



The Impact of Social Media Use (TikTok/Instagram) on Generation Z's Understanding and Practice of Worship: An Islamic Religious Education Perspective

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Abstract

The study aims to comprehensively analyze and synthesize the impact of two dominant social media platforms, TikTok and Instagram, on two fundamental aspects of Generation Z's (Gen Z) religiosity: understanding of Islamic teachings and practice of worship, viewed from the perspective of Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Gen Z, as true digital natives, exhibits a massive reliance on online content, which fundamentally transforms how they access and internalize religious values. This shift creates serious challenges related to Digital Religious Literacy (DRL), where Gen Z's understanding of worship tends to be fragmentary and susceptible to algorithmic bias. In practice, worship is often shifted from the spiritual-personal domain to the public-social domain, increasing the risk of digital riyā' (showing off) and eroding khushū' (solemnity) due to digital distractions. The research method employed is a qualitative library research (study of literature). Data were systematically collected through documentation techniques from various primary and secondary sources, including reputable scientific journals, reference books, and recent studies on digital literacy, adolescent psychology, and Islamic education. The collected data were then analyzed using content analysis to identify patterns, value shifts, and formulate an PAI-based solution framework. The findings highlight a crisis of spiritual integrity and authenticity in worship among Gen Z. In response, the study posits the strategic role of PAI as a critical intervention. PAI must transform into a "digital filter" that equips students with Muslim Digital Ethics, integrates a curriculum for critical analysis of digital extremism narratives, and reasserts the spiritual essence of worship beyond the pursuit of social media validation. This research contributes a framework for PAI educators and policymakers to guide Gen Z towards becoming Digitally Intelligent Muslims who balance technological demands with their spiritual integrity.

Keywords: *Digital Religious Literacy, Generation Z, Islamic Religious Education, Library Research, Social Media, TikTok, Worship Practice.*

PRELIMINARY

Generation Z (Gen Z), defined as those born after the mid-1990s, is the first demographic group to grow up entirely in a digital environment (digital natives) (Taliwuna, 2024; Fotaleno & Batubara, 2024). In Indonesia, the Gen Z population has a very high level of access to and dependence on social media, particularly visual and short-video-based platforms like TikTok and Instagram (Santoso & Taufiqurrahman, 2023; Nafisah & Jannah, 2024). These platforms have gone beyond their function as mere means of entertainment and communication; they have now transformed into a primary source of religious information. The phenomenon of cyber religion or digital religion shows that Gen Z often obtains religious understanding and worship guidance from influencers or digital ustadz/ustadzah, fundamentally changing the landscape of the transmission of spiritual and moral values.

This transformation has two crucial impacts that are the primary focus of this research. First, in terms of understanding, religious content on social media tends to be fragmented and instantaneous, often prioritizing virality and attractive packaging over contextual depth and authoritative validity. This risks

causing a shallowing of Digital Religious Literacy (LKD), where Gen Z struggles to sort out credible sources of information regarding the pillars, requirements, and philosophy of worship. Second, in terms of practice, exposure to social media triggers a shift in worship motivation from the spiritual-personal realm to the public-social domain (Maslahatun, et.al., 2025; Fahmi, et.al., 2024). Worship is vulnerable to being commodified into content for the purposes of social validation or self-branding, which threatens the values of sincerity (ikhlas) and devotion (khushū'), which are the main pillars of Islamic Religious Education teachings.

Furthermore, the development of digital culture among Gen Z shows that platforms like TikTok and Instagram influence not only their consumption patterns of religious information but also how they construct their religious identities (Aprilia et al., 2023; Afifah & Kuntari, 2025). The presentation of religious content in short visual forms creates a new space for Gen Z to express their spirituality, but often without strong epistemological guidance (Siregar, 2025; Fadilan et al., 2025). This phenomenon of hyper-visual religiosity demands a critical reading because it disrupts traditional religious authority, previously dominated by ulama, educational institutions, and families as the three pillars of Islamic value transmission.

Furthermore, this shift in religiosity patterns demonstrates that Gen Z's understanding and practice of religious worship are no longer shaped solely by direct interactions with Islamic Religious Education teachers and religious figures, but also by the dynamics of digital algorithms. Algorithms wield curatorial power, determining what type of religious content they see, when they see it, and how it is presented. This dependency poses serious challenges to maintaining the authenticity of religious practices and the stability of religious understanding. Therefore, it is crucial for Islamic Religious Education to position itself as an agent of digital religious literacy that is adaptive and responsive to Gen Z's spiritual needs amidst rapid technological developments.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a library research approach (Assingkily, 2021). This method was chosen because the primary objective of the study was to conduct an in-depth analysis, synthesis, and interpretation of concepts, theories, and findings from various literature sources related to the impact of social media on Gen Z in the context of Islamic Religious Education. In this study, the researcher also employed critical source analysis techniques by selecting literature based on credibility, year of publication, thematic relevance, and academic authority. The sources analyzed included reputable journals, academic books in the field of Islamic Religious Education, digital psychology studies, and official reports from government agencies related to religious digital literacy. This approach ensured that the research findings were not only descriptive but also analytical and argumentative, thus offering a comprehensive picture of Gen Z's religious dynamics in the digital space.

The data analysis procedure was carried out through the stages of data reduction, thematic categorization, interpretation, and the development of a conceptual framework based on Islamic Religious Education. Each collected data was systematically organized to identify relevant patterns such as shifts in worship motivation, changes in religious authority structures, and digital literacy challenges. The analysis was then directed at formulating strategic recommendations for educators, parents, and educational institutions to be able to respond constructively to changes in Gen Z religiosity. This makes this research more than just a literature review, but also a practical contribution to strengthening the role of Islamic Religious Education in the digital era.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Generation Z's Digital Religious Literacy Through TikTok and Instagram Content

The widespread use of platforms like TikTok and Instagram has fundamentally changed the way Generation Z (Gen Z) acquires and interprets religious teachings, particularly those related to worship. Their religious understanding is now often fragmented and instantaneous, shaped by algorithms that tend to prioritize virality and visual appeal over contextual depth or authoritative validity of religious content. This phenomenon presents a serious challenge to Digital Religious Literacy (DLI), where Gen Z may receive religious advice or fatwas from religious teachers/digital influencers who lack a sufficient

background in formal religious education, or even from content deliberately framed for self-branding or entertainment purposes (Khairiyah, 2024). As a result, their understanding of the pillars, requirements, and philosophy of worship has the potential to be shallow, focusing only on external practices that are easily imitated and spread virally, without delving into the spiritual essence that is the primary goal of Islamic Religious Education.

Nevertheless, social media also offers positive potential as a starting point for bringing Gen Z closer to religious issues. These platforms successfully present moral messages and worship guidance in relatable and accessible formats, filling a communication gap that may be inaccessible to formal educational institutions (Hidayatullah & Fitriana, 2023). Effective Islamic Religious Education content on TikTok and Instagram often showcases the application of worship in a modern context, for example, the ethics of online interactions or spirituality amidst the busyness of daily life. The task of Islamic Religious Education is to bridge this gap by equipping students with critical thinking skills regarding religious information sources in the digital world, teaching them how to validate authoritative sources, and encouraging Gen Z to go beyond instant understanding on social media to explore more credible and in-depth primary sources.

Transformation of Generation Z's Worship Practices: A Study of Changes in Ritual and Spiritual Behavior Due to Social Media Exposure

The intense use of social media by Generation Z, particularly TikTok and Instagram, has triggered a fundamental shift in the practice of worship. This shift is marked by a tendency to transform worship from a private and spiritual domain to a public and social one. Worship, which is essentially a personal interaction with God, is now often displayed through uploaded videos or photos. Actions such as posting moments of reading the Quran, self-reflection activities, or even the atmosphere of congregational prayer have the potential to change the fundamental intention of worship. From the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, this transformation risks obscuring the value of sincerity (*ikhlas*), making it vulnerable to motives of social validation (*riya'*) and religious self-branding (Fadhilah & Mustofa, 2024).

This transformation of practice is also demonstrated through the standardization and commodification of rituals. Social media algorithms tend to promote forms of worship that are aesthetically pleasing, easily imitated, or contain strong emotional elements, such as the trend of crying during prayer or challenges to certain *sunnah* prayers. As a result, Gen Z may be more motivated to follow trendy forms of worship than to understand the philosophical depth and teachings behind them (Lestari, 2023). This creates pressure to worship in an "ideal" way according to digital standards, limiting more personal and authentic spiritual exploration. Islamic Religious Education must be vigilant against this phenomenon to prevent worship from becoming merely empty ritualism that prioritizes outward appearance.

Another crucial impact of social media exposure is the disruption of devotion and spiritual focus. The presence of smartphones, which are Gen Z's primary medium for every aspect of life, including worship, often becomes a source of distraction (Engelbert, 2025). Inevitable notifications and scrolling habits can disrupt concentration during prayer, *dhikr*, or religious studies. The devotion (*hudhūr al-qalb*), the core of quality worship, becomes difficult to achieve when the mind is divided between ritual practice and the urge to immediately check devices. This is a major challenge for Islamic Religious Education, which teaches digital discipline and the importance of maintaining boundaries between the real world and the virtual world, especially when dealing with spiritual activities.

Facing this challenge, Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role in equipping Gen Z with Muslim Digital Ethics (*adab al-ta'āmul ma'a al-i'lām al-raqmī*). The Islamic Religious Education curriculum needs to emphasize that the best worship is worship that is carried out without the need for publicity, in accordance with the teachings of sincerity and avoiding *riya'*. Islamic Religious Education teachers must facilitate critical discussions on the difference between sharing inspiration and showing off worship, and teach Gen Z how to use digital platforms wisely to spread goodness (*dakwah*) without damaging personal spiritual integrity (Jamiluddin & Khotimah, 2024).

In conclusion, the transformation of Gen Z's religious practices due to social media is not a single phenomenon, but rather a combination of shifting motivations, standardization of rituals, and a decline in

the quality of devotion. Therefore, the success of Islamic Religious Education in the digital era depends heavily on its ability to adapt, integrate digital moral education, and reaffirm the spiritual essence of worship: an authentic and sincere relationship between the worshipper and their Creator as the primary priority, transcending any form of validation or applause from social media.

The Strategic Role of Islamic Religious Education in Guiding and Facilitating Religious Media Literacy for Generation Z

The strategic role of Islamic Religious Education has become vital in the digital era, shifting from merely transferring religious knowledge to developing strong Religious Media Literacy (LMK) for Generation Z. Islamic religious education must function as a "digital filter" that equips students with critical thinking skills to filter the flood of rapid and often unverified religious information on social media (Hidayatullah & Fitriana, 2023). This includes teaching the difference between authoritative sources (ulama, books, official institutions) and popular sources (influencers, memes, viral content), so that Gen Z does not easily fall into shallow religious understanding or algorithm bias.

One key implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI)'s role is through curriculum integration that includes topics on digital ethics and the validation of religious sources. Islamic religious education materials can no longer focus solely on formal Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) but must be enriched with lessons on social media ethics (adab al-ta'āmul ma'a al-raqaqiyah). This includes procedures for polite religious discussions, avoiding hate speech, and avoiding the spread of hoaxes or digital gossip. In this way, Islamic religious education helps internalize Islamic moral values in online behavior (cyberspace), making students agents of positive da'wah (Islamic outreach), rather than spreaders of polarization.

Furthermore, Islamic Religious Education must actively teach critical analysis of narratives of radicalism and extremism that often lurk behind online religious content. Islamic Religious Education teachers need to dissect digital rhetorical techniques used to manipulate emotions and instill intolerant ideologies. By utilizing real-life case studies from social media, Islamic religious education can demonstrate how moderate religious teachings are misused for violent purposes. This role positions Islamic religious education as the vanguard in strengthening Religious Moderation in the digital space, in line with the national education vision (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022).

In the context of religious practices, Islamic Religious Education serves as a counterbalance to the trend of ritualism without substance fueled by social media validation. Islamic Religious Education teachers must consistently emphasize the importance of intention (niyyah) and sincerity (ikhlas) as the primary foundations of worship, transcending uploaded visual displays. Islamic Religious Education needs to encourage Gen Z to discover spiritual authenticity and reverence, teaching that true worship is between the individual and their God, without the need for public approval. Islamic Religious Education can leverage technology, for example, by developing self-reflection apps that encourage spiritual reflection without the need for publicity.

Methodologically, Islamic Religious Education must adopt a participatory and technology-based learning model. Islamic Religious Education teachers should not merely be preachers but also facilitators and digital coaches. Methods such as problem-based learning (PBL) or project-based learning (PjBL) can be used to assign students to analyze, deconstruct, and produce positive and responsible Islamic Religious Education content on digital platforms (Laili & Khusna, 2024). Through this hands-on experience, Gen Z learns how to use social media as a constructive tool for preaching, rather than as a source of distraction or misguidance.

In conclusion, the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education in the digital era is to produce digitally intelligent Generation Z Muslims. Islamic religious education is not just about memorizing Islamic teachings (dalil), but also about guiding students to be able to operate their faith amidst digital complexity, distinguishing right from wrong in online content, and maintaining their spiritual integrity from the temptations of social media validation. The success of Islamic religious education will significantly determine the quality of Gen Z's religious understanding in the future, ensuring they grow as devout, tolerant, and responsible individuals in both the real world and online.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that changes in Gen Z's understanding and practice of religious worship are inextricably linked to the phenomenon of algorithmic religiosity, a condition where religious experiences are heavily influenced by social media algorithms. In this context, Islamic Religious Education needs to reorient its paradigm so that it focuses not only on the transfer of text-based material but also on digital religious literacy education (Ropu & Syukur, 2025). This reorientation requires Islamic religious education teachers to understand the function of algorithms, their impact on students' religious perceptions, and strategies for teaching the validation of religious information in a digital ecosystem vulnerable to misinformation and echo chambers. This is crucial given that Gen Z tends to view content frequently appearing on homepages as authoritative truth, even though it may not necessarily have academic or religious legitimacy.

Furthermore, Islamic religious education needs to integrate new pedagogical practices based on problem-solving and reflective learning to help Gen Z reinterpret worship as a spiritual activity, rather than as visual content. Classroom discussions on the phenomenon of digital ostentation, the trend of commodification of worship, and the fragmentation of religious understanding can raise students' awareness of the significant influence of social media on their relationship with God. Furthermore, collaboration between Islamic religious education teachers, school counselors, and families is also needed to build an educational ecosystem that supports the holistic spiritual development of Gen Z, both in the physical and digital worlds. In this way, Islamic religious education can serve as a crucial bridge guiding students toward intelligent, critical, and authentic religious understanding amidst the wave of digital disruption.

CONCLUSION

The use of social media (TikTok and Instagram) has had a transformative and ambivalent impact on Generation Z's understanding and practice of worship, demanding a strategic response from Islamic Religious Education. The first sub-chapter found that Gen Z's Digital Religious Understanding (LKD) is often fragmented and instantaneous, dominated by viral content from potentially less authoritative influencers, thus creating the risk of shallowing the meaning of worship and difficulties in validating religious sources. This impact continues in the second sub-chapter, namely the Transformation of Worship Practices. Social media exposure tends to shift the motivation for worship from the spiritual-personal realm to the public-social domain, increasing the risk of digital *riya'* (showing off) and the search for social validation, which fundamentally erodes the value of sincerity. Furthermore, the standardization of rituals due to content trends and the disruption of devotion due to digital distractions pose real challenges in maintaining the quality of Gen Z's worship.

Facing these challenges, the third sub-chapter emphasizes the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) as the primary institution in guiding Gen Z. Islamic religious education must transform into a "digital filter" focused on developing Religious Media Literacy (LMK) and critical thinking skills. Islamic religious education interventions include integrating digital ethics curricula, strengthening religious moderation against online extremist narratives, and re-emphasizing the essence of spirituality and sincerity. Islamic religious education needs to utilize technology-based learning methodologies and projects to train Gen Z to become digitally savvy Muslims who use social media wisely, constructively, and responsibly, without compromising the spiritual integrity of their worship.

Overall, the dynamics of TikTok and Instagram usage have placed Gen Z at a crossroads between religious opportunities and challenges. Social media can provide accessible religious inspiration, but it also has the potential to shift the orientation of worship from spirituality to the search for social validation. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education has a strategic responsibility to facilitate the emergence of a Generation Z with mature digital religious literacy, able to distinguish authoritative content from mere viral trends, and maintain the spiritual essence of worship as a form of sincere connection between servants and their God. Reorienting Islamic religious education based on digital literacy is key to Gen Z growing as Muslims with integrity, moderation, and competence in facing the challenges of the digital era.

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