

Utilization of Digital Space in Strengthening Religious Moderation Education of Generation Z in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze the attitude of Generation Z (Gen Z) toward religious moderation in terms of social class and their religious learning motivation. In addition, this article also aims to describe the utilization of digital space in strengthening the religious moderation of Gen Z. This is a quantitative research approach. The research questionnaire was distributed to 179 teenagers aged 16–19 living in three Central Java regions in Indonesia. This research resulted in several findings. First, Gen Z's religious moderation is in the "moderate" category, with an average score of 2.92 on a scale of 4. Most respondents agree that religious differences are not obstacles to making friends and that forcing others to believe in the same religion is not allowed. Second, Gen Z's religious moderation attitude has a very weak correlation with their religious learning motivation and social class. Third, increasing religious moderation platforms and digital media-based programs can strengthen the attitude of religious moderation among Gen Z. In conclusion, this study provides significant implications for the availability of references to religious moderation of Gen Z. It provides valuable contributions to opportunities to use digital space for positive activities for Gen Z to promote inter-religious tolerance.

Keywords: Digital media, Gen Z, religious moderation, religious tolerance, social media

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INTRODUCTION

As an archipelagic state, Indonesia is very rich in various cultures, ranging from ethnic groups, languages, customs, traditions, and other cultural heritages. Indonesia is a religious country that believes in one God and allows its citizens to embrace any religion and belief. Based on a Pew

Research Center survey, Indonesia is listed as one of the most religious countries in the world (Lahitani, 2016; Nashrullah, 2020). Unfortunately, it is not listed as the most tolerant country in the world. Based on the 2015 Legatum Institute's Prosperity Index, Indonesia was ranked 123 of the most tolerant countries in the world, while Canada occupied the first rank (Lahitani, 2016). This is understandable because there are many intolerance cases in Indonesia.

Historically, intolerance is not a new problem in Indonesia because some reports picture intolerance cases from time to time. Based on the Setara Institute Report 2022, there were 175 types of religious freedom, with 333 cases. The number slightly increased compared to the previous year, which reached 171 types with 318 cases (Dzulfaroh, 2023). The most common type of violation of religious freedom in 2020 was intolerance (Guritno, 2021). The Wahid Institute also notes a gradually increasing trend of intolerance and radicalism by stating that 0.4% of Indonesian citizens have committed radical actions (Siagian, 2020).

Acts of intolerance have sadly occurred among the young generation, and there is a tendency to increase intolerance among them. According to the National Commission of Human Rights study from 2012–2018, the intolerance attitude index has strengthened to more than 50% compared to the previous intolerance index of 20% (Nugraheny, 2019). A survey conducted by the Setara Institute 2016 also showed the potential for intolerance among students. This is proven

by as many as 0.3% of high school students exposed to the ideology of terrorism, and 2.4% of them experienced active intolerance (Riana, 2018).

Moreover, intolerance is identified as a consequence of the digital era (Latipah & Nawawi, 2023), which deals more with social media. Social media gives people more freedom to talk and upload materials freely. The materials could be religious issues, discrimination towards minorities, fanaticism, truth claims, hate speech, or even extremist speech, which are easily accessed. As a result, social or religious conflicts can easily occur. The continuous rise of intolerance cases will tarnish the citizens' harmonious lives, especially harmonious lives among religious communities.

The policy of religious moderation is one of the government's efforts to reduce the high number of intolerance cases in Indonesia. This policy is applied in the real world and the digital space. One of the efforts made to present moderation in the digital space is by increasing digital literacy, such as "ASN Penggerak Moderasi Beragama" (Driving civil servants for religious moderation), as was done by the Ministry of Religious Affairs as the leading sector of religious moderation (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2022). The civil servants are then trained and given the task of being more active in filling and uploading digital spaces with moderate and tolerant religious materials as well as providing correct information to counter hoaxes as one of the challenges of the digital world (Suhardi et al., 2022; Ulfa, 2024). In addition, it is necessary to

increase digital literacy, transparency, and accountability of social media platforms and encourage social media platforms to offer different views (Ulfa, 2024) to minimize polarization of religious views.

Studies on religious moderation among Gen Z are often associated with the digital era, which is highly correlated with the internet and social media. Gen Z is one of the internet-affected groups as they use the internet to support their daily lives (Dumford et al., 2023). One of the impacts of information technology is the creation of exclusion and strengthening of group identity. Nowadays, Gen Z no longer asks religious leaders about doctrines or references, and they prefer to use the Google search engine as their first source instead (Faisal, 2020). This condition causes some problems related to religious moderation among Gen Z. One of the problems is the dissemination of inaccurate or misleading religious information in digital space, which can hinder moderation campaigns and increase interfaith tensions. As a result, Gen Z is often exposed to extremist views on social media, which can trigger polarization and hinder the understanding of religious moderation. Moreover, the existence and activeness of extremist groups in the digital space can influence Gen Z and hinder the understanding of religious moderation. In addition, Gen Z lacks an understanding of how to sort credible information from incredible ones. It can also obstruct the acceptance of religious moderation messages. All of these emphasize the importance of digital space in

strengthening religious moderation as one of the counter-narratives of radicalism.

On the other hand, social media in the digital era can be used as a medium for Gen Z to speak out about religious moderation. One of the religious moderation campaigns through social media is carried out by the Peace Generation (PeaceGen) platform. The organization, founded by Irfan Amalee and Eric Lincoln, promotes 12 peace values that align with the spirit of religious moderation, such as eliminating prejudice, rejecting violence, and understanding conflict, religious differences, gender, and groups. PeaceGen utilizes social media such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, Instagram, and YouTube (Elvinaro & Syarif, 2021).

PeaceGen's research was in line with others, as it is a fact that several studies have discussed the utilization of the internet and social media platforms for religious practices. For instance, in her studies, Campbell mentioned that digital media has affected almost all aspects of human life, including communication, accessing information, sharing ideas, and religious practices (Campbell & Evolvi, 2019; Lövheim & Campbell, 2017). In addition, religious information is more accessible in the digital age, enabling remote participation in practices and communication between like-minded believers (Blondheim & Rosenberg, 2017; Mutia et al., 2024).

Previous studies show that religious moderation insight can be developed through various media, such as internet-based social media, socio-cultural activities, and formal and informal education. However,

the studies above have not examined the potential for religious moderation among Gen Z based on social class, motivation to learn religion, and geographical conditions of villages/cities. This paper tries to fill the gap because there is no study of religious moderation among Gen Z related to these three aspects. Explicitly, this article aims to (1) measure the religious moderation attitude of Gen Z; (2) examine the correlation between religious moderation attitude with social class and motivation to learn religion; (3) describe strategies that can be done to campaign for religious moderation among Gen Z.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Religious moderation is the practice of balancing religious teachings with the recognition of different views to reduce violence and extremism. In Islam, religious moderation aims to be on a moderate path, avoid violence, and encourage dialogue and tolerance (Aslamiyah et al., 2023; Untu, 2023). In Indonesia, religious moderation is important due to its heterogeneity and plurality. This concept is seen as an attempt to find agreement rather than emphasizing differences by balancing personal religious practice and respecting other religions. The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs established four indicators of religious moderation-national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and local cultural accommodation- to evaluate the extent to which religious moderation is implemented (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2019). National commitment is concerned with

accepting national principles, while tolerance includes an open attitude to differences. Anti-violence is associated with rejecting radicalism, and local cultural accommodation means adapting religious practices to local traditions. Religious moderation among Gen Z is influenced by sociological, digital, and ethnic diversity factors (Iswanto et al., 2021; Vukojević, 2020).

Social media plays an important role in influencing the religious attitudes and behaviors of Gen Z. Some platforms, such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, provide space for flexible exploration and expression of beliefs, allowing this generation to access religious information easily. The use of social media encourages them to combine various aspects of religion personally, reflected in social advances and modern technology (Lövheim & Lundmark, 2021). In addition, the platform helps connect religious communities and supports forming a more flexible identity than traditional approaches (Kamarulzaman et al., 2015; Romario, 2022). Some studies show that exposure to diverse religious interpretations on social media can increase tolerance and reduce commitment to traditional religious practices. Gen Z seeks religious knowledge from traditional sources and social media, influenced by the Islamization of public spaces. This generation sees millennials as the new authority on religion (Febriani & Ritonga, 2022; Kertamukti, 2022). While social media can support religious moderation, there is also a risk of radicalization and intolerance (Kholis, 2021).

Several studies discussing the moderation of Gen Z on social media can be classified into at least three categories. First, descriptive studies of the moderation of the younger generation and students, as well as its measurement (Ardi et al., 2021; Sugihartati et al., 2020). Second, studies analyze the factors that strengthen and weaken the moderation of the young generation (Barkah et al., 2023; Budirahayu & Saud, 2021). Third, studies analyze the potential for radicalism and terrorism among youth from the perspectives of conservative and moderate Islamic concepts (Jubba et al., 2022). In addition to exploring the potential use of digital media in strengthening religious moderation among Gen Z, the significance of this article is to present the latest data on the level of religious moderation in Gen Z, which is associated with religious learning motivation and social classes.

Although some studies have addressed religious moderation among the younger generation, particularly related to factors strengthening or weakening moderation, as well as the potential for radicalization among youth, there is still a significant gap in the literature that examines religious moderation among Gen Z, especially in the context of the use of social media as a space for religious exploration. Most existing research focuses on the descriptive measurement of moderation levels or analyzes moderation in the context of conservative and moderate Islam without further exploring the dynamics that occur in the digital space. In addition, no studies have deeply linked the influence of social media

to Gen Z's motivation to learn religion, which is an important factor in shaping their religious attitudes, as well as how social class can affect the level of moderation applied in daily life. Previous research has also not identified how sociological, digital, and ethnic diversity among Gen Z affects their religious moderation attitudes, especially in a high-plurality country such as Indonesia. Therefore, this study is important to fill in this gap by presenting up-to-date data examining the relationship between religious moderation, religious learning motivation, and socio-economic factors among Gen Z, as well as exploring the potential of social media in strengthening or reducing religious moderation among Gen Z.

METHODS

This research used a quantitative approach to describe the attitude of religious moderation among Gen Z in 2021. The research population was adolescents aged 15-19 years who were still studying at the *madrasah aliyah* (Islamic senior high school level) in three districts in Central Java. *Madrasah aliyah* students were chosen considering research results that state that students in homogeneous educational and social environments tend to show low tolerance toward alienated groups (Ardi et al., 2021). Systematic random sampling was applied, and 179 research respondents were obtained from three regions representing rural and urban areas, with a total population of 6,624 students. The selection of 179 respondents was determined to provide an accurate estimate with an error

rate of 7.4%. This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, so it did not allow for strict sampling because most students were studying from home. In some studies, especially in certain conditions, heterogeneous populations, and varied variables, this research chose more than a 5% error margin because of limitations in controlling these variables. However, this study is still guided by error margin determination, which has to be under 10% of the prevalence because more errors can invalidate the study (Mohapatra & Mishra, 2020). The error margin of this study is below 10%, which is the maximum tolerable error rate in social research. If the error rate is to be expanded, for example, to 10%, then the sample size can be smaller (Gomm, 2008).

The next step was determining the students who became the research samples using systematic random sampling. The determination of respondents is preceded by collecting the names of all students. After the data of all students' names was obtained, the next step was determining the sample interval using $k = N / n$, where k is the sample interval, N is the population, and n is the number of samples. N is the population at one school, while n is the number of samples determined at each school, which is 30 students. The description of respondents can be seen in Table 1.

This study measured three variables: religious moderation, religious learning motivation, and social class. The three variables were also measured based on the

Table 1
Description of research respondents

Aspect	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	78	43.6%
Female	101	56.4%
Region		
Rural	60	33.5
Urban	119	66.5
Father's educational background		
None/SD/MI equivalent	62	34.6
SMP/MTs equivalent	22	12.3
SMA/SMK/MA equivalent	66	36.9
Diploma/S1/S2/S3	29	16.2
Mother's educational background		
None/SD/MI equivalent	63	35.2
SMP/MTs equivalent	44	24.6
SMA/SMK/MA equivalent	44	24.6
Diploma/S1/S2/S3	28	15.6
Monthly Parents' Income		
Less than IDR 1.7 million	86	48.0
IDR 1.71 million–2.7 million	44	24.6
IDR 2.71 million–3.7 million	26	14.5
More than IRD 3.7 million	33	12.9

respondents' presence in rural and urban areas. The attitude of religious moderation was derived from three indicators, namely (1) tolerance, (2) national commitment, and (3) anti-violence. The indicator of accommodating local culture was not studied with the assumption that Gen Z lacks an understanding of local traditions because of a decrease in love of culture and nationalism due to globalization (Agustin, 2011). Religious learning motivation variables were derived from three indicators: (1) desires and needs to learn religion, (2) expectations and appreciation of learning religion, and (3) activities and conducive environment for learning religion. The social class variable was derived from two indicators: parents' education and parents' income.

The scale used in the research instrument was a Likert scale of 1 to 4, where 1 represents the lowest score, and 4 represents the highest score. For the religious moderation attitude of Gen Z, the results of filling out questionnaires by respondents were classified into three categories, namely 1.00–2.00 (low), 2.01–3.00 (medium), and 3.01–4.00 (high). Furthermore, the instrument score calculation results were analyzed descriptively and discussed with relevant theories and results of previous studies.

Instrument validity tests have been carried out using expert validity tests. The expert validity test was carried out by four experts in their fields, who then calculated the Aiken coefficient as follows (Ulfah et al., 2020):

$$V = \sum \frac{s}{[n(c - 1)]}$$

where $s = r - Lo$; Lo is the lowest validity assessment number; c is the highest validity assessment number; r is the number given by the expert.

Based on this formula, the Aiken coefficient on each instrument item lies in the interval of 0.75 - 1.00. This means that all instrument items can be declared valid. The construct validity test was conducted through a field trial of 60 students, with the results that most of the tested items were valid, and a small part was revised. The reliability test was done using the SPSS 25.0 program, and Cronbach's Alpha coefficient score was obtained at 0.795. This score shows that the instrument has generally met the reliability requirements.

The data analysis used was descriptive quantitative analysis and correlation analysis. Descriptive analysis was conducted by calculating the average score on each variable, while correlation analysis was obtained by calculating the correlation between variables. Before conducting the analysis, coding and data cleaning were carried out based on the results of the questionnaire filled out by respondents.

This study has met the ethical procedures and obtained permission from the school principal and research participants. The research instruments were addressed to people of legal age. The authors stated that they informed the participants that their anonymity and confidentiality would be guaranteed and that the data obtained would be used for scientific purposes, in addition to the absence of promised variables that could lead to the identification of participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religious moderation among Gen Z is very interesting to explore because the generation has two unique characteristics: a global social circle and a willingness to change the world (Wilson, 2021). These two characteristics show that Gen Z has enormous potential in determining changes in world civilization. Currently, Gen Z is beginning to dominate the world's population. The results of the 2020 census noted that Indonesia's population is dominated by Gen Z, the population group born in 1997–2012, or estimated to be 8–23 years old (Central Bureau of Statistics & Ministry of Home Affairs, 2021). Gen Z, as digital natives, plays a very strategic role in campaigning for religious moderation, a government program to create social harmonization and balance of social life.

Religious Moderation Among Gen Z

The Indonesian population, in which young people dominate, is a strategic opportunity to sow the seeds of religious moderation among young people, as well as to make them agents of religious moderation. The positive characteristics of Gen Z include being multifaceted (can do several jobs at a time), expert and familiar with gadgets and technology, critical, broadly communicative, easy to understand and appreciate the differences between other cultures (Anna & Ismail, 2023; Suhandiah et al., 2022) are the good base to implement the program among them.

The results of this study showed that Gen Z's religious moderation attitudes

scored 2.92, or in the “moderate” category. Most of them are in this category, reaching 60.3%, while those with high moderation attitudes reach 38.5%, and low moderation attitudes are only 1.2%.

In terms of the national commitment indicator, the result of this study showed that most respondents (79.33%) agreed and strongly agreed that Pancasila is in line with Islamic teachings. In terms of tolerance indicators, this study showed that 84.92% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that religious differences are not obstacles in making friends, and 84.35% agreed and strongly agreed that they should not force others to believe in the same religion as theirs. In addition, on the indicator of anti-violence, 73.19% of respondents agreed that destroying places of worship of other religions is not justified. Thus, most research respondents have moderate religious attitudes.

The description of the religious moderation, religious learning motivation, and social class of Gen Z is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2 also provides information that Gen Z's learning motivation is in the “high” category, with an average score of 3.19. Meanwhile, in terms of social class, 179 Gen Z students who became the research sample came from “middle” social class families, as shown by the average score of 2.16. The existence of Gen Z, the majority of whom come from a lower social class, is indicated by the fact that most of their parents earn less than 1.7 million per month, reaching 48.0%. When it comes to parents' educational

Table 2

Religious moderation, religious learning motivation, and social class of Gen Z

Variables	Indicators	Average indicator score	Average variable score
Religious moderation	Tolerance	3.20	2.92 (Moderate)
	National commitment	2.61	
	Anti-violence	2.60	
Religious learning motivation	Desire and need to learn religion	3.25	3.19 (High)
	Expectations and rewards of learning religion	3.26	
	Activities and environment conducive to religious learning	2.52	
Social class	Parents' educational background	2.28	2.16 (Moderate)
	Monthly Parents' income	1.92	

background, the majority have low education, i.e., elementary school graduates or even unschooled parents, reaching more than 34%. Similarly, when it comes to parents' occupations, most of them work as laborers, farmers, fishermen, and entrepreneurs, and most of their mothers are housewives.

The results show that a limited number of Gen Z have low religious moderation attitudes, which is only 1.2%. Even though it is small, the potential for low religious moderation in Gen Z needs to be addressed properly. The low attitude of Gen Z's religious moderation is indicated by their statement relating to religious tolerance, such as "If my friend who has a different religion/belief is sick, I do not want to visit him," there are 6.15% of the respondents "agreed" to the statement. Also, 15.08% of respondents stated "agree" with the statement "different religion/belief is an obstacle in making friends." In addition, 10.06% of the respondents did not agree to live with neighbors from different religions, and 6.71% are not willing to have friends from different religions.

In terms of the indicator of national commitment, several respondents' answers indicate their attitude toward religious moderation is still low because 21.78% of them agreed with the statement "salutation to the Indonesian flag is forbidden to do." There are 20.67% of Gen Z who "did not agree" with the statement "Pancasila as the state ideology of the Republic of Indonesia is in line with Islamic teachings." Meanwhile, there were 26.81% of the respondents "disagreed" with the statement "the act of destroying worshipping places of other religion followers is not justified." This last statement is one of the anti-violence indicators.

Correlation of Religious Moderation Attitude with Social Class and Religious Learning Motivation

Gen Z, which exists in the digital era, has implications for the closeness of their lives to the digital world. They can get a variety of knowledge easily through internet searches, like knowledge about religious moderation insights. Therefore,

digital *da'wa* is considered a solution to increasing the understanding of religious moderation and has given a new color to the world of *da'wa*, especially *da'wa* with Gen Z segmentation. The close relationship between the digital world and Gen Z is seen as a great opportunity for Islamic *da'wa* to support the importance of religious moderation for Gen Z (Rumata et al., 2021).

The potential for religious moderation, which is still low among Gen Z, should be a common concern for all parties, including the family, community, educational institutions, and even government elements. How this attitude emerges is supposed to be anticipated from the beginning before it moves in a more extreme direction. This paper correlates religious moderation attitudes with social class and religious learning motivation among Gen Z. This is based on several studies that stated that economic level affects a person's tolerance attitude (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017; Yusuf et al., 2019). However, higher individual income and educational attainment are associated with greater religious tolerance (Yusuf et al., 2019), and respondents with middle economic status tend to be 1,070 times more likely to be quite tolerant of other religious activities (Ministry of Education and

Culture, 2017). By calculating the product-moment correlation, the correlation value between the three variables is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 provides information that Gen Z's religious moderation has a positive but weak correlation with social class status and religious learning motivation. This is indicated by the correlation value between religious moderation and religious learning motivation of only 0.143 and the correlation between religious moderation and social class of only 0.190. Despite having a low correlation, the Sig. (2-tailed) shows that social class has a significant correlation with religious moderation. However, when viewed from the Sig. (2-tailed), it shows that religious moderation has a significant correlation with social class. Thus, the religious moderation attitudes of Gen Z are more influenced by other factors besides religious learning motivation and social class.

A test that examines the influence of two independent variables (religious motivation and social class) on the dependent variable of religious moderation attitude will yield consistent results. The results of the regression test are in Table 4.

Based on the analysis in Table 4, it is shown that religious motivation and social

Table 3
Correlation of religious moderation attitudes, social class, and religious learning motivation

		Religious learning motivation	Social class	Religious moderation
Religious Moderation	Pearson Correlation	0.143	0.190*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.056	0.011	
	N	179	179	179

Table 4
Multiple linear regression analysis

	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F	R Square
Regression	2	1.222	0.611	4.584	0.011	0.095
Residual	176	23.467	0.133			
Total	178	24.689				

class variables have a significant influence on Gen Z's religious moderation attitude. This is indicated by the Significance F value of 0.011 (less than the score of α 0.05). However, the contribution given by religious learning motivation and social class toward religious moderation attitude is relatively small; it can be seen from the R score, which only reaches 4.95%. Social class has a weak correlation with religious moderation attitudes because anyone from any social class can get the same access to education that emphasizes tolerance and inclusiveness, as well as media that promotes cross-cultural understanding. Besides that, a moderation attitude is often formed through direct interaction with people from different backgrounds, which are not limited to one particular social class. As a result, religious moderation attitude is more related to individual experiences and social environment than one's economic status or social class. At the same time, the motivation to learn religion is often based on dogmatic understandings that can hinder tolerance of other religions and beliefs.

The weak influence of religious learning motivation and social class on religious moderation is caused by several more dominant factors, such as the recognition of diverse beliefs, effective communication systems, historical experience, and the

implementation of systematic and planned measures to foster tolerance (Mahmud, 2022). In addition, peer literacy and digital literacy can also improve religious moderation by providing students with critical thinking skills and access to diverse perspectives. Understanding and tolerance in a multicultural society can be fostered through the literation of digital libraries, social media literacy, literacy through webinars, and literacy through scientific papers (Nyanasuryanadi et al., 2023).

Previous studies have discussed factors influencing religious moderation, such as religiosity, demography, education, and access to information. Studies show that religiosity has a positive impact on religious moderation, with factors such as intellectuality, ideology, and religious practice supporting moderate religious views (Subchi et al., 2022). Other highly influencing factors in religious tolerance are family education, religious affiliation, ethnic affiliation, and communication level among communities (Matevski & Matevska, 2021). Other research suggested that religious tolerance is more influenced by self-confidence, self-worth, and self-acceptance. These three factors allow a person to see the uniqueness and equality of others through the prism of their individuality (Dudin et al., 2018).

A study also stated that parents' income has a negative correlation with religious moderation. This means that increasing parents' income will reduce religious moderation. In Indonesia today, many upper economic classes prefer fundamentalist religious understanding. They send their children to inclusive schools that provide fundamentalist-based religious teachings (Subchi et al., 2022). In addition to parents' income, gender contributes considerably to religious moderation in the aspect of tolerance. One study showed that female students had lower scores on religious tolerance than other students. Religious tolerance and positive attitudes toward gender equality are highly correlated (Nazar et al., 2017).

In terms of motivation to learn religion, the findings of this study corroborate the results of previous studies, which said that students' religious motivation affects their tolerance attitudes if they learn religion (Sa'diyah, 2015). Learning about religion is important to avoid the emergence of excessive religious fundamentalism, which can create exclusivity among students. A study found that religious fundamentalism and collective narcissism make individuals less likely to show interfaith contact. However, good religious beliefs and meta-religious support encourage interfaith contact (Ardi & Budiarti, 2020).

Some studies highlighted the role of education in strengthening religious moderation. Mahsusi (2023) found that students carrying out learning activities could identify and understand the values

of religious moderation. Moderate and inclusive Islamic education plays an important role in eradicating extremism and encouraging religious moderation (Mughtar et al., 2022), while Hook et al. (2017) highlighted the importance of intellectual humility as a key component of religious learning motivation to foster religious tolerance. Therefore, it is important to internalize the religious moderation values in education to encourage religious tolerance attitudes (Mufi et al., 2023). These studies collectively show that religious learning motivation can be important in encouraging religious moderation.

Education has a strong influence on religious tolerance. People with higher education levels tend to be more tolerant than younger people with lower education levels (Wang & Uecker, 2017). Religious moderation through education occupies a very strategic position, considering that most Gen Z are teenagers of active school age. Formal education can be a medium of religious moderation education for Gen Z, considering that the learning space in formal education is structured, systemic, and easy to evaluate. In addition, formal and informal education can also be used as media for religious moderation education for the younger generation because these two educational paths are built on public awareness and are integrated into the community so that they are effective in stemming radical religious beliefs which are easily accessible and consumed by the community (Naj'ma & Bakri, 2021). Religious moderation

education can be internalized through curriculum development full of insights into multiculturalism (Bislimi & Buleshkaj, 2022; Tondok et al., 2022).

This article highlights its different findings from previous studies. In addition to providing information about the religious moderation level of Gen Z, which is at the “medium” level, this study also found the potential for immoderate attitudes in Gen Z. This is shown by the finding that there is still a small percentage of respondents who considered religious differences as an obstacle in making friendships. A small percentage of respondents also justified the destruction of worshipping places of other religions as a right action. Since there is still the potential for intolerance in Gen Z, it is necessary to strengthen religious moderation among them by utilizing digital space.

This study makes a significant theoretical contribution to understanding religious moderation among Gen Z, especially in Indonesia, by highlighting the complexity of factors that shape their religious tolerance attitudes. The main finding shows that although most respondents express a moderate religious attitude, there is still intolerance potential that needs to be noted. This research enriches religious moderation literature by confirming that moderation attitude is not only influenced by economic factors or motivation to study religion but also by personal experiences and inclusive social interaction. By identifying some indicators, namely national commitment, tolerance, and anti-violence, this study supports the theory that religious moderation

is a social construction that develops through interpersonal interaction and an open social environment. This finding corroborates the theory that external factors (such as digital literacy and intercultural experiences) play a greater role in shaping religious moderation attitudes among Gen Z than socio-economic status or parental educational background.

Utilization of Digital Space in Strengthening Religious Moderation of Gen Z

Gen Z is the largest generation in Indonesia, reaching 27.94% of the total population. It is an asset for the Indonesian people to voice religious moderation, not only in Indonesia but also in the world. Giving Gen Z the opportunity to express moderate religious attitudes is certainly adapted to their soul and character. Understanding their spirit and character is important to making them agents of religious moderation.

Francis and Hoefel (2018) categorized Gen Z into four main characters. First, Gen Z is “the undefined ID” that respects everyone’s expression without giving a specific label. Gen Z is an open-minded generation. Second, Gen Z is “communaholic” and inclusive, and they like utilizing advanced technology to expand benefits. Third, Gen Z is “the dialoguer.” They believe that dialogue as a sort of communication is important in conflict resolution. Fourth, Gen Z is “realistic;” they are more realistic and analytical in decision-making (Purwaningrum, 2021). With these four main characteristics, it is possible to make Gen Z agents of religious moderation.

Gen Z as “the comunaholic” is closely related to how they are close to and can hardly be separated from the world of technology. Pew Research Center (2022) identified Gen Z as the dominant social media users (as cited by Nawi et al., 2023). Technological sophistication in the industrial era 4.0 is mostly used by the millennial generation and Gen Z/post-millennial generation (Antaufhan & Isnaini, 2023; Bayti & Ariani, 2020). Gen Z’s “dependence” on digital devices is what allows them the opportunity to express moderate religion in the digital space. The 2018 Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (2019) survey found that the majority of Gen Z are internet users. If it is classified by age, internet users from Gen Z aged 10–14 years are 66.2%, those aged 15–19 years are 91%, and those aged 20–24 years are 88.5%.

Opportunities for moderate religious expression for Gen Z are increasingly open because most have gadgets. This research also shows that as many as 94.4% of the 179 respondents who belong to Gen Z have smartphones, and 81.6% of them state that they had no problem with internet quotas. To anticipate the entry of radicalism ideology, it needs to embed moderate religious values in digital content, which has become a trending topic for Gen Z. Content about the meaning of national commitment, religious tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation to local culture should be massively distributed. Therefore, in their study, Susilawati et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of digital literacy in Islamic

religious education, especially in the context of Gen Z’s dependence on social media. This is an important strategy because Gen Z seeks religious knowledge through traditional sources and social media, which have been deeply influenced by the Islamization of public spheres (Romario, 2022).

Several groups have been leading the religious moderation movement in the digital world. For instance, the number of Islamic preachers who have switched from conventional *da’wa* media to digital *da’wa* media through social media has attracted sympathy and interest from netizens and succeeded in embracing Gen Z, such as Ustaz Abdul Somad, Khalid Basalamah, Hanan Attaki, Ustaz Adi Hidayat, Gus Baha, Gus Muwafiq, and Gus Miftah whose lectures can be accessed directly by the audience on social media and the internet (Kholis, 2021). Virtual *da’wa*, easily accessible without space and time constraints, has attracted people, especially Gen Z, whose daily lives are very close to social media and the internet. The strategy of internalizing religious moderation content in virtual *da’wa* can be done by packaging *da’wa* messages in the digital era, digitizing *da’wa* through websites, making *da’wa* videos in the digital era, and moderating *da’wa* in the form of articles (Sutrisno, 2020).

Peace Generation (PeaceGen) is one of the social media platforms that campaigns for religious tolerance. The values of peace developed through this platform are very relevant to religious moderation, such as opposing violence and the values of

religious diversity. PeaceGen leverages social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and blogs (Elvinaro & Syarif, 2021). More platforms that promote peace and religious moderation need to be developed. The government can provide opportunities for young talents to work and innovate to create a platform for religious moderation through social media to make the religious moderation movement even more massive.

The study results indicate that Gen Z uses various social media platforms, including YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp, as sources for religious learning. Gen Z's preference for social media as a source of religious learning places YouTube (79.89%), WhatsApp (67.60%), and Instagram (58.10%) as the most accessed platforms. Most of them also admitted to listening to or watching religious *da'wa* through YouTube (83.24%), Instagram (57.54%), and WhatsApp (37.99%). This result indicates that Gen Z has utilized digital space as a religious learning source. The use of this digital platform is one of the positive impacts of the development of communication technology on religious practices, namely, to express their "religious" identity and find religious groups with one vision (Campbell, 2016; Golan, 2023).

Gen Z utilizes digital space to stay connected with their same-minded friends, forming a bubble of religious content that is homogeneous in faith but diverse in other aspects (Novak et al., 2022). For example, Instagram provides a good

discussion platform and results in a better understanding of religious problems in Indonesia. Some Instagram accounts, such as @milenialislami.id, @friends_islami, @husein_hadar, @ideclare_id, and @yerry_pattinasarany, provide religious moderation messages that persuade to kindness and truth. Instagram is a social media platform that suits Gen Z's lifestyle, making it easier for the wisdom values of religious moderation to be implemented in their discussion practice and media activity (Kertamuksi, 2022). Besides that, *da'wa* content in TikTok offers advantages, including affordability, creativity in delivering messages, high engagement rates, and strengthening religious identity (Aini et al., 2023). By creating and sharing contents that emphasize humanistic values and positive perception, Gen Z can foster a more tolerant religious outlook (Kertamuksi, 2022).

As a generation born and raised in the internet era, Gen Z is used to solving fast-paced problems with one-click solutions. By entering a question in a search engine, hundreds or even thousands of answers can be obtained, including from social media (Bencsik et al., 2016). With the characteristics of Gen Z, which is instant and easily accepts influences from outside, it is necessary to use social media for counter-radicalism narrative campaigns. Religious moderation campaigns through social media can work as a counter-narrative to radicalism, considering that digital space is being used for radical ideas and propaganda. Research shows that within a year (2015–

2016), 106,000 pro-ISIS activists used social media as a propaganda tool, and 166 groups in social media were used to build a network (Nuruzzaman, 2018). Some religious moderation strengthening efforts in social media include collaboration with influencers, producing interactive podcasts on YouTube, making religious moderation applications based on Play Store, and several other innovations (Daud & Bafadhal, 2023). A counter-narrative of radicalism through religious moderation content in social media has been done massively. For example, when we write #moderasiberagama on Instagram, we will find 86.5 thousand posts and more than 50 tags that use the word religious moderation. This proves that through platforms such as Instagram, Gen Z shares content that persuades open discussion, promotes interfaith understanding, and highlights the importance of respecting differences. Gen Z has successfully made social media a powerful tool for supporting a more inclusive and peaceful religious life.

Furthermore, several young Indonesian preachers promote religious moderation to young audiences, including Gen Z, through social media platforms. Some of them are Habib Husein Ja'far Al Hadar (Islamic preacher), Pastor Steve Marcel (Christian preacher), and Bhante Dhirapuñño (Buddha monk). Besides, as preachers, they are Indonesian influencers with hundreds of thousands to millions of followers on their official social media accounts. The netizens have received their posts well, as reflected in the number of views, comments, and likes. In addition, these three people have

made videos together and posted them on their respective social media accounts, as well as worked in collaboration with other influencers like Ria Ricis, Jirayut, and Desta.

Habib Husein Ja'far Al Hadar is actively engaged with his audiences through his official accounts. His official TikTok account has 3.2 million followers and 79 million likes. Most of his uploaded videos received positive feedback from the netizens. For instance, a video with the title "clash of religions" and the caption "*Meski tanganmu patah, ia tak boleh sampai mematahkan semangatmu utk merangkul yg berbeda utk bersama*" (Even if your hand is broken, it should not break your spirit to embrace the different to be together; Ja'far, 2024) posted on 12 October 2024, has 2.3 million views, 4,720 comments, 491,700 likes, and 18,600 saved as favorite videos. This short video presents figures of diverse religions, including pastor Steve Marcel and Bhante Dhirapuñño, and the message in the content asks the audience to respect religious differences.

Steve Marcel has actively posted videos on his social media platforms that promote tolerance and religious moderation. His official Instagram account @STEVEMARCEL has 459,000 followers. Meanwhile, his official TikTok account has 389,200 followers and 4.8 million likes. One of his posts, "New Agent for the New War," has 3.4 million views, 255,000 likes, and 4,104 comments (Marcel, 2024). In this video, Steve Marcel and Ria Ricis, another prominent influencer, talk about how people

prepare to buy clothes before celebrating Eid Al Fitr; this implies that non-Muslims are also happy to welcome Eid.

The official IG account of Bhante Dhirapuñño has 3,124 posts and 111,000 followers. One of his uploaded photo with the title “Nyalakan lilin di vihara X, Nyalakan lilin di gereja V”, and with a caption “*Kadangkala menyalakan penerangan gak harus di rumah sendiri, Ketika rumah tetangga butuh penerangan dan kita bisa, maka lakukan, gak ada salahnya kan???*” (Sometimes turning on the lights does not have to be done in your own house. When your neighbor’s house needs lighting, and we can then do it, there is nothing wrong with that, right?) (Dhirapuñño, 2024) received 18,000 likes, 325 comments, and 338 reposted. This message implies that we should help others regardless of their religious backgrounds.

Algorithms that emphasize content popularity and the speed of information often cause religious moderation discussions to become fragmented and limited to slogans or short statements. These algorithms can strengthen religious moderation narration by delivering tolerance and inclusivity messages, but they can also exacerbate polarization if they highlight extremist or controversial content. A study analyzed religious moderation tweets on Twitter from April 2022 to March 2023. There were 16,407 tweets that were posted about religious moderation, of which 62% had a negative sentiment. This negative sentiment reflects critical views, criticism, or rejection of religious moderation. The study also

concluded that echo chambers and social media algorithms stimulate liberal people to become more liberal and radical/extreme ones to become more radical and extreme (Achfandhy et al., 2023).

This study provides a significant theoretical contribution to understanding the role of digital space in strengthening religious moderation among Gen Z. As a generation highly connected to digital technology; Gen Z also utilizes various social media platforms to explore and express moderate religious values. This study corroborates the theory that stated digital space, with its interactive and rapid nature in disseminating information, can effectively promote religious moderation, especially if the content prioritizes some values, such as tolerance, peace, and respect for diversity. By identifying Gen Z behavior, which tends to use social media such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok in searching for religious learning, this study expands our understanding of the religious moderation dynamics in the digital era. Moreover, this study highlights the importance of digital literacy and collaboration between preachers and influencers in effectively disseminating religious moderation messages, creating a counter-narrative to the growing online radicalization.

CONCLUSION

The attitude of Gen Z is one of the crucial elements for achieving religious moderation in Indonesia’s multicultural society due to their significant proportion of the population, as it is a fact that there are several intolerant

actions occurring in the country. The results of this study show that Gen Z's religious learning motivation is at a high level, while their religious moderation attitude is at a medium level. Although their religious learning motivation is high, this does not necessarily mean they have a stronger religious moderation attitude. On the other hand, social class, which is measured through the educational background and monthly salary of Gen Z parents, is at a medium level, and the score is lower and the religious moderation attitude. It means that social class has a weak correlation with religious moderation attitudes. This indicates that other factors, such as personal education and experiences, may influence one's religious moderation attitude more.

As digital natives born in an era of widespread technology and information, Gen Z is the right audience for religious moderation campaigns on digital platforms. Gen Z utilizes social media as a religious learning source significantly, with platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp being the top three choices. They use social media not only to access religious content but also to participate in discussions that promote religious moderation and reject radicalism. However, although social media offers great potential to support religious moderation campaigns, there are challenges, such as the fragmentation of messages and the polarization risk due to algorithms that amplify extremist content. As such, it is important to manage social media usage to support campaigns of inclusivity and tolerant values among Gen Z.

Implications for Theory and Practice

This study has important implications regarding the utilization of digital platforms to promote religious moderation among Gen Z, with a focus on interfaith tolerance as a counter-narrative to extremism. The findings provide a theoretical contribution to understanding Gen Z's religious moderation attitudes in digital space and practical implications for policymakers and social media users. The religious moderation campaign in digital space needs to be arranged and planned effectively to increase religious learning motivation and promote moderation values through engaging content.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Study

This study has limitations related to the limited number of participants, so it does not generally represent the Central Java population. Future studies should involve a wider range of respondents and use a mixed-method approach, as well as more representative sampling techniques, such as the stratified sampling technique. Future research also needs to explore the use of digital platforms by the young generation in supporting religious activity and analyze which platforms are most effective in delivering religious moderation messages. In addition, more studies are needed on the role of algorithms in disseminating religious moderation content and how policy intervention or platform design can reduce polarization and the spread of extremism. Longitudinal studies that

monitor changes in religious moderation attitudes among Gen Z related to digital campaigns are also needed to evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy.

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