

Navigating Digital Religious Education: A Schutzian Motive Analysis of Generation Z Students in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the increasing dependence of Generation Z students in Majene, Indonesia, on social media as a primary medium for religious education, analyzed through Alfred Schutz's phenomenological framework of motives. The research examines how Schutz's distinction between "because-motives" and "in-order-to motives" elucidates the contextual and aspirational dimensions shaping students' engagement with digital religious content. While traditional institutions such as mosques and *pesantren* have historically dominated religious learning, platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok are now integral to students' spiritual formation. Using qualitative methods including interviews, observations, and document analysis, the study finds that students' because-motives stem from the limited availability of youth-oriented programs in mosques, shifting generational media habits, and the appeal of concise online content. Their in-order-to motives reflect aspirations for spiritual growth, deeper understanding of Islamic teachings, and identification with charismatic online preachers. The findings demonstrate that social media functions not merely as a technological tool but as a transformative arena for constructing religious identity. The study underscores the importance of enhancing digital literacy and promoting moderate online religious engagement.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, social media has emerged as a dominant force not only transforming patterns of communication but also redefining how religious knowledge is accessed, interpreted, and internalized. This shift poses both opportunities and challenges for religious education, especially among generation Z – youth who have grown up entirely within the digital ecosystem (Soliha, 2015) (Supratman, 2018) (Rizka, 2019) (Solahudin, 2019) (Aprilia, 2020). Unlike previous generations who obtained religious understanding through *pesantren*, mosques, and face-to-face learning, generation Z increasingly

depends on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp to as primary sources of spiritual guidance (Slama, 2018) (Nisa, 2018) (Weng, 2018) (Uyuni, 2021) (Al Isro'i, 2022). Instagram and TikTok, originally recognized as a platform for entertainment and online trading, has significantly transformed into a new arena for digital Islamic preaching (Avifah, 2017) (Fahma, 2020) (Allisa, 2023). This digital migration raises urgent questions regarding the authenticity, depth, and moderation of the religious content consumed online. The phenomenon of mediated religiosity demonstrates how immediacy, personalization, and algorithmic curation reshape traditional religious authority and pedagogical methods (Lengauer, 2018) (Syamsurijal, 2021) (Sabara, 2021) (Fitriansyah, 2023). Scientifically, this research is relevant in advancing understanding of digital religion and the phenomenology of learning in mediated environment. Practically, it provides insights for educators, policymakers, and religious institutions to develop adaptive, digitally literate, and contextually relevant model of religious education that can guide generation Z toward constructive and ethical engagement in online religious spaces

While digital platforms democratize access to religious knowledge and enable new forms of spiritual engagement, they also present notable risks (Hasan, 2020) (Faizah, 2024). Studies have highlighted the spread of misinformation, exposure to extremist ideologies, and the erosion of traditional religious authority as pressing challenges of digital religiosity (Alimi, 2018) (Sorgenfrei, 2022) (Widiana, 2024). At the same time, other scholars emphasize opportunities for community building and broader outreach through digital da'wah (Husein, 2018) (Halim, 2018) (Benny, 2019) (Arrobi, 2021). These diverging perspectives illustrate not only the complexity of social media's role in shaping contemporary religious life but also the urgent educational need to prepare students with critical and digital literacy skills.

Despite the growing body of literature on religion in the digital sphere, most existing studies focus either on global implications or on urban contexts where access to technology is highly advanced (Pribadi, 2020), (Hamdani, 2020). Localized and non-metropolitan experiences of digital religiosity remain underexplored, particularly among youth populations whose religious identity formation is deeply influenced by digital media (Suhadi, 2019). This gap is especially significant in Indonesia, where diverse socio-cultural settings shape unique patterns of religious practice. In Majene, a coastal district in West Sulawesi, preliminary observations and interviews with teachers from State Islamic Senior High School (MAN) 1 Majene, Darul Da'wah wal Irsyad Islamic Senior High School (MA DDI) Majene, and State Senior High School (SMAN) 2 Majene, indicate that many students experience limited access to formal and structured religious education, while simultaneously showing strong engagement with digital religious content on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. This tension between traditional religious learning and spontaneous digital religiosity reflects an emerging empirical issue, the shift in how generation Z students interpret, internalize, and perform their faith in a context where digital exposure often surpasses institutional guidance (Turner, 2007).

This study aims to examine how generation Z students in Majene construct and experience their religious learning through social media, using Alfred Schutz's phenomenological framework of "because-motives" and "in-order-to motives". Field observations reveal that students' reliance on online preachers and Islamic influencers stems from both necessity and preference—necessity, due to the scarcity of youth-centered religious programs in schools and mosques; and preference, because digital content offers interactive, visual, and relatable approaches to faith learning. Specifically, the research seeks to identify the contextual factors that drive students to shifts from traditional religious institutions to digital platforms, as well as the personal aspirations that shape their engagement with online religious content (Akmaliah, 2020). By applying Schutz's theory within a localized Indonesian context, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of *mediatized religiosity* from a motive-based perspective.

Theoretically, this research enriches the discourse on digital religion by revealing how meaning, motivation, and identity formation intertwine in youth religiosity within peripheral education setting. Empirically, it responds to a pressing issue in Majene, the dissonance between institutional religious education – often limited in innovation and digital integration – and students increasing dependence

on algorithm-driven spiritual content. Practically, it underscores the urgent need to develop religious education models that integrate digital literacy, promote critical evaluation of online content, and encourage constructive participation in virtual religious spaces. Thus, social media is not only viewed as a substitute for the limited availability of youth-centered religious programs in traditional institutions but also as a transformative educational arena that facilitates spiritual growth, entertainment, and the shaping of religious identity among generation Z students.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design using a phenomenological approach to explore how social media influences students' religious understanding in Majene Regency. A qualitative design was chosen to capture participants' lived experiences in depth (Creswell, 2018). Fieldwork was conducted between March and September 2022 across three secondary schools: State Islamic Senior High School (MAN) 1 Majene, Darul Da'wah wal Irsyad Islamic Senior High School (MA DDI) Majene, and State Senior High School (SMAN) 2 Majene. Fifteen students were recruited through purposive sampling, ensuring that participants actively engaged in religious activities both inside and outside school for at least one year. This criterion guaranteed sufficient exposure to provide meaningful reflections (Palinkas et al., 2015). The sample size was determined based on data saturation, where no new insights emerged from additional participants.

Multiple techniques were used to strengthen data validity. First, systematic observation documented students' patterns of accessing religious content on digital platforms. Second, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted, lasting 20–30 minutes each, and recorded with participants' consent. The interviews were later transcribed (Gillham, 2005). Interviews were flexible, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences and motives. Finally, supplementary materials such as personal notes and autobiographical documents were collected to support triangulation.

Data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's six-step framework. This analysis followed several stages: (1) data identification, (2) initial coding, (3) theme discovery, (4) theme review, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) report preparation (Braun, Virginia; Clarke, 2006). Themes were developed through iterative coding and refinement (Robson, 2016). Alfred Schutz's phenomenological theory of motives served as a sensitizing framework, distinguishing between "because-motives" (historical or contextual factors shaping behavior) and "in-order-to motives" (future-oriented goals and aspirations) (Lattes, 2015) (Knudsen, 2004) (Goettlich, 2011). Therefore, it can be said that the core of Alfred Schutz's thought lies in understanding social action through interpretation. Schutz situates human nature within subjective experience, particularly in the ways individuals take action and adopt attitudes toward everyday life (Alfani, 2024). This theoretical lens enabled the analysis to capture both the underlying causes and the intended purposes of students' engagement with religious content on social media (Ulinnuha, 2024). The study adhered to ethical research standards. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained. Confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing participants' identities and schools.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The rapid advancement of digital technology, particularly in the field of mass communication, has fundamentally reshaped traditional modes of information exchange and religious learning. Conventional media have evolved into interactive digital platforms such as social media, which offer users an abundance of choices and have become an integral part of everyday life. This technological transformation has not only altered communication habits but also redefined how young people access and experience religion.

In Majene, this shift is evident among students who increasingly rely on social media as their primary channel for religious engagement. Rather than attending in-person religious gatherings or mosque lectures, many students prefer consuming religious content through platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Field observations indicate that smartphones have become

extensions of students' cognitive and spiritual lives, enabling them to connect with religious teachings in flexible, individualized, and contextually adaptive ways.

A student from MAN 1 Majene named Asrul explained that almost all of his classmates own smartphones and maintain multiple social media accounts—Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram being the most popular. He described how the courageous sermons of renowned preachers, particularly Ustaz Das'ad Latif and Ustaz Abdul Somad, have become his primary source of religious learning. These preachers, he noted, are “entertaining and easy to understand,” which makes their digital preaching appealing to young audiences. This story illustrates a broader pattern observed throughout the research: students' religious engagement is increasingly driven by the accessibility, practicality, and entertainment value of digital content, marking a shift from institutionally bound religious culture to mediated and personal spiritual experiences.

Smartphones, once used mainly for communication, have evolved into multifunctional tools that facilitate access to religious content—especially for students who seldom attend mosque lectures. This trend aligns with Miftah Farid (SMA 2 Majene), who describes YouTube as his preferred source for religious learning. He emphasizes the platform's efficiency in delivering prompt answers to spiritual questions, eliminating the need for prolonged searches or traditional lectures.

This growing dependence on social media signifies a missed opportunity for religious leaders (*mubaligh*) to actively harness digital platforms for outreach. With 82 million internet users in Indonesia—80% of whom are youth—social media presents a powerful vehicle for religious engagement. The immediacy and convenience of platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube have turned them into primary sources of religious knowledge among students, especially during transitional life stages like adolescence.

Students such as Aulia Kartika (MA DDI Majene) report routinely accessing *da'wah* content in their leisure time, often between Maghrib and Isha prayers. She listens to short sermon clips, primarily by Ustaz Adi Hidayat, while also engaging in conversation with peers. The choice of content and preacher is typically influenced by personal interest and familiarity.

Humans living in the 19th century had vastly different needs compared to those in the 21st century. In particular, secondary needs have undergone significant transformations over time. This notion is echoed by Nur Aisyah, a student at SMAN 2 Majene. According to Nur Aisyah, accessing religious content on platforms like YouTube or Instagram can be instantaneous. However, she emphasizes the importance of critical thinking when consuming such content, as misinformation can lead to misunderstandings or even misguidance. Her statement reflects a broader truth: smartphones and social media applications are indispensable in today's digital age. With a smartphone, one can easily enhance their knowledge using platforms like Instagram and YouTube.

This perspective is shared by Miftah Farid, a senior science student at SMA 2 Majene, who noted that YouTube has become a popular application for accessing religious content. Miftah's account suggests that social media facilitates quick and convenient access to answers for religious inquiries. A simple keyword search can yield results within seconds. Without platforms like YouTube, it would be difficult to access spiritual teachings from figures such as Ustaz Abdul Somad.

Social media thus serves various functions, ranging from providing viral content to addressing users' daily informational needs. The latter function is widely utilized by students, who often rely on social media to obtain religious knowledge by browsing platforms like Facebook and Instagram. This is similarly expressed by Aulia Kartika, an eleventh-grade student at MA DDI Majene. Aulia explains that she typically listens to *dakwah* content during the interlude between the Maghrib and Isha prayers. She dedicates around 30 to 40 minutes to absorbing snippets of Ustaz Adi Hidayat's lectures on Instagram or other platforms, sometimes while exchanging messages with friends. The choice of which religious speaker to follow and which content to consume remains a personal one, influenced by individual preferences and spiritual inclination.

Based on the empirical findings discussed above, social media, accessed by senior high school (SMA) and Islamic senior high school (MA) students through internet-connected digital platforms and social networking services, has proliferated significantly and gained widespread popularity. These

platforms have effectively assumed the role of alternative, renewable information centers. Social media serves as a productive medium for disseminating knowledge, exchanging ideas, and bridging communicative gaps that once seemed insurmountable—particularly in efforts to shape religious understanding among youth.

Nonetheless, it is essential to recognize the potential adverse effects of technological advancement, particularly for users in the critical stage of adolescence. Theoretically, this developmental period is characterized by identity exploration and a lack of fixed values or stable worldviews. At this age, students are prone to experimentation and exposure to novel experiences, making them highly vulnerable to external influences—both positive and negative. Thus, the digital realm functions much like a “double-edged sword,” containing both virtuous and harmful content, disseminated by individuals or groups with diverse intentions. Inevitably, such dynamics may have either beneficial or detrimental impacts on the users engaging with them.

Given this context, it becomes urgently necessary to draw attention to the crucial role of guardians, educators, educational stakeholders, and policymakers in guiding youth through the ethical and informed use of social media. Their collective vigilance is essential in mitigating the risks while optimizing the educational and spiritual potentials of these platforms.

Moreover, many students have intentionally used YouTube as a source for deepening their religious insights, as illustrated by Nur Hidayah, a twelfth-grade student at MAN 1 Majene. She shared:

"I have Facebook and Instagram accounts, but I mainly use Instagram and YouTube. Whenever possible, I listen to religious lectures by Ustaz Abdul Somad via his official YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/c/UstadzAbdulSomadOfficial/videos>). Through platforms like YouTube and other social media, we can directly access videos and recorded lectures. I also frequently listen to religious talks and advice from Ustaz Adi Hidayat's channel." (Interview: Nur Hidayah, Student, MAN 1 Majene)

A similar sentiment was expressed by Fatir, a twelfth-grade science student at SMAN 2 Majene:

"For students, mobile phones are inseparable. They're like a new toy that helps relieve boredom—and they're useful too. For example, I use Google Maps to find directions. In terms of religion, I often listen to lectures on YouTube by Ustaz Das'ad Latif, Ustaz Felix, Buya Yahya, and others. During free time, I like listening to Buya Yahya's short talks. I enjoy his delivery because he is knowledgeable, polite, and his speech is very gentle." (Interview: Fatir, Student, SMAN 2 Majene)

As young individuals still in the process of internalizing religious values, many students are drawn to nearly all available forms of social media content related to Islamic teachings. Prominent religious figures such as Ustaz Adi Hidayat, Ustaz Abdul Somad, Ustaz Das'ad Latif, Sheikh Ali Jaber, Ustaz Luqmanul Hakim, Ustaz Hannan Attaki, Ustaz Felix, Buya Yahya, and Ustazah Oki Setiana Dewi are among those frequently followed by students.

This is evident in the testimony of Zalfa Atika, a student at MA DDI Majene, who described how students interact with religious content personally, choosing platforms and religious figures that align with their interests and spiritual needs. In this process, social media becomes not only a technological convenience but also an influential space for spiritual learning and identity formation among the younger generation.

YouTube also emerges as a dominant medium for religious learning among students like Nur Hidayah, Fatir, and Nur Fadiah. These individuals actively follow sermons from prominent religious figures such as Ustaz Abdul Somad, Sheikh Ali Jaber, Ustaz Luqmanul Hakim, Ustaz Hannan Attaki, and others. Students don't just passively consume this content—they also share it through WhatsApp and Facebook, indicating a social element in the discourse surrounding religion.

Notably, there's growing awareness among students about verifying the credibility of the religious content they consume. For instance, Andi Afifah cross-checks information with her teachers or seeks confirmation before sharing it with family and friends. Afifah uses multiple platforms—YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter—to seek educational and religious content. She finds YouTube both cost-effective and content-rich, often preferring detailed explanations from figures like Ustaz Adi Hidayat.

While concerns about misinformation and ideological extremism remain, the educational potential of social media is also clear. Students gravitate toward preachers whose communication style is clear, humorous, and age-appropriate. Dudung Abdul Rohman explains that successful da'wah on social media involves understanding digital social interaction, persuasive communication, and the ethos of the preacher—credibility, relatability, and influence. However, the digital content landscape also includes figures with controversial reputations. Some students follow preachers labeled as fundamental or conservative, like Ustaz Abdul Somad and Ustaz Bahar Smith, whose messages have occasionally been deemed provocative or exclusionary. While such labels are often shaped by political dynamics—particularly around events like the 2019 Indonesian election—they reflect the ideological polarization that can affect students' religious perceptions.

Students' exposure to religious content via social media underscores a larger issue: the lack of youth-oriented religious programming in mosques. Alwi (MAN 1 Majene) and Imam Fatih Janjang (SMA 2 Majene) highlight the inaccessibility of religious studies tailored to adolescents. As a result, they turn to social media for both guidance and inspiration. Imam Fatih, for example, frequently listens to salawat and short sermons from preachers like Habib Rizieq and Ustaz Bahar Smith, favoring their assertive styles and perceived authenticity.

Social media platforms, particularly Facebook and YouTube, have become integral to students' spiritual journeys. Students like Siti Sarah and Indah argue that mosques should become more youth-friendly, offering content that resonates with teenage concerns. Without inclusive programming, students seek refuge in online communities and digital da'wah groups like Shift Media and the Hijrah Community.

The absence of structured, student-centered religious learning opens the door for online platforms to fill this void. As Nur Alim Subur notes, social media—especially YouTube—offers an accessible and personalized religious experience:

"I enjoy listening to Quran recitations and religious lectures on YouTube, especially from Ustaz Das'ad Latif. I rarely attend live studies, so I rely on social media for religious knowledge. If I'm unsure about something, I first search online before asking a teacher or Ustaz at school." (Interview with Nur Alim Subur, 2022)

Application of Alfred Schutz's Theory of Motives in Understanding Social Media Engagement

The findings of this study demonstrate that Generation Z students in Majene engage with religious content on social media through three interrelated motivational dimensions—biogenetic, sociogenetic, and theogenetic motives. These dimensions provide a comprehensive understanding of students' lived experiences and extend Alfred Schutz's phenomenological framework of *because-motives* and *in-order-to motives* to a localized Indonesian context. In doing so, the study directly addresses its central research question: how students in a non-metropolitan area construct and experience religious learning through social media, and how these experiences influence their understanding of Islamic knowledge.

The biogenetic motives reveal how technological adaptation and daily routines drive religious engagement among digital-native students. Smartphones, as ever-present devices, have transformed the rhythm and accessibility of religious learning. Students' preference for short, visually engaging da'wah videos represents a habitual integration of faith into their digital lifestyle (Setyowati, 2023). This corresponds to Schutz's concept of *because-motives*, where prior experiences and environmental affordances shape present meaning structures. In line with Widiana, who found that pervasive smartphone use has redefined religious practice into hybrid online–offline spaces, this study illustrates that digital religiosity in Majene is both necessity-driven and culturally internalized—a finding that enriches Schutz's phenomenology by embedding it within a technological lifeworld (Widiana, 2024).

The sociogenetic motives emphasize the relational and communal aspects of religious learning. Students' decisions to follow specific preachers or share religious content are often influenced by peers and social networks, underscoring that religiosity is not an isolated act but a socially mediated process. Slama's (2018) notion of *networked religiosity* provides a useful comparative lens: just as Indonesian

Muslims in urban contexts practice faith within digital collectives, Majene students also negotiate their religious authority through online peer interaction. However, as Solahudin warns, social media simultaneously enables the spread of populist and polarizing ideologies, creating risks of ideological fragmentation (Solahudin, 2019). This duality—between community building and vulnerability to misinformation—illustrates how *because-motives* (social belonging) and *in-order-to motives* (aspiration for religious recognition) intersect in constructing digital religious identity.

The theogenetic motives highlight students' transcendental aspirations and their desire for spiritual growth, ethical self-discipline, and closeness to God. These motives embody Schutz's *in-order-to orientation*, where future-directed intentions inform present actions. Students' narratives reveal that digital sermons and Islamic influencers serve not merely as sources of knowledge but as affective and spiritual companions in their daily lives. However, as Solahudin cautions, the multiplicity of online interpretations also challenges traditional authority structures. Hence, theogenetic motives illuminate both the empowering and destabilizing aspects of digital religiosity—spiritual enrichment on one hand, and potential detachment from authentic sources on the other (Solahudin, 2019). This insight reinforces the need for educators and parents to provide guided meditation to sustain the credibility of students' spiritual formation.

By mapping the triadic structure of biogenetic–sociogenetic–theogenetic motives, this study extends Schutz's phenomenological theory into the domain of digital religion and youth studies. While prior research has explored online Islamic practices and digital piety, few have examined the *motive-based* dimensions underlying these behaviors (Slama, 2018). The study's integration of Schutz's theory with empirical fieldwork offers a novel analytical lens that bridges phenomenological sociology and media anthropology. It demonstrates that motives are not fixed psychological traits but socially embedded orientations continually negotiated in mediatized contexts. This theoretical advancement contributes to the growing discourse on *mediatized religiosity*, situating Indonesian peripheral youth as active meaning-makers within the context of global digital transformations.

Empirically, the study fills a geographical and socio-cultural gap in the literature. Whereas most studies focus on urban Muslims with advanced digital infrastructure, this research foregrounds the lived experiences of students in a non-metropolitan setting, where access to formal religious programs is limited. The Majene context thus becomes a microcosm for understanding how digital platforms substitute, supplement, and sometimes surpass traditional religious institutions in shaping faith-based learning.

The findings hold important implications for religious educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers. First, integrating digital religious literacy into school curricula is crucial to help students critically evaluate online content, identify credible sources, and resist algorithmic biases that promote sensationalism or extremism. As Widiana emphasizes, digital competence has become both a moral and cognitive necessity in contemporary Islamic education (Widiana, 2024). Second, teachers and religious authorities should leverage social media as a constructive pedagogical tool—producing contextualized, inclusive, and youth-oriented materials that align with local values while fostering critical reflection. Third, collaboration between educators, parents, and digital influencers could help establish an ecosystem of moderate and reflective digital religiosity, countering the rise of populist interpretations (Solahudin, 2019).

4. CONCLUSION

This study set out to analyze how generation Z students in Majene engage with religious education through social media by applying Alfred Schutz's phenomenological framework of "because-motives" and "in-order-to motives". The finding reveal that students' digital religiosity is driven by three

interrelated dimensions of motives – biogenetic, sociogenetic, and theogenetic – that together illuminate both the contextual drivers and aspirational goals of their online religious learning.

Biogenetic motives show that digital technologies and mobile devices have become integral to students' everyday lives, positioning social media as a natural and accessible medium for religious learning. Sociogenetic motives emphasize the influence of peers, online communities, and cultural shifts that shape preferences for certain religious figures and content. Meanwhile, theogenetic motives reflect the students' desire to seek spiritual meaning, deepen worship, and fulfill their sense of divine responsibility through online engagement.

Viewed through Schutz's "because-in-order-to" framework, these motives illustrate how digital religiosity embodies both structural adaptation and intentional pursuit of spiritual growth. The research thus confirms that social media functions not merely as a technological convenience but as a transformative educational space where identity, authority, and faith are continually negotiated.

In line with this objective, the study concludes that strengthening digital literacy and renewing pedagogical strategies are essential to ensure that online religious engagement nurtures critical understanding, ethical discernment, and spiritual maturity. Practically, collaboration between traditional institutions and digital platforms is crucial to create credible, inclusive, and contextually relevant models of religious education that can guide generation Z toward responsible and meaningful spiritual development in digital era.

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