

The Phenomenon of Digital Religious Cognition among Muslim Students

Roby Al Ghifari¹, Uswatun Hasanah², Khoirul Umam Adzakky³

¹Islamic Education Departement, ²Islamic Education Departement, ³ Islamic Education Departement, Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, UIN Raden Intan Lampung.

Jl. Letnan Kolonel H. Endro Suratmin, Sukarame, Kota Bandar Lampung, 35131, Indonesia

Corresponding author

¹robvalghifari85@gmail.com, ²uswatunh@radenintan.ac.id, ³khoirulumam201806@gmail.com

Abstract: The rapid expansion of digital media has transformed how young Muslims learn, interpret, and evaluate religious knowledge. While online platforms such as TikTok and YouTube democratize access to Islamic teachings, they also blur distinctions between credible scholarship and popular interpretation. This shift creates a new cognitive challenge, namely discerning religious truth and managing uncertainty amid fragmented and algorithm-driven content. Previous studies on digital religion have focused largely on emotional expression and religious performance, leaving the cognitive and evaluative dimensions of online faith engagement underexplored. This study fills that gap by examining how Muslim students assess the truth of digital religious information and how they manage doubt when facing conflicting teachings. The research, conducted at UIN Raden Intan Lampung, Indonesia, employs a qualitative field approach through in-depth interviews with four active social media users. This design allows a close understanding of students' reflective reasoning and verification strategies in navigating online religious discourse. Findings reveal that students critically evaluate digital religious content by cross-checking sources, consulting trusted authorities, and aligning new information with established knowledge of religion. When uncertainty arises, they employ reflective and dialogic strategies, pausing, seeking clarification, and grounding their faith in scholarly tradition. These practices represent an emergent form of digital moral cognition, blending critical awareness with ethical restraint. The study contributes to the literature on digital religion and moral education by highlighting how cognitive engagement, rather than mere exposure, influences the religious understanding of young Muslims. It suggests that digital environments, despite their risks, can cultivate discernment, reflexivity, and adaptive faith learning among university students.

Keywords: Digital Age, Digital Literacy, Religious Understanding, Social Media, Students.

Introduction

The digital age has become an integral part of modern life and has had a significant impact on religious practices. Advances in information technology have enabled people to access religious knowledge through various digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Religious information obtained through digital media can be beneficial when critically examined and compared with reliable authoritative sources. However, if this information is consumed without adequate analysis and verification, it has the potential to cause misunderstandings in understanding religious teachings (Fathul Barri et al., 2025).

In the context of higher education, social media provides opportunities for students to broaden their religious understanding. Students generally have an intrinsic drive to explore new knowledge related to religion in order to enrich their insights. When used wisely, social media can have a positive impact in the form of increased motivation to perform religious duties and strengthening religious ethical values (Rahmawati et al., 2024). However, easy access to information also presents challenges. Some students tend to spend time on less productive activities, such as excessive use of social media, which can reduce their attention to religious obligations (Rahmawati, 2023, p. 169).

Previous studies emphasize the importance of applying religious moderation as a principle of balance in understanding Islamic teachings in order to avoid extremism (Aziz et al., 2023). This principle is in line with the theory of multiculturalism, which underlines the importance of respecting diversity of beliefs in social life (Sihombing et al., 2024). In addition, the development of information technology has changed the pattern of religious knowledge seeking from direct learning forums to more open digital access. This change affects the way students build religious understanding and assess the truth of the religious teachings they receive.

The influence of information technology is also evident in changes in religious behavior, including aspects of faith, worship, and morals (Ibrahim & Kholifah, 2025). This is relevant to constructivism theory, which emphasizes that learning is a process of building understanding through individual experience and activity. Thus, students are expected to be more active in managing religious information so that the understanding they gain can be applied in real life (Suparlan, 2019).

On the other hand, only some students are aware of their role as the intellectual generation in responding to the challenges of the digital era. Difficulties in adapting to technological developments are often a hindering factor. Research on students' perceptions of their roles is in line with role theory, which highlights how individuals understand and carry out their social functions in a community environment (Arlina et al., 2023; Abdurrahman, 2008).

Furthermore, religious activities are not limited to formal rituals but are also reflected in daily behavior. Previous research shows that teachers have a strategic role in enhancing students' religiosity through the process of socializing religious values (Sholich, 2020). This is relevant to socialization theory, which views individuals as learning values and norms through social interaction (Hidayat et al., 2023). This indicates the need to strengthen religious digital literacy so that students are able to sort information appropriately and responsibly. Thus, analytical skills become an important aspect.

Although various studies have discussed the affective and behavioral aspects of religion, studies

on the cognitive dimension of religious understanding in the digital era are still limited. In addition, in-depth studies involving students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung are still rare. Therefore, this study aims to answer two main questions:

- (1) how do students assess the truth of digital religious information?
- (2) how do they manage doubts when encountering differences in teachings in the digital space?

Materials and Methods

Study area

This research was conducted at UIN Raden Intan Lampung, a higher education institution that became the focus of research on students' understanding of religious studies in the digital age. This location was chosen because it is representative as a center for student academic activities with broad access to digital media.

The research used a qualitative descriptive method, which aimed to explore in depth the phenomenon of students' understanding of religious studies in the digital age. This approach emphasized the collection of contextual data on aspects of faith, worship, religious knowledge, and the application of moral values in everyday life.

The research subjects consisted of four students from UIN Raden Intan Lampung, selected purposively based on their involvement in religious activities and use of digital media to obtain religious information.

Procedures

Data Collection

Data was obtained through observation and semi-structured interviews involving students as research subjects. Observations were conducted to observe the process of access, selection, and student responses to religious content on digital platforms. Meanwhile, semi-structured interviews aimed to explore students' understanding, experiences, and interpretations of religious teachings obtained from digital media, including platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and others.

Data Organization

The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. The interview transcripts and observation notes were then classified based on emerging patterns and issues, including trusted digital reference sources, forms of understanding religious teachings, and the impact of digital content exposure on students' religious attitudes.

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. Researchers read and coded the data, identified patterns, and then grouped the codes into relevant themes, such as patterns of digital religious access, forms of religious teaching interpretation, and critical dynamics among students in choosing sources. The final findings were interpreted based on the theoretical framework of digital literacy and contemporary religious understanding studies.

Results and Discussion

Result-1: Factors Affecting the Assessment of Digital Religious Information

The development of digital technology has created a fundamentally different ecosystem for religious outreach, changing not only the medium of delivery but also the entire paradigm of religious content consumption among students. This transformation is not merely a shift in platform, but a comprehensive change in the way students interact with religious messages (Barri et al. 2025).

Therefore, various social media platforms should support the daily lives of Muslims, especially in helping them understand whether social media as a form of reform has an educational impact or is misleading. Each individual also needs to have the ability to distinguish between positive and negative information (Andriyana and Adrian 2024), as this can affect a person's understanding, attitude, and even worship values.

Based on the interview results, there are two main factors that influence the assessment of digital religious information, namely the authority of the source and the identity of the information provider. This shows that students still have a critical and

skeptical attitude towards religious information they obtain from social media.

This finding reinforces previous research theories, namely the constructivism theory proposed by Shymansky. This theory states that constructivism is an active process, in which each student constructs their own knowledge and seeks meaning from what they learn, as well as completing new concepts based on the framework of thinking that they already have (Suparlan 2019). The critical and skeptical attitudes shown by students reflect the process of meaning construction that takes place actively and reflectively in a complex digital environment.

Result-2: Managing Doubts about Differences and Uncertainties in Teaching in the Digital World

Social media serves as a platform that facilitates users to share content, including information, motivation, and opinions, in various contexts such as education, criticism, satire, and others. In addition, social media is capable of creating a space for interaction that is not limited by space and time. This is one of the factors that encourages individuals to integrate it into their daily activities (Fernardo et al. 2020).

Interpersonal communication through social media platforms seems limitless, allowing individuals to freely express themselves without constraints. In reality, this freedom is often abused to spread hate speech, which has a negative impact on interfaith harmony. This starts with mutual taunting and escalates to insults against each other's beliefs or religions. Sometimes, people argue with each other on social media, which leads to hostility, without any concern that they could become enemies in real life (Baihaki 2020).

Religious information will continue to evolve along with people's habits in using mobile devices. However, we must remain vigilant against individuals who deliberately mislead us. Sometimes, the intention to mislead does not arise from personal desire, but rather from ignorance or a lack of expertise in discussing the subject matter, so that the information conveyed can be misleading and even cause divisions among religious communities. This serves as a reminder for us to always pay attention to the distribution channels or

the identity of the information providers (Andini et al. 2023)

The digital era can be utilized as strategic capital in demonstrating excellence amid the dynamics of global progress. Islamic education is viewed as an ideal education system because it is able to integrate a balance between worldly and spiritual life. The various challenges that arise in the context of Islamic education can actually serve as a foundation for developing existing potential while evaluating aspects that need improvement. These challenges help shape the character of students, especially university students, whose freedom of thought is framed by teachings that have validity of truth, thus creating a balance between technological progress and the formation of ethical social attitudes (Kholifah 2022).

Overall, the results of the study indicate that student interaction with religious information in the digital age occurs through a process of reflective assessment, in which the credibility of sources, the capacity of communicators, and religious literacy are key to building a balanced, critical, and principled understanding.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung show a significant level of critical awareness in evaluating the validity of digital religious information. Their skeptical attitude and tendency to verify information sources reflect a reflective cognitive process that is in line with constructivism theory. Within this theoretical framework, learning is viewed as an active individual activity in developing knowledge through experience and previously established cognitive structures (Suparlan, 2019). Therefore, students do not merely act as passive consumers of information, but as interpretive agents who autonomously construct religious understanding in accordance with the context of the digital environment they encounter.

This finding also reinforces the view that advances in information technology do not necessarily reduce the quality of religious understanding, but rather open up new opportunities for the development of religious digital literacy. Broad access to various religious sources allows students to enrich their religious

knowledge, provided that it is balanced with adequate analytical and evaluative skills. This is in line with the findings of Fathul Barri et al. (2025), which confirm that digital information can be an educational tool if it is critically examined and compared with credible authoritative sources. Therefore, strengthening religious digital literacy is an important requirement so that students are able to distinguish between valid information and information that is manipulative or misleading.

Conclusions

The results of this study indicate that students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung demonstrate a high level of critical awareness in evaluating the validity of digital religious information. They do not impulsively accept information from social media, but rather carry out a verification process through online and offline channels by comparing reliable sources and consulting with individuals who are more knowledgeable in the field of religion. This reflective attitude reflects a constructivist approach in developing autonomous and rational religious understanding amid the rapid flow of digital information.

References

- Abdurrahman A. 2008. Sociolinguistik: Teori, Peran, dan Fungsinya terhadap Kajian Bahasa Sastra. *LiNGUA: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa dan Sastra*.
- Andini IP, Hamida FN, Faristiana AR. 2023. Perubahan Dakwah di Era Digital. *ALADALAH: Jurnal Politik, Sosial, Hukum dan Humaniora* 1(2): 302–314. <https://doi.org/10.59246/aladalah.v1i2.375>
- Andriyana P, Adrian B. 2024. Agama, Media, dan Masyarakat di Era Digital. *Borneo: Journal of Islamic Studies* 4(2): 85–95. <https://doi.org/10.37567/borneo.v4i2.2810>
- Aziz ARA, Rabi'ah R, Ihromi I. 2023. Peluang dan Tantangan Moderasi Beragama di Era Digital. *INTEGRASI: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan dan Kemasyarakatan* 1(2): 64. <https://doi.org/10.61590/int.v1i02.90>
- Baihaki ES. 2020. Islam dalam Merespons Era Digital. *SANGKEP: Jurnal Kajian Sosial Keagamaan* 3(2): 185–208. <https://doi.org/10.20414/sangkep.v3i2.1926>
- Barri MAF, Ramadhan FH, Putra MA, Satresna D, Fajrussalam H. 2025. Fenomena Konsumsi Konten Dakwah Digital pada Kalangan Mahasiswa: Systematic Literature Review. *Jurnal Da'wah: Risalah Merintis*,

- Da'wah Melanjutkan 8(1): 129–138.
<https://doi.org/10.38214/jurnaldawahstidnatsir.v8i1.332>
- Eka Rahmawati. 2023. Dampak Penggunaan Aplikasi Tiktok terhadap Perilaku Belajar Siswa. [Disertasi]. UIN Syarif Hidayatullah.
- Fernando E, Rahardaya A, Irwansyah I. 2020. Studi Meta-Analisis Pengurangan Ketidakpastian di Era Digital: Pencarian Informasi di Media Sosial sebelum Pertemuan Tatap Muka Pertama. *Jurnal Lensa Mutiara Komunikasi*.
- Hidayat W, Ramadhana A, Suryana A. 2023. Teori Sosialisasi Kebijakan Pendidikan. *Journal J-MPI: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan*.
- Kholifah A. 2022. Strategi Pendidikan Pesantren Menjawab Tantangan Sosial di Era Digital. *Jurnal Basicedu* 6(3): 4967–4978. <https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v6i3.2811>
- Leonardo HS, Siahaan PG, Purba NR, Batubara DK, Siahaan HTB, Togatorop RF. 2024. Penerapan Pendidikan Multikultural Berbasis Nilai Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa dan Persatuan Indonesia dalam Perspektif Toleransi Beragama. *SELAMI IPS* 17.
- Miceli T. 1997. *Economics of the Law: Torts, Contract, Property, Litigation*.
- Nurhayati M, Wirayudha AP, Fahrezi A, Pasama DR, Noor AM. 2023. Islam dan tantangan dalam era digital: Mengembangkan koneksi spiritual dalam dunia maya. *AL-AUFA: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kajian Keislaman* 5: 16–20.
- Rahmawati JR, Puspita DA, Azis MZ, Fadhil A. 2024. Dampak Media Sosial terhadap Religiusitas Mahasiswa Universitas Negeri Jakarta. *Hikmah: Jurnal Studi Pendidikan Agama Islam* 2(1): 168–182. <https://doi.org/10.61132/hikmah.v2i1.584>
- Rijal MK, Nasir M, Rahman F. 2022. Potret moderasi beragama di kalangan mahasiswa. *PUSAKA* 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.31969/pusaka.v10i1.672>
- Saputra F. 2024. Pembinaan Karakter Mahasiswa melalui Pendidikan Agama Islam di Era Digital. *Wathan: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora* 1(2): 176–188. <https://doi.org/10.71153/wathan.v1i2.77>
- Shafrina A. 2025. Pandangan mahasiswa terhadap peran da'i dalam aktualisasi dakwah di era siber. *Journal of Communication and Islamic Broadcasting*. doi:10.21093/nubuwwah.v3i01.9058
- Sholich M. 2020. Peranan Guru Agama Islam dalam Meningkatkan Religiusitas Siswa di Era Digital. *Ats-Tsaqofi: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Manajemen Islam* 2(1): 85–95. <https://doi.org/10.61181/ats-tsaqofi.v2i1.215>
- Sri Lestari, Jupriaman. 2024. Peran Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam di Era Digital. *Zenius Journal*: 74–77.
- Suparlan S. 2019. Teori Konstruktivisme dalam Pembelajaran. *ISLAMIKA* 1(2): 79–88. <https://doi.org/10.36088/islamika.v1i2.208>
- Susanto MA. 2024. Islam dan Teknologi: Tantangan Etika dan Adaptasi dalam Era Digital. *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 1: 95–102.