

From Reels To Reality: Internalization Religious Moderation In Generation Z Social Interactions

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Abstract:

The development of digital technology has changed social interaction patterns and religious practices, especially among Gen Z, who are very familiar with social media. This study aims to examine the process of internalization religious moderation values disseminated through short content such as Instagram Reels into the real-life social practices of Gen Z. Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, this study involved 10 UMM Islamic Education students as subjects, employing in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation as data collection techniques. The results show that religious moderation content on social media, especially Reels, is effective in shaping Gen Z's understanding and tolerant attitudes, despite challenges such as exposure to intolerant narratives and social media algorithms that can reinforce polarization. The internalization of values occurs through stages of value transformation, value transaction, and trans-internalization, which are influenced by internal and external factors. Gen Z plays a strategic role as agents of change by utilizing digital literacy to spread messages of tolerance and inclusivity. This study emphasizes the importance of digital literacy and critical thinking in filtering religious information in the digital age, as well as the need for creative strategies in delivering messages of moderation so that they are more easily accepted and practiced in everyday life.

Keywords— *Reels, religious moderation; internalization; social media; generation z*

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has brought changes to various aspects of life, including religious practices and social interactions. One of the tangible impacts of this development can be seen in Generation Z or Gen Z, who are familiar with social media. Social media has become an integral part of Gen Z's lives, who have grown up with digital technology and use it as their primary tool for interacting, sharing, and building their identity [1]. This phenomenon not only affects communication patterns but also serves as a platform for the widespread and rapid dissemination of both social and religious values [2].

On social media, the phenomenon of short religious content or reels on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter has become attractive to Gen Z. The content is concise, visual, and easy to understand, enabling it to reach young audiences quickly and effectively [3]. Despite its brevity, this content has great potential in shaping

religious understanding, including in terms of the values of diversity. One important value that is often raised in reels content is religious moderation.

Religious moderation that prioritizes the value of tolerance is an important foundation in maintaining social harmony in society, especially in countries with high diversity [4]. Gen Z has great potential to internalize and transform these values into everyday life through simple actions such as respecting differences, increasing interfaith understanding, and avoiding hate speech or discriminatory actions [5]. However, easy access to information also has the potential to expose them to intolerant or provocative narratives spread on social media. Therefore, Gen Z needs to equip themselves with strong digital literacy so that they are able to critically sort through information, so that they are not easily influenced by intolerant or provocative narratives circulating on social media.

Gen Z can play an active role as agents of moderation by utilizing their digital skills to spread messages that promote tolerance and inclusivity on

various social media platforms [6]. Gen Z can also become a bridge between different groups in society through their ability to manage and disseminate inclusive and tolerant information in the digital world [7]. Therefore, Gen Z is not only a consumer of information, but also a producer of positive content that can strengthen the values of religious moderation in a diverse society.

Although many studies discuss the values of religious moderation and the role of social media as a means of spreading messages of tolerance, there is still not much research that specifically examines how these values can be internalized by Gen Z [7], [8]. Most studies emphasize the dissemination of content on digital platforms such as Reels, without exploring the process of internalization from digital content consumption to actual practice. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining the transformation of religious moderation values from the digital world to the daily reality of Gen Z.

This study focuses on Instagram as a social media platform that plays a strategic role in shaping Gen Z's perceptions and attitudes toward religious moderation. Instagram is not only a space for disseminating content that supports tolerance and inclusivity, but also allows for the emergence of extreme views that have the potential to influence users' attitudes in various ways. The researcher aims to explore how the values of religious moderation conveyed digitally can be transformed into real-world practices among Generation Z. Therefore, the researcher is interested in the title *From Reels to Reality: The Transformation of Religious Moderation Values in Generation Z Social Interactions*.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design that aims to understand the experiences of Gen Z in internalization values of moderation on Instagram in social interactions. The research subjects consisted of 10 UMM Islamic Education students from the 2022 cohort who were selected using purposive sampling. This limitation was imposed to obtain data that was more relevant to the context of Islam and education in an academic environment. Data collection was obtained through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation.

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to explore the experiences and perceptions of informants, while observations were conducted to capture social behavior in a real context. The data analysis technique referred to the Miles and Huberman model with three stages, namely data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing [9]. This approach helped researchers to explore in depth how the process of internalization the value of moderation on TikTok affects the social interactions of Generation Z students in a contextual and meaningful way.

III. RESULT & DISCUSSION

A. Religious Moderation in the Digital Context

Religious moderation can be defined as an attitude, perspective, and religious practice that prioritizes humanity, benefit, and tolerance among religious communities [10]. Religious moderation emphasizes belief in religious truth, which is to continue to respect and honor followers of other religions without necessarily justifying their religions [11]. In the context of Islam, religious moderation is referred to as *wasathiyah*, which means the middle or middle ground that is fair and best.

Moderation also has principles in Islam, including balance (*tawazun*), tolerance, justice, social welfare, wisdom, dialogue and collaboration, avoidance of extremism, simplicity, and moral integrity [12]. This aims to prevent extreme attitudes, both radical and liberal, so as to create a harmonious and peaceful life amid a diverse society. Religious moderation is not only a theoretical teaching, but also a practical guide for living in harmony, avoiding conflict, and building peace and unity.

Social media serves as a primary space that can be used to disseminate information and positive values, including religious moderation. Platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok enable the widespread and rapid dissemination of messages about the importance of tolerance, inclusivity, and peace. Religious organizations and individuals can use social media to educate about religious moderation in easy-to-understand language and attractive formats, thereby reaching a wide audience, especially young people who are active on social media. This is because social media facilitates two-way interaction, accelerating the transmission of information and motivating users to

engage in more effective and efficient religious communication.

The development of digital technology has transformed Islamic preaching methods, especially through social media such as Instagram. Short sermons in the form of short videos or reels are very effective in reaching a wide audience, especially the younger generation who prefer fast-paced and visual content [13]. Instagram Reels, with its short video feature and algorithm that makes it easy for content to spread widely, allows sermons to go viral. Creative, engaging, and communicative da'wah content can effectively influence the hearts and minds of the faithful. Therefore, Gen Z must also be able to adapt to short formats while still conveying the essence of Islamic teachings in depth. This phenomenon marks a paradigm shift in preaching from one-way communication to dialogical and participatory communication, where one must be ready to respond to digital audience interactions.

B. Generation Z and Religious Content Consumption

Generation Z is known as a generation that is very familiar with digital technology and social media as the main sources of information, including religious information. Research conducted by PPIM UIN Jakarta in 2021 shows that around 64.66% of Gen Z respondents answered that social media is one of their main sources of religious knowledge (Unairnews 2024). This study also found that Gen Z more frequently accesses religious-themed information and programs through social media and podcasts, and actively interacts with religious content on social media through likes, shares, and comments. The higher a person's level of religiosity, the more intense their interaction with religious content on social media.

Social media algorithms play an important role in determining what content appears in users' feeds, thereby directly influencing Gen Z's patterns of religious understanding. These algorithms tend to display content that matches users' preferences and previous interactions, which can reinforce certain views while limiting exposure to other perspectives. Algorithms can help disseminate moderate and inclusive religious content selected by Gen Z, reinforcing the values of tolerance and religious moderation [14]. However, on the other hand, algorithms also have the potential to create echo chambers that reinforce extreme views if users

interact with such content more frequently, thereby posing the risk of polarization and radicalization [15].

Social media as an interactive space allows for dialogue and discussion that can enrich religious understanding, but it also requires good digital and religious literacy so that users can sort and filter information wisely [14]. Therefore, the role of social media algorithms is crucial in determining how Gen Z shapes their identity and patterns of religious understanding in the digital era.

C. Internalization of Values in Social Life

Internalization is the process of instilling values into the human soul. This process makes these values not only cognitively understood, but also part of a person's inherent attitudes and behaviors (Elmontadzery, Basori, and Mujadid 2024). Meanwhile, internalization has several stages, namely 1) value transformation, which is the process of accepting values verbally; 2) value transaction, which is two-way interaction and application of values; 3) trans-internalization, which is the deep instilling of values so that they become character or personality traits within an individual [16]. In the process of value internalization, there are two factors that influence behavioral change from the digital world to the real world, namely internal and external factors. These two factors complement each other and interact to ensure that the values obtained can be adopted and manifested in real behavior.

D. Generation Z's Understanding of Religious Moderation

Gen Z understands the concept of religious moderation as an attitude of deeply believing in the truth of one's own religion, while still respecting and appreciating other religions without necessarily justifying their beliefs. This understanding is in line with the theory of religious moderation by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2019), which emphasizes four main indicators in religious moderation, namely national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodating local culture [17]. The attitude of mutual respect and not being arbitrary towards others as portrayed by Gen Z is a tangible manifestation of tolerance and anti-violence.

Religious moderation is considered very important to be implemented in Indonesia, especially among Gen Z. This is based on the

diversity of religions, ethnicities, nations, and cultures that make Indonesia known as a multicultural country. As John Hick's concept states, a multicultural society requires mutual respect to prevent horizontal conflicts [18]. In addition, the phenomenon of moral degradation among Gen Z reinforces the urgency of religious moderation as an effort to build character and morality in order to create an attitude of mutual respect for differences.

Available social media can be used to obtain information [19]. Gen Z can utilize social media, especially Instagram reels, as a means of flexibly increasing their religious knowledge. The content on Instagram Reels is considered to provide insights from various perspectives. The use of Instagram Reels allows for quick access and brings up a variety of perspectives, thereby encouraging a broader and more dynamic transformation of values. However, some content has been found that does not reflect a moderate attitude in religion.

This shows the importance of digital literacy and critical thinking in responding to the flow of information, as expressed in media literacy theory [20]. The importance of the ability to sort and evaluate content is key to maintaining moderation values in the digital space. This is because content that does not reflect moderation has the potential to trigger interfaith conflict. Gen Z expresses its disapproval of such content, hence the importance of a critical attitude in responding to religious content on social media.

Gen Z's strategic role as agents of change can spread the values of religious moderation on social media. There are several ways this can be done, such as promoting religious moderation through reposting content, actively participating in interfaith discussions, and spreading messages of tolerance and moderation. Gen Z's ability to master the digital world is an important asset in stimulating others to spread positive values.

The characteristics of religious moderation content that are easily accepted by Gen Z are the use of language that is easy to understand, non-provocative, and polite delivery of messages. It is important to emphasize the clarity of the message and the selection of media that suits the characteristics of the audience so that the message can be conveyed effectively. Changes in the preferences of digital audiences are also occurring, with a tendency to prefer content that not only provides information but also an engaging reading

experience [21]. Not only that, content packaged in light formats such as podcasts interspersed with humor has also been proven to be more appealing to audiences [22].

One of the challenges faced by Gen Z in applying the value of moderation is the negative stigma from their surroundings. Some informants often receive unfavorable responses, such as being considered too Islamic or even leaning towards a particular sect. In addition, social media algorithms tend to make content that triggers emotional or provocative reactions go viral more quickly than content promoting moderation. Therefore, the solution offered is to create short, concise interfaith dialogue content involving popular figures among Gen Z so that the message of religious moderation can be more easily accepted and internalized.

Research data shows that religious moderation content on Reels is considered quite influential on informants' attitudes in daily life. Respondents become more open and accepting of religious diversity in their surroundings. Therefore, when creating religious moderation content, it is important to use neutral language, avoid controversial opinions, and prioritize dialogue. Creators like @hananattaki are considered successful in conveying messages of moderation thanks to their soft, calming, and easy-to-understand delivery style.

E. Internalization of Religious Moderation Values

The internalization of religious moderation values is an important process in maintaining harmony and peace in a multicultural society. Therefore, religious moderation is defined as an attitude and behavior that takes a middle ground, is not extreme, and promotes tolerance, justice, and balance in practicing religious teachings. The process of internalization of religious moderation values can be influenced by internal and external factors, as follows.

First, internal factors. Motivation is the main factor in the adoption of values obtained from Reels. The implementation of positive values can bring about positive changes in daily life. This is in line with Mahande (2023), who states that individuals will be more motivated to adopt behaviors that are considered beneficial and relevant to their personal needs [23]. In addition, emotions and feelings also play a significant role; content that provides inspiration and increases self-confidence triggers a higher tendency to apply

values. Conversely, negative content lowers morale and self-perception, which can hinder the process of implementing values [24].

The experiences of Gen Z significantly influence the ease of implementing religious moderation values on social media, but this must be balanced with the consumption of positive content in order to boost self-confidence. These experiences shape a more open mindset and attitude towards diversity, making it easier for them to accept and apply moderation values. Consuming inspiring and uplifting positive content not only strengthens internal motivation, but also helps manage emotions so that respondents are better prepared to deal with differences of opinion or extreme views in the virtual world. The balance between personal experience and exposure to supportive content is key to strengthening the implementation of religious moderation values among Gen Z, especially in the context of highly dynamic and diverse interactions on social media.

Second, external factors. Social environments such as family, friends, and community provide important support in the process of adopting values. However, the final decision is still based on personal considerations. The role of external information from other sources such as educational institutions and the media also enriches informants' understanding of moderation values, thereby facilitating the process of internalization these values.

Watching content on Reels caused informants to experience a change in mindset that was more open to values of moderation, such as interfaith tolerance. This indicates a process of value transformation in line with the model of attitude and behavior change [25]. This more open mindset not only reflects a deeper understanding of moderate values, but also shows individuals' readiness to internalize and apply these values in their daily social interactions.

In addition, routine and emotional conditions also influence the consistency of value application, indicating that value change requires adequate environmental support and psychological readiness. For example, when in a bad mood or under increased pressure from daily activities, individuals may find it difficult to remain tolerant and rational when faced with differences of opinion or conflict. Therefore, positive and stable social environmental support is essential to strengthen the process of value internalization and maintain individual motivation and psychological readiness.

IV. CONCLUSION

This article shows that social media, especially short video features such as Instagram Reels, plays a significant role in the process of internalization religious moderation values among Gen Z. Creative, communicative, and easy-to-understand short religious content can be an effective means of spreading messages of tolerance, inclusivity, and anti-violence widely and quickly. Gen Z, as a generation that is very familiar with digital technology, is not only a consumer but also a producer of positive content that can strengthen the values of religious moderation in society.

Gen Z has great potential as agents of change in building social harmony amid the diversity of Indonesian society. By utilizing their digital skills, Gen Z can promote the values of religious moderation through various social media platforms, actively participate in interfaith discussions, and spread messages of tolerance in creative and interesting ways. The success of internalization the values of religious moderation greatly depends on Gen Z's ability to select, manage, and produce content that is relevant, neutral, and non-provocative.

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