rely on digital religious influencers as references for understanding contemporary Islamic issues, such as hijrah, the caliphate, gender relations, the ruling on music, interfaith tolerance, and religious identity. This situation presents a challenge for PAI teachers because various digital narratives also influence students' understanding. In some cases, debates arise, along with a tendency to judge certain religious practices and exclusive attitudes influenced by social media consumption. This phenomenon indicates that the PAI classroom has become an arena for negotiating the complex meanings of digital religiosity, one that is fraught with ideological contestation.

Various studies have examined religious moderation, social media, and digital religiosity in Islamic education. Febriani and Ritonga (2022) demonstrate that social media plays a role in the internalization of religious moderation among the younger generation through digital religious content. Yuliawati and Asri (2022) found that internet exposure influences the younger generation's understanding of religious moderation and patterns of social interaction. Meanwhile, Zaid et al. (2022) assert that social media reconstructs religious authority and positions religious influencers as new sources of religious legitimacy. Hasan and Juhannis (2024) also note that research on religious moderation remains dominated by normative approaches and educational policy, and has not yet sufficiently highlighted students' pedagogical experiences in digital spaces. Consequently, there remains a research gap regarding how Islamic religious education pedagogy shapes Generation Z's moderate consciousness amid the polarization of digital religiosity. Studies on the experiences of students and teachers in dealing with the contestation of digital religious authority in madrasah learning spaces are also still limited. Consequently, there is an academic gap regarding the interrelationship between pedagogical processes, classroom interactions, students' digital experiences, and religious learning practices in shaping moderate consciousness in the era of digital participatory culture.

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to analyze the pedagogy of Islamic religious education in shaping Generation Z's awareness of religious moderation amid the polarization of digital religiosity at MAN 1 Jombang. This study focuses on the pedagogical strategies of Islamic religious education teachers, students' experiences with digital religiosity, the dynamics of learning interactions, and the process of internalizing the values of religious moderation within the classroom and madrasah culture. This study employs a qualitative approach grounded in critical pedagogy and religious moderation to understand the meanings, experiences, and social

practices emerging in students' lives. The novelty of this study lies in its analysis of how Islamic religious education pedagogy functions as a process of fostering moderate religious consciousness amidst Generation Z's digital participatory culture and religious polarization. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich research on Islamic religious education pedagogy, religious moderation, and Generation Z's digital religiosity. Practically, this study is expected to offer a contextual, dialogic, and relevant Islamic religious education (PAI) pedagogical model to address the challenges of digital religious polarization in contemporary Islamic educational settings.

METHOD

منهج

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design. This approach was chosen to provide an in-depth exploration of the pedagogical dynamics of Islamic religious education in shaping Generation Z's moderate consciousness amid the polarization of religious views in the digital realm, specifically within the context of MAN 1 Jombang. The case study allows for a contextual, holistic, and naturalistic understanding of the experiences, interactions, pedagogical practices, and constructions of meaning that develop among teachers and students. The research was conducted from February to May 2026, involving eight informants selected through purposive sampling, consisting of three Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, one vice principal in charge of the curriculum, one school committee member, and three Generation Z students who actively access digital religious content. The selection of students was based on the intensity of their social media use, their engagement in digital religious discussions, and their ability to reflect on their religious experiences. To enrich the data, the study also employed snowball sampling to identify additional informants relevant to the dynamics of students' digital religiosity.

Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Interviews were used to explore informants' experiences, PAI teachers' pedagogical strategies, the dynamics of students' digital religiosity, and the process of internalizing religious moderation. Through open-ended questions, this technique allowed for in-depth and contextual exploration of the data. Participatory observation was conducted during PAI lessons, teacher-student interactions, and religious activities at the madrasah to understand pedagogical dynamics and responses to digital religious narratives. Documentation was used to supplement the data through analysis of learning modules, religious moderation policies, photos of activities, and relevant social media content. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation from various informants. Additionally, validation was conducted through member checking and audit trails to ensure the credibility, consistency, and traceability of the research process.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). During the condensation stage, the data were selected, focused, and categorized based on the themes of Islamic Education pedagogy, digital religiosity, religious moderation, and Generation Z experiences. Data presentation was conducted through descriptive narratives and thematic categorization to identify patterns, relationships, and dynamics across the interviews. Conclusions were drawn in a gradual and reflective manner by interpreting the interrelationships between teachers' pedagogical strategies, students' digital experiences, and the formation of moderate religious awareness in madrasahs. The analysis was

conducted interpretatively using Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, Azyumardi Azra's approach to religious moderation, and Henry Jenkins's concept of participatory digital culture to understand the construction of meaning and social practices in Generation Z's digital religiosity.

RESULT | نتائج

Generation Z's Digital Religious Practices Amid Social Media Polarization

Social media has become the primary gateway through which Generation Z students at MAN 1 Jombang seek religious knowledge. Students consistently described TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and religious podcasts as the platforms they accessed most frequently to understand contemporary Islamic issues, including *hijrah*, Islamic motivation, youth *fiqh*, gender relations, interfaith tolerance, Muslim identity, and other emerging religious topics. One student explained:

"I usually look for religious information on TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and religious podcasts because they are easier to access, easier to understand, and discuss issues that are relevant to young people." (S1)

Another student similarly stated:

"Social media helps me understand religious topics more quickly because the explanations are concise and directly related to current issues." (S2)

These accounts indicate that social media has become an integral part of students' daily religious learning practices rather than merely serving as an alternative source of information.

Teachers also confirmed this shift in students' learning behaviour. They observed that students were now more familiar with digital religious resources than with conventional printed materials, and that classroom discussions frequently originated from religious content encountered on social media. As one teacher remarked:

"Many students bring religious issues they have watched on TikTok or YouTube into classroom discussions. This has become part of their daily learning experience." (T1)

The Vice Principal for Curriculum similarly noted:

"Today's students are very close to digital information. Religious learning can no longer rely solely on textbooks because students are already interacting with religious content through social media." (VP)

Classroom observations further showed that discussions about viral religious content and digital preachers frequently emerged during Islamic Religious Education lessons, demonstrating that students continuously integrated their online religious experiences into formal learning activities.

The increasing use of social media has also influenced students' perceptions of religious authority. Rather than relying exclusively on teachers or traditional religious figures, students acknowledged that they frequently followed digital preachers and religious influencers whose communication styles were considered more concise, practical, and relevant to the younger generation.

"I often follow religious speakers on social media because their explanations are short, clear, and easier for young people to understand." (S2)

Teachers likewise observed that students often became familiar with religious figures

through digital platforms before encountering them in formal educational settings.

"Students often mention the names of digital preachers during lessons because they have already watched their content on social media." (T2)

These findings indicate that social media is gradually reshaping patterns of religious authority, with digitally visible religious actors becoming increasingly influential in students' religious learning.

Furthermore, broad access to diverse religious content has exposed students to multiple religious perspectives. Students reported encountering different viewpoints regarding religious practices, tolerance, religious identity, and contemporary Islamic issues, while teachers acknowledged that some students tended to accept digital religious information without first verifying its credibility.

"Sometimes I find different explanations about the same religious issue on social media, so I have to compare them before deciding which one is more convincing." (S1)

A member of the school committee also emphasized:

"The main challenge today is not the lack of religious information but helping students distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources in digital spaces." (SC)

Observation data likewise revealed that students' discussions reflected the diversity of religious narratives promoted through social media algorithms, which repeatedly exposed them to content aligned with their viewing preferences. Consequently, social media functions not only as a source of religious knowledge but also as a digital environment in which students continuously construct their religious understanding and identity.

Fragmentation of Religious Authority and Students' Digital Experiences

Interview and observation data revealed that Generation Z students at MAN 1 Jombang no longer relied on a single source of religious authority in understanding Islamic teachings. Instead, they accessed religious knowledge from multiple sources, including Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, digital *ustaz*, *hijrah* influencers, YouTube da'wah channels, religious podcasts, and Islamic accounts on TikTok and Instagram. This diversity enabled students to access religious information at any time while simultaneously exposing them to a wide range of interpretations. One student explained:

"I don't only learn religion from teachers at school. I also follow several ustaz on TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram because each of them discusses different religious topics." (S1)

Another student similarly stated:

"When I want to understand a religious issue, I usually compare explanations from different social media accounts because every ustaz has a different way of explaining it." (S2)

These findings indicate that religious authority is no longer concentrated within formal educational institutions but has become increasingly dispersed across various digital platforms, allowing students greater autonomy in selecting religious references according to their interests and informational needs.

Teachers confirmed that this transformation had significantly influenced classroom learning. Students frequently introduced religious issues encountered on social media into classroom discussions, resulting in a learning environment where multiple religious perspectives were negotiated simultaneously. As one teacher explained:

"Students often ask about religious issues they have watched on TikTok or YouTube. They bring different opinions into the classroom, and we discuss them together." (T1)

The Vice Principal for Curriculum likewise observed:

"Students now have much greater freedom to choose religious learning resources. Therefore, teachers need to help them evaluate which sources are credible and appropriate." (VP)

Classroom observations further showed that students actively referred to digital religious content when discussing contemporary Islamic issues, illustrating that religious authority had become increasingly decentralized and shaped by students' digital experiences.

However, broader access to religious information did not necessarily produce a more coherent understanding of religion. Instead, students frequently encountered contradictory interpretations regarding music, interfaith tolerance, gender relations, local religious traditions, the concept of *hijrah*, and the characteristics of an ideal Muslim. One participant reflected:

"Sometimes one ustaz says something is allowed, while another says it is forbidden. It makes me think carefully about which explanation is more convincing." (S2)

Teachers similarly observed that not all students possessed sufficient skills to verify the credibility of religious information obtained through digital media.

"Some students immediately believe what they watch on social media without checking where the information comes from or whether the explanation is reliable." (T2)

Observation data also indicated that students often relied on different online sources when discussing the same religious issue, resulting in varying interpretations within classroom interactions. These findings demonstrate that increased accessibility to religious information simultaneously creates greater interpretive complexity for students.

The fragmentation of religious authority was further reinforced by the diversity of religious narratives circulating through social media algorithms. Students described encountering moderate, inclusive, and tolerant messages alongside narratives emphasizing religious exclusivism, doctrinal purification, and claims of absolute truth.

"On my social media, I often find different religious opinions appearing one after another. Sometimes the messages are completely different even though they discuss the same issue." (S1)

Teachers acknowledged that students were often influenced by content that appeared repeatedly on their social media feeds.

"Students tend to remember religious content that frequently appears on their timeline or comes from popular religious figures." (T1)

These findings suggest that social media algorithms function not only as mechanisms for distributing information but also as important actors in shaping perceptions of religious legitimacy. Popularity, visibility, and repeated exposure increasingly influence which religious voices students consider authoritative.

Students' digital experiences also extended beyond information seeking to the construction of religious identity. They reported participating in online religious communities, sharing religious content, responding to contemporary Islamic issues, and expressing religious identity through digital interactions.

"I usually share Islamic content that I think is beneficial and follow online communities that discuss religious topics." (S2)

A teacher observed that students' expressions of religiosity were increasingly shaped by visual culture and digital trends.

"Students' religious expressions today are strongly influenced by trends they encounter on social media, including the way they communicate and present their religious identity." (T3)

The School Committee member also emphasized the broader educational implications of this phenomenon.

"Digital technology has changed how young people understand and express their religious identity. Therefore, schools and families need to guide students so that digital media strengthens, rather than weakens, their religious understanding." (SC)

Overall, the findings demonstrate that students' digital religious experiences occur within a fragmented landscape of religious authority in which multiple actors simultaneously compete for legitimacy in digital spaces. While this fragmentation broadens students' opportunities to access religious knowledge, it also increases the complexity of evaluating the credibility of religious information and negotiating religious identity. Consequently, the challenge faced by Generation Z extends beyond accessing religious knowledge to developing the critical capacity to navigate competing religious narratives within an increasingly algorithm-driven digital environment.

Islamic Religious Education Pedagogy in Addressing Digital Polarization

Interview and observation data indicate that the pedagogy of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at MAN 1 Jombang has undergone a significant transformation in response to the rapid expansion of social media in students' religious lives. Teachers recognized that students no longer entered the classroom relying solely on textbooks or formal instruction but brought with them diverse religious perspectives acquired through TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, religious podcasts, and other digital platforms. As one teacher explained:

"Today's students already come to class with information they have obtained from social media. Therefore, teaching cannot rely only on textbooks because they have already encountered many different religious perspectives." (T1)

The Vice Principal for Curriculum similarly emphasized:

"The diversity of digital religious information means that students arrive in the classroom with different questions, experiences, and understandings. Teachers must adapt their learning strategies to respond to this reality." (VP)

Classroom observations further revealed that discussions frequently began with religious issues currently circulating on social media, indicating that students' digital experiences had become an integral part of classroom learning. These findings suggest that PAI pedagogy has shifted from knowledge transmission toward responding to students' lived digital religious experiences.

Rather than merely delivering normative religious doctrines, teachers deliberately employed dialogic learning strategies to cultivate students' critical engagement with digital religious content. Religious issues that attracted widespread attention on social media were intentionally incorporated into classroom discussions to encourage students to compare

different viewpoints and critically evaluate religious arguments. One teacher stated:

"When a religious issue becomes viral on social media, we discuss it together in class. I encourage students to examine different opinions instead of immediately deciding which one is right or wrong." (T2)

Students confirmed this pedagogical approach.

"Our teachers often ask us to discuss religious content that is trending on TikTok or YouTube. We are encouraged to express our opinions and compare different perspectives before reaching conclusions." (S1)

Observation data showed that students actively presented arguments, questioned one another, and reflected on different interpretations emerging from digital media. This dialogic learning environment encouraged students to move beyond passive acceptance of information toward critical analysis and reflective understanding.

The development of religious moderation constituted another central dimension of PAI pedagogy. Teachers consistently integrated the values of tolerance, respect for diversity, anti-extremism, and *tabayyun* into classroom discussions, particularly when addressing controversial religious issues circulating online. One teacher explained:

"Teaching religious moderation is not limited to explaining concepts. Students need opportunities to discuss differences openly so they learn to respect opinions that are not always the same as their own." (T3)

The Vice Principal likewise emphasized:

"Religious moderation is strengthened through classroom interaction, dialogue, and critical discussion rather than through lectures alone." (VP)

Classroom observations confirmed that teachers regularly facilitated discussions on interfaith tolerance, differences among Islamic schools of thought, local religious traditions, the phenomenon of digital *hijrah*, and other contemporary religious debates. These learning activities enabled students to understand religious diversity more contextually while reducing the tendency to accept exclusive truth claims frequently encountered in digital spaces.

The findings also demonstrate a substantial transformation in teachers' professional roles within digitally mediated learning environments. Rather than functioning solely as the primary source of religious knowledge, teachers increasingly acted as facilitators of dialogue, mediators of competing religious perspectives, and guides for students' critical reflection. One teacher explained:

"Students often bring different religious opinions from social media into the classroom. My role is not simply to provide answers but to help them understand the context, examine the evidence, and think critically before drawing conclusions." (T1)

Students likewise recognized this shift.

"Teachers do not immediately tell us which opinion is correct. Instead, they encourage us to discuss, ask questions, and understand why different views exist." (S2)

Observation data further demonstrated that classroom interaction was predominantly dialogic rather than teacher-centred, with students actively participating in constructing knowledge through discussion, questioning, and collaborative reflection.

Overall, the findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education pedagogy at MAN 1 Jombang has evolved in response to the challenges of digital religious polarization. Learning has shifted from the one-way transmission of religious knowledge toward a dialogic pedagogical model that emphasizes digital religious literacy, critical thinking, reflective inquiry, and religious moderation. Within this framework, teachers function not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as facilitators who guide students in evaluating diverse religious narratives, negotiating competing truth claims, and constructing a more contextual and moderate religious understanding amid the complexity of contemporary digital environments.

Digital Literacy and the Development of Critical Awareness of Religious Diversity

Interview and observation data indicate that digital literacy has become an integral component of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at MAN 1 Jombang in response to the growing influence of social media on students' religious learning. Rather than focusing solely on the transmission of normative religious knowledge, PAI teachers emphasized students' ability to understand, evaluate, and critically interpret religious information encountered in digital environments. One teacher explained:

"Religious education today is not only about teaching Islamic concepts but also about helping students understand how to evaluate the religious information they encounter on social media." (T1)

The Vice Principal for Curriculum similarly emphasized:

"Students interact with digital information every day. Therefore, religious learning must help them connect Islamic values with the realities they experience in digital spaces." (VP)

Classroom observations further revealed that teachers consistently incorporated trending religious issues, digital *da'wah* content, and contemporary social media phenomena into classroom discussions. These findings demonstrate that digital literacy has become embedded within Islamic Religious Education as an essential response to students' everyday digital experiences.

Digital literacy practices extended beyond the use of digital media to include the development of students' capacity to verify the credibility of religious information before accepting or disseminating it. Teachers regularly encouraged students to examine the origin, context, and reliability of online religious content rather than accepting it uncritically. As one teacher stated:

"Whenever students bring religious information from social media, I ask them to identify where it comes from, who produced it, and whether the source is trustworthy before drawing conclusions." (T2)

Students confirmed that this approach had become a regular part of classroom learning.

"Our teachers ask us to compare information from different sources and discuss why different opinions exist instead of immediately deciding which one is correct." (S1)

Observation data also showed that teachers rarely provided direct answers to students' questions. Instead, they encouraged students to independently search for additional references, compare multiple sources, and critically evaluate the credibility of religious information. This pedagogical practice demonstrates that digital literacy is understood not merely as access to information but as the development of verification and evaluative skills.

Teachers also deliberately used viral religious content circulating on social media as learning materials to strengthen students' critical thinking. Rather than avoiding controversial issues, classroom discussions encouraged students to examine competing religious narratives, identify supporting evidence, and recognize the diversity of Islamic perspectives. One teacher explained:

"Sometimes we analyze viral religious videos together. The purpose is not simply to determine whether they are right or wrong but to help students understand why different interpretations exist." (T1)

Students similarly described this learning experience.

"We often discuss religious debates from TikTok or YouTube. Through these discussions, I realized that not every viral opinion should be accepted without checking other references." (S2)

Observation data further revealed that teachers encouraged students to identify provocative language, exclusionary rhetoric, oversimplified religious arguments, and narratives that could potentially promote intolerance. These classroom practices indicate a pedagogical shift toward critical digital literacy, enabling students to understand not only the content of religious information but also the mechanisms through which digital platforms shape religious discourse.

The strengthening of digital literacy also contributed to the development of students' critical awareness of religious diversity. Students reported becoming increasingly cautious when encountering religious content on social media and no longer accepting online information without verification. One student explained:

"Now I usually compare several sources before believing religious information because I realize that different accounts often explain the same issue differently." (S1)

Teachers likewise observed noticeable changes in students' learning behaviour.

"Students are becoming more reflective. They ask more questions, compare different opinions, and try to understand the context before expressing their own views." (T3)

The Vice Principal also noted that students had become more aware of the broader social implications of digital religious narratives.

"Students are beginning to consider not only whether information is religiously correct but also its impact on social harmony and respect for diversity." (VP)

Classroom observations supported these accounts, showing that students increasingly engaged in questioning, comparing perspectives, and discussing the social consequences of the religious information they consumed. This shift reflects the emergence of a more reflective, selective, and critically informed pattern of religious learning.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that digital literacy within Islamic Religious Education extends beyond the technical ability to access information. It encompasses systematic practices of verification, evaluation, *tabayyun*, critical reflection, and dialogue that enable students to navigate diverse religious narratives responsibly. Through these pedagogical processes, students develop the capacity to critically evaluate competing religious claims while cultivating a more contextual, balanced, and moderate understanding of religious diversity amid the complexity of today's digital environment.

Based on the overall findings from the four previous subthemes, a framework for the process of reconstructing Generation Z's moderate consciousness can be developed, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Construction and Reconstruction of Moderate Consciousness Among Generation Z in the Madrasah Environment

Analytical Dimensions	Empirical Findings	Madrasah Pedagogical Responses	Impact on Moderate Religious Awareness
Generation Z's Digital Religious Practices	Students rely on social media as their primary source of religious knowledge and a reference for matters of faith	Teachers link Islamic Education (PAI) content to students' digital experiences	Raising awareness of the influence of the media on the formation of religious understanding
Fragmentation of Religious Authority	Students are confronted with a variety of religious authorities whose views are often different and contradictory	Teachers facilitate dialogue, clarification, and reflection on various religious viewpoints	Students are more open-minded and able to evaluate various sources objectively
Polarization of Digital Religious Narratives	Students are exposed to moderate, conservative, and exclusive narratives on social media	Promoting the values of religious moderation, tabayyun, and respect for differences	A selective attitude is emerging toward religious narratives circulating in the digital sphere
Critical Digital Literacy	Students are trained to verify, evaluate, and reflect on digital religious information	Learning based on discussion, critical reflection, and analysis of digital content	Developing critical thinking skills regarding religious diversity
Moderate Madrasah Culture (Synthesis)	The values of tolerance, dialogue, and respect for diversity are instilled in the daily life of the madrasah	Teachers' exemplary behavior, social conditioning, and a culture of dialogue	A moderate consciousness that is reflective, dialogical, and contextual has emerged

Table 1 shows that the formation of moderate religious awareness among Generation Z occurs through the interaction between digital religiosity, the fragmentation of religious authority, Islamic Religious Education pedagogy, and digital literacy. Exposure to diverse religious narratives in the digital space is addressed through dialogic, reflective, and contextual learning, thereby encouraging students to develop critical thinking skills, an open attitude toward differences, and a more moderate understanding of religion. Thus, moderate religious awareness is not formed instantly but rather through a pedagogical process and digital experiences that are intertwined in madrasah life.

DISCUSSION | مناقشة

Research findings at MAN 1 Jombang indicate that the development of moderate religious awareness among Generation Z is taking place within an increasingly complex digital religious landscape. Social media has become the primary space for students to access religious information, engage with various Islamic narratives, and construct their religious identities. This situation reflects a transformation in religious learning patterns—shifting from a model previously centered on formal institutions toward one that is more open, participatory, and interconnected with the digital ecosystem. Students no longer rely entirely on teachers, textbooks, or formal educational institutions; instead, they actively seek out, select, and interpret religious information they deem relevant to their needs and life experiences.

This phenomenon aligns with Henry Jenkins' theory of digital participatory culture, which

explains that the digital generation is no longer a passive consumer of information but rather acts as an active participant in selecting, interpreting, producing, and distributing information (Henry Jenkins & Jie, 2024; Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Myers, 2025). In the context of digital religiosity, students not only access religious content but also engage in the process of meaning-making through interactions with various communities, religious accounts, and information sources available in the digital space. Activities such as participating in online religious studies, sharing religious content, commenting, and discussing various religious issues demonstrate the emergence of a participatory religious culture among Generation Z (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020; Mónica, 2021; Zaid et al., 2022). Thus, students' religious experiences are shaped not only through formal learning but also through ongoing digital interactions.

The openness of the digital space has simultaneously led to the fragmentation of religious authority. Religious authority is no longer centralized in teachers, clerics, or formal educational institutions, but is dispersed among various actors participating in the social media ecosystem. The presence of digital ustaz, hijrah influencers, da'wah channels, religious podcasts, and even anonymous religious accounts creates a diverse range of reference sources that learners can access simultaneously (Raya, 2025; Zaid et al., 2022). As a result, the process of religious knowledge formation takes place in a space that is more open, dynamic, and decentralized compared to conventional religious learning patterns (Berger & Golan, 2024).

From the perspective of digital participatory culture, this situation indicates that the production of religious knowledge is no longer monopolized by specific institutions but takes place within digital networks that enable various actors to participate actively. Students are not merely recipients of information but are also involved in the processes of searching for, selecting, interpreting, and reproducing religious meanings (Abusharif, 2024; Jarmer, 2025). This situation means that religious legitimacy is no longer determined solely by formal scholarly credentials but is also influenced by the visibility, popularity, intensity of interaction, and digital exposure of various religious actors on social media.

This transformation demonstrates that the digital space has evolved into an arena where various religious narratives compete. The simultaneous presence of moderate, conservative, and exclusive narratives indicates that students live in a complex and not always consistent information environment. Social media algorithms also determine which information appears more frequently and gains users' attention, thereby potentially reinforcing certain tendencies through the "echo chamber" mechanism. Under these conditions, students are often confronted with diverse and even conflicting viewpoints regarding religious issues they encounter in their daily lives. This situation indicates that the challenges Generation Z faces in navigating religious diversity are not only related to the abundance of information available but also to their ability to understand, verify, and manage the complexity of information circulating in the digital space.

This reality of digital religiosity is driving a pedagogical transformation in Islamic Religious Education within madrasahs. Research findings indicate that teachers no longer merely serve as conveyors of religious doctrine but also as facilitators of dialogue, mediators of knowledge, and guides for students' critical reflection. This shift indicates that the pedagogy of Islamic Religious Education is undergoing a transformation from an instructive approach toward one that is more dialogic, reflective, and contextual. The classroom no longer functions merely as a place for the transmission of religious knowledge but has evolved into a pedagogical arena that helps students understand, clarify, and evaluate the various religious narratives they encounter in the digital space.

These findings align with Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, which views education as a process of fostering critical consciousness through dialogue, reflection, and the active engagement of learners in understanding social reality. Classroom dialogue, case studies, critical reflection, and discussions of social media content demonstrate that students are not positioned as passive recipients of information, but as active participants in the learning process (Budnyk et al., 2023; Freire, 2021; Sharma, 2025). In contrast to the "banking education" model, the approach identified in this study demonstrates an effort to create a learning space that enables students to develop critical thinking skills regarding various religious narratives circulating on social media. Through this process, students are encouraged to understand the context, assess the credibility of sources, and reflect on the social implications of the information they consume.

This pedagogical transformation goes hand in hand with the strengthening of digital literacy in Islamic Religious Education. Research findings indicate that digital literacy has emerged as a pedagogical response to the increasing complexity of religious information faced by Generation Z. In this context, digital literacy can no longer be understood merely as the technical ability to use digital media, but has evolved into the ability to critically understand, verify, evaluate, and reflect on information. Practices such as *tabayyun*, information verification, digital content analysis, and reflective discussions demonstrate efforts to foster critical awareness among students as they navigate the flow of digital religious information.

The development of critical thinking skills is closely linked to the formation of a more moderate attitude toward religion. The ability to scrutinize information sources, understand context, evaluate various perspectives, and consider the social impact of a narrative helps students become more open to differences and less susceptible to extreme, provocative, or exclusionary narratives circulating on social media (Dawson & Mäkelä, 2020; Zhai et al., 2024; Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia et al., 2020). Thus, digital literacy possesses important ethical, social, and epistemological dimensions in shaping the religious attitudes of the younger generation (Yalvaç Arıcı, 2025). Digital literacy serves not only as a technical competency but also as a means of fostering reflective awareness that enables students to understand the reality of religious life more critically and responsibly.

In addition to the learning process, the development of a moderate mindset is also influenced by the madrasah culture, which emphasizes the values of tolerance, openness, respect for differences, and dialogue. Research findings indicate that religious moderation is not only taught as part of the curriculum but is also internalized through social practices that take place in daily life within the madrasah environment. Interactions between teachers and students, a culture of open discussion, religious activities, and the cultivation of mutual respect are all integral parts of the process of fostering religious moderation. In this context, madrasahs serve as social and pedagogical spaces that enable students to learn how to manage differences constructively.

This situation aligns with Azyumardi Azra's perspective on religious moderation, which defines moderation as a worldview and religious practice that emphasizes balance, tolerance, and respect for diversity (Idris, 2020; Romli et al., 2025). The research findings indicate that these values are not merely understood at a conceptual level but are embodied through social and pedagogical experiences that enable students to interact directly with differences. Thus, religious moderation appears as a social practice shaped through experiences, relationships, and an ongoing learning process.

Various previous studies have examined the relationship between social media, religious

moderation, and digital religiosity in the context of Islamic education. Febriani and Ritonga (2022) demonstrated that social media plays a role in the internalization of religious moderation values among the younger generation through exposure to digital religious content. These findings align with the results of this study, which indicate that digital experiences play a significant role in shaping students' perspectives on religion. However, this study reveals that the influence of social media on religious moderation is not direct. Digital religious experiences are first mediated through pedagogical practices, classroom interactions, madrasah culture, and the strengthening of digital literacy, which enable students to reflect on the various religious narratives they encounter in digital spaces.

The findings of this study also reinforce the results of Yuliawati and Asri's (2022) research, which showed that internet exposure influences young people's understanding of religious diversity and patterns of social interaction. However, this study found that digital experiences do not always lead to polarization or exclusivism. Unlike studies that tend to frame social media as a risk factor for religious moderation, this study demonstrates that social media can also serve as a space for learning moderation when mediated through dialogic pedagogy and critical digital literacy. In this context, digital experiences are not merely a source of challenges but can also serve as a source of reflective learning for students.

Furthermore, the findings of this study align with the research by Zaid et al. (2022) which shows that social media has reshaped religious authority through the emergence of digital religious influencers as a new source of religious legitimacy. However, this study reveals a more complex phenomenon. Students not only experience a shift in authority from teachers to digital religious figures but also face the fragmentation of religious authority due to the existence of various competing sources of information in the digital space. This situation creates a more fluid epistemological landscape, requiring students to develop reflective skills and critical literacy to identify credible sources of religious knowledge.

The findings of this study also expand upon the research by Hasan and Juhanni (2024) which showed that studies on religious moderation are still dominated by normative and educational policy approaches. Unlike previous research, which has largely focused on curricula, programs, or policies related to religious moderation, this study demonstrates that the development of a moderate mindset among Generation Z occurs through pedagogical experiences rooted in the interaction between digital culture, students' religious experiences, critical literacy, and Islamic Religious Education practices in madrasahs. Thus, religious moderation is understood not only as the result of the internalization of values but also as the result of a dynamic process of negotiating meaning that takes place within students' social and digital lives.

Consequently, the development of a moderate mindset among Generation Z in this study does not occur through a one-way mechanism of value transfer but through an ongoing process of negotiating meaning between students' digital experiences and the educational environment in which they learn.

Although the findings demonstrate that dialogic pedagogy, digital literacy, and religious moderation practices provide important opportunities for students to critically engage with diverse religious narratives, the present study does not claim that these pedagogical interventions have fully transformed students' long-term patterns of digital religious behaviour. The interview and observation data indicate that students became more reflective in discussing religious differences, verifying information, and considering multiple perspectives during classroom learning. However, because this study was conducted within a limited period and

focused primarily on pedagogical experiences in the madrasah, it was not designed to examine whether these critical dispositions were consistently sustained in students' independent digital activities outside the school environment. Therefore, the findings should be understood as demonstrating the potential of dialogic Islamic Religious Education pedagogy to foster critical religious awareness rather than as definitive evidence of long-term behavioural transformation. Future longitudinal research is therefore needed to examine whether the critical awareness developed through dialogic Islamic Religious Education is maintained in students' everyday digital religious practices beyond the school setting.

The main contribution of this study lies in the development of a Model for the Reconstruction of Moderate Consciousness Among Generation Z in the Madrasah Environment. This model demonstrates that the formation of moderate consciousness does not occur through a linear internalization of values, but rather through a circular process involving digital religious experiences, the fragmentation of religious authority, a dialogical pedagogy in Islamic Religious Education, critical digital literacy, and a culture of moderation within the madrasah. These findings expand the existing body of research on religious moderation, which has traditionally focused primarily on curriculum, policies, and educational programs as the main factors in shaping moderation. This study demonstrates that students' digital experiences are a crucial variable that directly interacts with pedagogical processes in shaping a reflective, dialogical, and contextual religious consciousness.

Based on a synthesis of all research findings, this study presents a Model for Reconstructing Moderate Awareness Among Generation Z in the Madrasah Environment, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Model of the Reconstruction of Moderate Consciousness Among Generation Z in the Madrasah Environment



The model illustrates that the development of moderate religious awareness occurs through a circular relationship among digital religious experiences, Islamic Religious Education

pedagogy, critical digital literacy, madrasah culture, and the internalization of religious moderation. Digital experiences influence how students understand religion and shape their religious orientation. These experiences are then mediated through the learning process, classroom dialogue, digital literacy, and a culture of moderation that develops within the madrasah. Furthermore, this process fosters a more reflective, tolerant, and contextual religious consciousness, which ultimately influences how students interact with various religious information in digital spaces. Thus, the formation of moderate religious consciousness unfolds as a dynamic, ongoing process that is continually reconstructed through both social and digital experiences.

Theoretically, these findings indicate that Generation Z's moderate consciousness is a socio-pedagogical construct shaped through the ongoing interaction between digital experiences and the educational environment. Moderate consciousness does not emerge as the result of a one-way transfer of values but develops through processes of dialogue, reflection, negotiation of meaning, and social experiences that take place in students' daily lives.

Thus, the model of the reconstruction of Generation Z's moderate religious consciousness developed in this study expands the field of digital Islamic education by demonstrating that religious moderation is the result of a circular interaction among digital religious experiences, the fragmentation of religious authority, pedagogical mediation, critical digital literacy, and an ongoing educational culture. This model emphasizes that the development of Islamic education in the digital age must be understood not only as a process of transmitting religious knowledge but also as a process of fostering critical awareness, reflective abilities, and a moderate form of religiosity that is adaptable to the dynamics of contemporary society and the digital ecosystem.

CONCLUSSION | خاتمة

This study shows that the formation of Generation Z's moderate religious consciousness takes place within a context of digital religiosity characterized by the dominance of social media as a source of religious information, the fragmentation of religious authority, and the contestation of various religious narratives in the digital space. In this context, students do not merely act as recipients of information but also as active agents who interpret, select, and negotiate the various religious understandings they encounter. The research findings indicate that a dialogic, reflective, and contextual pedagogy of Islamic Religious Education—supported by the strengthening of critical digital literacy and a culture of moderation within the madrasah environment—plays a crucial role in shaping a more open, tolerant, and reflective perspective on religion. Generation Z's sense of moderation is shaped through a dynamic interaction between digital religious experiences, the fragmentation of religious authority, pedagogical practices, digital literacy, and the ongoing culture of the madrasah.

Theoretically, this study contributes by presenting a model for reconstructing Generation Z's moderate religious consciousness, which explains that religious moderation does not develop through a linear process of value internalization, but rather through a circular process of mediation and negotiation between digital experiences and the educational environment. These findings expand the study of religious moderation—which has traditionally focused more on normative aspects, curricula, and policies—by positioning digital religious experiences as a crucial element in shaping the moderate consciousness of the younger generation. From a practical and policy perspective, the research results underscore the importance of strengthening critical digital literacy, a culture of dialogue, and Islamic religious education pedagogy that is adaptive to the dynamics of the digital space.

This study should also be interpreted in light of its limitations. As a qualitative case study conducted within a relatively limited research period, the findings primarily capture participants' experiences and pedagogical practices during the period of data collection rather than long-term changes in students' digital religious behaviour. Consequently, the study cannot conclusively determine whether the critical awareness fostered through dialogic Islamic Religious Education is consistently maintained in students' everyday digital activities beyond the madrasah environment.

Future longitudinal research is therefore recommended to investigate how students' moderate religious consciousness develops over time and to examine whether the effects of dialogic pedagogy and critical digital literacy are sustained across different educational contexts and digital environments. Future research could also expand the study to various contexts within Islamic educational institutions and explore the influence of digital platforms, virtual religious communities, and digital pedagogical practices on the formation of religious moderation among the younger generation.

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