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The Dynamics of Students' Religious Spiritual Development in Religious Education in the Digital Age: A Case Study of MAN Sukamara

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ABSTRACT

The development of religious spirit among adolescents is greatly influenced by their social and digital environment, particularly through social media, which has now become an alternative source of information. This transformation has led to the fragmentation of religious authority, making students susceptible to cognitive dissonance and misconceptions in their understanding of religious teachings.

The study purpose was to analyze the influence of social media usage intensity on the religious understanding of students at MAN Sukamara and assess their digital literacy capacity. Specifically, this study measures the shift in learning preferences from teacher authority to digital platforms and assesses the need for teacher guidance and the role of the family in building religious digital literacy.

Materials and methods. The method used is quantitative with an analytical survey design, supplemented by qualitative data triangulation through in-depth interviews. The research sample consisted of the entire student population of 19 people (total sampling). Data were collected through a closed questionnaire with 30 statements and interviews, then analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative triangulation to understand the psychological and pedagogical impacts of the observed phenomenon.

Results. The results showed that 63.2% of students used social media as their main source of religious information, and 73.7% experienced emotional and psychological impacts due to exposure to digital content. Fragmentation of authority triggered cognitive dissonance, making teachers' adaptability in guiding digital literacy crucial. This study also emphasizes the need for educational collaboration between teachers and families through a collaborative digital parenting model.

Conclusions. The implications of the study emphasize strengthening religious digital literacy in madrasas and transforming the role of PAI teachers into facilitators and curators of information. The synergy between schools and families can create a holistic learning ecosystem, protecting students from misconceptions, misinformation, and the potential for cyber radicalism.

Keywords: Cognitive dissonance; Religious digital literacy; Social media; Islamic pedagogy; Adolescents.

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a psychological transition phase marked by a search for identity, or what is often referred to in psychology as the "storm and stress" phase (Wisudahningsih et al., 2025). From the perspective of the psychology of religious development, the religious psyche at this stage has not yet reached absolute maturity, making adolescents' belief systems highly vulnerable to external influences (Surawan & Mazrur, 2020). This vulnerability is further complicated in the digital age, where external influences come not only from family and school but also from a massive and easily accessible virtual ecosystem.

Various social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have now transformed into new agents of religious socialization that dominate students' daily lives (Hakim & Dahri 2025). This transformation of the information landscape has led to a paradigm shift in religious authority, where the transmission of religious knowledge which was previously centered on teachers and printed literature is now freely and instantly available online. This situation underscores the urgency of mastering religious digital literacy as a critical tool before accepting information, so that students can discern which content aligns with the values and teachings of a moderate religion (Rohman & Waskito, 2025).

Adolescents who are exposed to a wealth of information without being equipped with critical thinking skills are at risk of developing misconceptions and simplistic understandings. (Narti et al., 2025). Research on adolescence indicates that without critical thinking skills, unrestricted access to information has the potential to lead to misunderstandings and superficial interpretations. This concern is reinforced by the findings of a preliminary study at MAN Sukamara, which showed that 63.2% of students use social media as their primary source for religious information, and 73.7% acknowledge emotional and psychological impacts resulting from exposure to religious content online. Exposure to digital religious information has the potential to influence adolescents' attitudes, understanding, and behavior (Faisal 2026).

The high penetration of digital media also gives rise to the problem of cognitive dissonance (Luthfi et al., 2025). Students often experience confusion when faced with the fragmentation of authority and differing theological views (ikhtilaf) circulating on social media. Instant information from the internet is often inconsistent with the values or curriculum taught in the classroom. Without adequate digital literacy, the flow of unverified information has the potential to cause disorientation in understanding, which may conflict with the principles of moderate religious teachings (Ardiansyah & Setiyani, 2025).

In light of these dynamics, simply restricting access to technology is neither relevant nor a solution (Singh 2024). What is needed is a transformative educational approach that equips students with the ability to curate, understand, and filter religious information critically, wisely, and responsibly (Khan & Ahmed, 2025). Optimizing digital literacy is expected to make religious education more effective and relevant to the demands of the times, while also shielding students from exposure to misinformation.

A review of the literature indicates that most previous studies have focused on social media as a learning medium or a tool for modernizing instructional aids (Marpelina 2024; Rizqi, 2023). However, research examining the intersection of adolescent religious development psychology, the fragmentation of religious authority on social media, and the urgency of digital literacy in mitigating disinformation remains very limited. The novelty of this study lies in proposing an integrated educational synergy model between teachers and families (collaborative digital parenting), in which teachers act as curators of religious information, parents as supervisors of digital media use, and students as active agents of digital literacy (Muharromah & Manshur 2025).

This given these issues and gaps, this study is urgently needed to investigate the impact of the intensity of social media use on the religious understanding of students at MAN Sukamara. Specifically, this study aims to measure the extent of the shift in learning preferences from teacher authority to digital platforms and to assess students' digital literacy capacity in preventing religious confusion (Pangesti, 2025). The research findings are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the study of Islamic pedagogy and practical recommendations for educators in formulating literacy-resilient PAI learning strategies.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach using an analytical survey design combined with a qualitative approach through data triangulation, in accordance with Sugiyono's (2019) mixed-methods principles, to analyze the influence of social media on students' religious development and understanding of religion. The research subjects were all students at MAN Sukamara (n = 19) using total sampling (Raihan et al. 2026). Data were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire

containing 30 scaled statements, participant observation, and in-depth interviews; the questionnaire was tested for validity and reliability before use. Quantitative data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data was analyzed thematically; the results of both were then cross-examined through triangulation to produce comprehensive conclusions regarding students' religious attitudes, behaviors, and understanding.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Students' use of social media has a significant impact on their religious understanding, both cognitively and behaviorally. This phenomenon reflects the complexity of the digital information flow, where students are exposed to diverse religious views and interpretations that are not always uniform or easily verifiable. Conceptually, this aligns with the theory of the fragmentation of digital religious authority, which posits that social media enables multiple parties to disseminate religious content, thereby decentralizing traditional authority (Safitri, 2025; Zhang 2025).

Furthermore, the research findings highlight the crucial role of teachers and families as mediators in guiding religious digital literacy. This supports the TPACK concept (Khaliq, 2024) and the Tri-Center of Education principle (Ferary, 2023), which emphasize the integration of subject matter mastery, pedagogical strategies, and collaboration among schools, families, and the community. Thus, the following discussion will outline two main aspects: first, the fragmentation of religious authority on social media and its impact on students' understanding, and second, the "Integrated Educational Synergy" model between teachers and families in building religious digital literacy.

1. The Fragmentation of Religious Authority on Social Media

Most students use social media as one of their primary sources for obtaining religious information (Anwar et al., 2024). This indicates that digital platforms have become the dominant medium shaping students' access to religious content, supplanting the traditional role of formal educational institutions or religious scholars as the sole sources of religious knowledge (Aflahah et al., 2023).

However, the study found that 73.7% of students experience confusion when faced with differing religious views or interpretations presented by various sources on social media. This situation indicates that although access to information is increasingly widespread, students' ability to sort through and verify the accuracy of information has not yet fully developed, so the risk of misconceptions or incomplete understanding remains high (Ma et al., 2025; Osborne, J., & Pimentel, D., 2023).

This phenomenon can be linked to the concept of the fragmentation of religious authority a situation in which authority and references for understanding religious teachings are no longer centralized in a single institution or individual, but are instead dispersed across various digital platforms (Abusharif, 2023). This fragmentation underscores the importance of the role of teachers and religious digital literacy as mediators to help students verify information before accepting it as truth, so that religious understanding remains accurate and contextual (Hannan & Mursyidi, 2023).

Interview Data

"Sometimes a religious teacher on YouTube says one thing, but on TikTok another teacher explains it differently. We're confused about which one to follow." (Interview with Student B, 2026). This statement indicates that students have broad access to information but are not yet able to critically verify religious information.

This interview excerpt illustrates students' experiences in navigating the diverse religious information circulating on digital platforms. The differing explanations from various clerics on YouTube and TikTok demonstrate that students have extensive access to religious content; however, this situation simultaneously creates epistemic uncertainty (Baedowi et al., 2025). Students find themselves in a situation where they are confronted with many conflicting perspectives, leading to confusion in determining which information is valid and worthy of reference (Naeem et al., 2023).

This phenomenon indicates that while social media expands students' access to religious knowledge, their ability to verify information before accepting it as true remains limited (Putra et al., 2024). Students do not yet possess adequate critical strategies to assess the quality, credibility, and

authority of information sources (Plummer et al., 2022). This aligns with the literature on religious digital literacy, which emphasizes the importance of information evaluation skills, particularly in an era where religious content can be freely produced and disseminated by anyone (Prawito, 2025; Putra & Ayyaisy, 2025; Rusadi & Aripin, 2023)

Thus, this quote underscores the need for teachers to serve as epistemic mediators who guide students in navigating digital religious content (Rohmatin et al., 2025). Teachers can help students identify credible sources, emphasize the principle of tabayyun, and foster a more critical and contextual understanding (Abowei et al., 2023). Furthermore, the results of these interviews also indicate that religious digital literacy is not merely a technical ability to access content, but encompasses evaluative and reflective competencies in filtering information so that students' religious understanding remains intact and free from misconceptions.

This phenomenon aligns with the theory of the fragmentation of digital religious authority (Abdillah, 2025) and the literature on digital literacy (Mohiuddin, 2023). Religious education teachers serve as epistemic mediators, in accordance with the TPACK principle (Yurtcu & Aktan, 2025), to help students critically navigate digital information. The phenomenon of student confusion when faced with conflicting religious information on social media can be understood through the concept of the fragmentation of digital religious authority.

As explained by Hoover (Berger & Golan, 2024), social media allows many parties to freely produce and disseminate religious content, thereby decentralizing traditional authority that is typically centered on religious scholars or formal educational institutions. In this context, students no longer rely on a single reference source but are confronted with a plurality of interpretations that are sometimes contradictory. This fragmentation directly influences the process of forming religious understanding and increases the risk of misconceptions if not accompanied by critical literacy skills.

Furthermore, the literature on digital literacy (Anurogo et al., 2023) emphasizes that students' ability to evaluate, verify, and filter information is at the core of religious digital literacy competencies. The findings of this study indicate that broad access to information does not automatically guarantee accurate understanding. Students require evaluative skills to assess the credibility of sources, the context of messages, and the relevance of content to religious teachings. Without these skills, students tend to accept information literally or selectively, which can lead to reductive or partial understanding.

The role of religious educators in this context is crucial as epistemic mediators. Based on the TPACK framework (Kumbo & Hayuma, 2023), educators do not merely deliver content but also integrate pedagogical strategies and technology use to help students navigate digital information. Teachers can guide students in selecting credible sources, emphasize the principle of verification (tabayyun), and facilitate critical discussions regarding differing viewpoints that emerge on social media. This approach bridges the gap between widespread access to information and students' ability to accurately understand the content.

The findings of this study can also be linked to the literature on digital-based religious education, which emphasizes the importance of adaptive pedagogical interventions. Religious digital literacy involves not only mastery of content and technical skills but also the development of reflective and critical competencies (Yuliana et al., 2025). Teachers serve as both information curators and discussion facilitators, enabling students to critically evaluate content and build a deeper understanding. Thus, the fragmentation of authority occurring on social media can be addressed through systematic and structured guidance.

A theoretical dialogue between empirical phenomena and the literature indicates that religious digital literacy must be viewed as a multidimensional competency (Singsuriya & Rimpeng, 2025). This competency encompasses technical skills for accessing digital media, critical skills for assessing the veracity of information, and reflective skills for understanding the socio-religious context. This study emphasizes that teachers and families play a strategic role in developing these competencies, so that students do not merely become passive consumers of digital information but are also capable of becoming critical, selective, and epistemically responsible agents of learning. As explained in QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 6, which emphasizes tabayyun the verification of information before accepting it as truth this is relevant to religious digital literacy.

يٰٓاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْٓا اِنْ جَاۤءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌۢ بِنَبَاٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوْٓا اَنْ تُصِيْبُوْا قَوْمًاۢ بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْبِحُوْا عَلٰى مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نٰدِمِيْنَ ۝٦

Meaning: O you who believe, if a wicked person comes to you with news, verify its truth so that you do not harm a people out of ignorance, which would lead you to regret your actions.

QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 6 emphasizes the principle of tabayyun, which involves verifying information before accepting it as true (Syihan, 2025). In the context of religious digital literacy, this verse is highly relevant because students in the age of social media are confronted with a wide variety of religious content that may differ from one another or even be contradictory. The principle of tabayyun teaches that the vast amount of information available should not be accepted at face value but must be critically examined and verified through credible sources, ensuring that religious understanding remains accurate and sound.

This verse provides a normative foundation for the role of teachers and families as mediators in religious digital literacy (Anwar & Surawan 2024). By guiding students to systematically assess and verify information, teachers and parents help instill critical and evaluative thinking skills. This aligns with the goal of religious digital literacy, which is to ensure that students not only access information but are also able to sort, evaluate, and understand religious content contextually and responsibly (Labibah & Surawan, 2025). The principle of tabayyun, therefore, serves as an ethical and pedagogical foundation for addressing the challenges of digital information among students.

The findings of this study highlight the epistemological impact of social media on students' religious understanding, particularly regarding their ability to sort, evaluate, and verify digital information (Rois & Yazdani, 2026). By demonstrating that students face confusion due to differing viewpoints spread across various platforms, this study emphasizes that religious digital literacy is not merely about access to information but encompasses evaluative and critical skills necessary to build accurate and comprehensive understanding. These findings expand the literature on Islamic religious education by incorporating the digital dimension as a key factor in shaping students' religious understanding (Mulyadi, 2025).

Furthermore, this study emphasizes the strategic role of teachers as digital mediators who guide students in navigating religious content on social media. Teachers do not merely function as content deliverers but also as facilitators in instilling the principle of tabayyun and religious digital literacy skills (Nasution et al., 2025). This conceptual contribution offers an adaptive pedagogical approach to the challenges of digital disinformation, while reinforcing the relevance of religious education in the context of the social media era. Thus, this study provides a foundation for the development of a learning model that integrates digital literacy, pedagogy, and the role of teachers as epistemic mediators.

2. The "Integrated Educational Synergy" Model Between Teachers and Families

The development of digital media has opened up new avenues for students to access a wide range of religious information (Norhidayah et al., 2025). Widespread access via social media allows students to encounter diverse perspectives and interpretations of religious teachings, meaning that the process of developing religious understanding no longer takes place solely in the classroom but also through interactions with various digital sources. This situation indicates that students' religious understanding is increasingly influenced by the dynamics of information in the digital space, necessitating a mentoring role that comes not only from the school but also from the family environment.

The high percentage indicates that 78.9% of students emphasize the importance of guidance from religious teachers in understanding religious content obtained through social media. This finding indicates that teachers still hold a central role as epistemic mediators, helping students evaluate, filter, and verify information so that their religious understanding remains accurate and contextual (Labibah & Surawan, 2025; Prasetyo et al., 2025). The role of teachers is not merely to deliver content but also to guide students in developing digital literacy skills, including the ability to think critically and evaluatively about various information sources (Lucaser & Acedera, 2025).

On the other hand, the data also shows that only 52.6% of students feel they receive guidance from their parents regarding the use of social media for religious content. This finding indicates that family guidance remains at a moderate level and is not yet optimal, even though families play a crucial role in shaping children's critical and ethical attitudes toward digital information. (Bai, 2025). This situation indicates a gap in educational collaboration between schools and families, meaning that students' religious digital literacy may be less effective if it relies solely on one party.

Based on these two findings, this study emphasizes the need for an "Integrated Educational Synergy" model, in which teachers and families systematically collaborate to guide students' religious digital literacy. This model emphasizes that teachers function as curators and facilitators of digital learning, while parents act as supervisors and companions for their children's content consumption at home (Khair, 2025). Through this collaborative approach, students not only gain broad access to information but are also equipped with the ability to critically evaluate, verify, and understand information, thereby enabling religious digital literacy to develop comprehensively.

Interview Data

"If there's a sermon online that confuses me, I usually ask my PAI teacher. At home, my parents rarely discuss it because they don't use social media." (Interview with Student F, 2026). These findings confirm that schools remain the primary venue for clarifying religious information.

The interview excerpt indicates that students tend to rely on their PAI teachers at school as their primary reference when encountering confusing religious information on social media. This statement underscores that although students have broad access to digital content, their ability to independently verify and assess the accuracy of information remains limited. Schools, through the role of teachers, remain a crucial space for clarifying and guiding students regarding differing interpretations that emerge online (Karataş & Tanrikulu, 2025).

This phenomenon also indicates a distinction in the roles of schools and families in guiding religious digital literacy. In the quote, students state that parents rarely discuss digital religious content because they do not actively engage with social media (Rahayu et al., 2025). This situation indicates that family support remains limited and underscores the need for synergy between school and home so that digital literacy guidance can occur consistently. Without collaborative support, students risk receiving information selectively or misinterpreting it.

Thus, these findings underscore the importance of the teacher's role as an epistemic mediator and facilitator of religious digital literacy. Teachers not only deliver content but also guide students in assessing the credibility of content and integrating the principle of tabayyun into the learning process. Schools function as centers of clarification that provide guidelines for filtering, understanding, and interpreting digital information appropriately, so that students' religious digital literacy develops critically and contextually (Munawir et al., 2026).

The findings of this study underscore the importance of collaboration between families, schools, and the community in guiding students' religious digital literacy, in line with the concepts of Collaborative Digital Parenting (Yafithufail & Kahfi 2025) and the Tri-Center of Education (Mahardika et al. 2025). Both concepts emphasize that educational success does not depend solely on schools or teachers but is the result of synergy among various actors involved in the students' learning process. In the context of religious digital literacy, this synergy is crucial because students are confronted with a vast and diverse flow of information on social media.

The Integrated Educational Synergy Model proposed by this study positions teachers as curators and mediators of information. Teachers play a role in filtering digital content, assessing the credibility of sources, and facilitating critical discussions in the classroom so that students can accurately understand differences in religious perspectives. This approach aligns with the TPACK principle (Khairi et al., 2022), where subject matter expertise, pedagogical strategies, and the use of technology are combined to enhance the quality of learning and equip students with digital literacy skills.

The role of parents is also a crucial component in this model as monitors of their children's digital consumption. Parents are responsible for monitoring their children's activities on social media, providing guidance, and helping them evaluate the religious content they consume at home. Family

support not only helps students understand information correctly but also instills ethical and critical values in the use of technology. Thus, collaboration between teachers and parents creates a holistic and sustainable learning ecosystem.

Meanwhile, students are positioned as active participants in digital literacy who consciously develop critical and evaluative thinking skills. They are trained to filter information, compare various perspectives, and apply the principle of tabayyun before accepting any content as truth. This approach emphasizes the importance of students' active engagement in the digital learning process, ensuring that religious digital literacy is not merely passive but becomes a reflective skill applicable in daily life (Labibah & Jasiah, 2025).

Overall, the interpretation of these findings indicates that the Integrated Educational Synergy model provides a conceptual framework that is adaptable to the challenges of digital disinformation. The synergy between teachers, parents, and students enables the development of comprehensive, critical, and contextual religious digital literacy. With this model, religious education does not merely focus on the transfer of content but also equips students with the ability to assess, verify, and understand digital information accurately, ensuring that students' religious understanding remains intact and valid in the era of social media. As emphasized in Quranic Surah At-Tahrim [66]: 6, families bear the responsibility to guide and protect their members from negative influences, including in the digital realm.

يٰٓاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا قُوْٓا اَنْفُسَكُمْ وَاَهْلِيْكُمْ نَارًا وَّقُوْدُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ عَلَيْهَا مَلٰۤىِٕكَةٌ غِلَاظٌ شِدَادٌ لَّا يَعْصُوْنَ اللّٰهَ مَآ اَمَرَهُمْ وَيَفْعَلُوْنَ مَا يُؤْمَرُوْنَ ۝٦

Meaning: O you who believe, protect yourselves and your families from the Fire of Hell, whose fuel is people and stones. Its guards are angels who are stern and severe. They do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, and they always do what they are commanded.

QS. At-Tahrim [66]: 6 emphasizes the family's primary responsibility to guide and protect its members from negative influences (Supiah & Podungge, 2024). In the context of religious digital literacy, this verse is relevant because children and adolescents in the age of social media face a vast and diverse flow of information, including religious content that can be confusing or misleading. The principle contained in this verse emphasizes that the role of parents is not merely to provide general guidance but also to actively accompany children in evaluating and filtering digital information so that their religious understanding remains accurate and sound.

This verse provides a normative foundation for the implementation of the Integrated Educational Synergy model, in which families serve as monitors of children's digital consumption, support teachers in the learning process, and guide students to develop responsible digital literacy. Family guidance is a crucial component in fostering students' evaluative and critical competencies, ensuring they do not merely become passive consumers of digital information but are capable of verifying content and understanding religious contexts in a contextual and ethical manner (Jannati & Hamandia, 2024). Thus, QS. At-Tahrim [66]: 6 reinforces the relevance of collaboration between schools and families in religious digital literacy.

This study makes an important contribution by emphasizing collaboration between teachers and families as a conceptual strategy for strengthening students' religious digital literacy. Unlike previous studies that focused more on the curriculum or the use of social media as a learning medium, this study demonstrates that the effectiveness of religious digital literacy depends not only on access to information but also on active guidance from teachers as mediators and parents as supervisors. This collaborative model ensures that students are able to critically filter, verify, and understand digital information, thereby making their religious understanding more accurate and contextual.

Furthermore, this study also offers a conceptual contribution to addressing the challenges of digital disinformation. By emphasizing the synergistic role between schools and families, the "Integrated Educational Synergy" model provides a framework to mitigate the risks of misconceptions and theological confusion arising from the fragmentation of religious authority on social media. This contribution broadens perspectives in the study of Islamic religious education and

digital literacy, while also providing a foundation for the development of pedagogical strategies that are adaptive to the digital age, where circulating information can significantly influence the formation of students' religious understanding.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that exposure to social media has the potential to cause confusion among students due to the fragmentation of religious authority, making critical religious digital literacy crucial; teachers serve as epistemic mediators and parents as supervisors of digital consumption, while students must actively filter and verify information before accepting it as truth. As an implication for Islamic Education (PAI), it is recommended that schools integrate religious digital literacy learning into the curriculum, strengthen collaboration between teachers and parents, and equip students with evaluative and reflective skills to navigate religious content in the digital world in a contextual and responsible manner.

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