



The TikTokization of Islamic Knowledge: Transforming Religious Education and Digital Authority among Generation Z in Aceh

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines the TikTokization of Islamic knowledge among Generation Z in Aceh, focusing on how TikTok is experienced as an alternative space for religious learning and how religious authority is negotiated in the digital environment. This qualitative study employed a phenomenological approach involving 12 Generation Z informants in Aceh, including school students, university students, young workers, santri, and Islamic boarding school alumni. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews and digital observation, while relevant TikTok content was documented as supporting data. Data were analyzed thematically through coding, categorization, comparison, and triangulation. The findings suggest that participants increasingly encounter TikTok as an additional source of Islamic knowledge beyond established educational settings. The short-form and algorithmically distributed nature of TikTok content appears to encourage fragmented, personalized, and need-based patterns of religious learning, conceptualized in this study as Micro Islamic Education. The findings also indicate that participants' perceptions of religious authority are shaped by the interaction of institutional scholarly legitimacy, digital popularity, audience engagement, and algorithmic visibility. The study is limited to 12 purposively selected Generation Z participants in Aceh and does not examine the long-term effects of TikTok-based religious learning. The study highlights the importance of strengthening digital religious literacy and developing credible, contextual, and youth-oriented Islamic content. Its originality lies in proposing TikTok zed Islamic Knowledge and Micro Islamic Education as concepts for understanding emerging patterns of digital religious learning and authority

Introduction

The rapid expansion of TikTok has created a significant transformation in the way Generation Z accesses and engages with Islamic knowledge. Originally associated primarily with entertainment, TikTok has increasingly become a digital space where religious messages concerning worship, morality, Islamic law, and everyday life are produced and consumed through short-form videos. This transformation is particularly crucial to examine because the platform's algorithm does not merely facilitate access to information but actively shapes what users repeatedly encounter, watch, share, and potentially recognize as relevant religious knowledge (Mariah et al., 2023). For Generation Z in Aceh, this development introduces a new educational environment alongside established Islamic institutions such as families, schools, *dayah*, and religious study groups (Hakim, 2024). The issue becomes increasingly significant because the accessibility and speed of algorithmically distributed content may transform not only the source of Islamic knowledge but also the way religious teachings are understood and internalized (Dewantri et al., 2023). Consequently, TikTokization represents more than a technological shift in the medium of Islamic communication; it potentially signals a transformation in the structure of religious education and the formation of religious authority in the digital era.

Previous studies have demonstrated the growing importance of social media in the circulation of Islamic knowledge and religious communication. Research on digital *da'wah* has shown that social media enables religious messages to reach younger audiences through interactive, visual, and accessible forms of communication, while studies of digital religion

have emphasized the changing relationship between media technology and religious authority (Chalim et al., 2025; Islamy et al., 2024; Sari et al., 2025). Theoretically, the mediatization of religion suggests that religious communication increasingly adapts to the logic and characteristics of media, whereas studies on digital religious authority demonstrate that visibility, popularity, interaction, and audience engagement can contribute to the recognition of religious actors (Hjarvard, 2008; Hjarvard, 2008; Lövheim, 2020). However, existing studies tend to examine digital *da'wah*, online religious learning, and religious influencers as separate phenomena (Ding et al., 2025). Limited attention has been given to the interconnected transformation through which TikTok simultaneously changes the source of Islamic knowledge, fragments religious learning into short and personalized units of information, and reconstructs the basis upon which religious authority is recognized. This limitation reveals the need to examine the phenomenon through the concept of TikTokization of Islamic Knowledge, particularly in Aceh, where institutional Islamic education and the authority of ulama and *dayah* remain significant within social and religious life.

From an educational perspective, TikTokization of Islamic knowledge can also be understood as a form of informal and digitally mediated learning that occurs beyond the boundaries of formal Islamic educational institutions (Askar et al., 2025). Informal learning enables learners to acquire knowledge through everyday interactions, self-directed exploration, and participation in digital environments, while microlearning emphasizes the delivery and acquisition of knowledge through short, focused, and easily accessible learning units. In the context of TikTok, these characteristics converge as Generation Z encounters Islamic teachings through brief videos that can be repeatedly viewed, selectively followed, shared, and incorporated into everyday learning practices (Hakim et al., 2024). However, the accessibility of micro-content does not necessarily guarantee comprehensive or accurate understanding. Digital literacy therefore becomes essential because learners need to evaluate the credibility of religious sources, distinguish authoritative interpretations from popular opinions, and critically interpret algorithmically selected content (Rahmah et al., 2025). Although previous research has discussed informal digital learning, microlearning, and digital literacy in educational contexts, these perspectives have rarely been integrated into the study of Islamic knowledge on TikTok, particularly in relation to the transformation of religious authority (Usmani, 2024). This study addresses this gap by conceptualizing TikTokization as an educational process in which informal learning, microlearning, and digital literacy intersect with algorithmic visibility and changing forms of religious legitimacy.

Based on the background and literature review above, the problem of this study can be formulated as follows: How does TikTok transform the ways Generation Z in Aceh obtains, understands, and internalizes Islamic knowledge? To address this central problem, the study examines three interconnected dimensions: the shift of TikTok from an entertainment platform to an alternative source of Islamic knowledge, the fragmentation and microization of Islamic knowledge through short-form video content, and the reconstruction of religious authority through the interaction between institutional religious legitimacy, digital popularity, audience engagement, and algorithmic visibility.

Based on the formulation of the problem, this study aims to analyze the phenomenon of TikTokization of Islamic Knowledge among Generation Z in Aceh. Specifically, the study seeks to explain the transformation of TikTok into an alternative space for Islamic education, examine how short-form and algorithmically distributed content contributes to the fragmentation and microization of religious knowledge, and analyze the changing configuration of religious authority between institutional Islamic actors and digital religious communicators. The study is expected to contribute to the development of Islamic communication and digital religious education by providing an empirical understanding of how platform-based communication reshapes the processes through which Islamic knowledge is accessed, interpreted, and legitimated in the digital era.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological study design to understand Generation Z's experiences in acquiring, understanding, and internalizing Islamic knowledge through TikTok (Rahmah, Hakim, Asyifa, et al., 2024). This approach was used because the research focuses on the changing meanings and experiences of users in utilizing TikTok, which was previously predominantly an entertainment medium, into an alternative space for acquiring religious knowledge. The study was conducted in Aceh in 2026, involving 10-12 Generation Z informants who were purposively selected based on the intensity of TikTok use and experience accessing Islamic content. Informants consisted of schoolchildren, students, Generation Z who were not currently pursuing higher education or already working, Islamic boarding school students (*santri*), and alumni of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren/dayah*). This diversity of backgrounds

was used to compare the experiences of users who received Islamic education institutionally with those who interacted more with religious knowledge through digital spaces.

A total of 12 informants were recruited through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: Generation Z residents of Aceh, active TikTok users, regular exposure to Islamic content, and willingness to describe their experiences in detail. Recruitment was conducted through personal networks and referrals from initial participants until the targeted sample was reached. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted individually, lasting approximately 45-60 minutes, and focused on participants' experiences of accessing, interpreting, evaluating, and internalizing Islamic content on TikTok. Digital observation was conducted by examining participants' reported interactions with Islamic content and, with their consent, relevant TikTok content, including FYP recommendations, followed accounts, videos, comments, and engagement patterns. The phenomenological analysis focused on identifying the meaning participants attributed to these experiences rather than merely describing their media-use behavior. Ethical procedures included informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymization of participant identities, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Data collection and analysis were conducted iteratively, with recurring experiences compared across participants to identify the essential meanings of TikTok-mediated Islamic learning and religious authority.

The primary data in this study were obtained through in-depth interviews and digital observations with 12 Generation Z informants in Aceh, consisting of schoolchildren, university students, young workers, Islamic boarding school (*pesantren/dayah*) alumni. The interviews were conducted to explore the informants' experiences using TikTok, their patterns of acquiring and understanding Islamic knowledge, and their views on sources of religious authority. Meanwhile, observations were conducted to examine the informants' TikTok usage patterns and their experiences interacting with religious content in the digital space (Nurhakim, 2023).

Secondary data was obtained through documentation of TikTok content relevant to the informants' experiences and religious references, including videos, narratives or *captions*, *hashtags*, number of interactions, comments, the *For You Page* (FYP) feature, and the profiles of creators or Islamic preaching accounts that the informants referred to (Fernando et al., 2023). This documentation was used to complement and confirm data from interviews and observations, particularly in analyzing three main phenomena: TikTok's shift from entertainment media to a source of Islamic knowledge, the fragmentation and microization of Islamic knowledge in short video formats, and the reconstruction of religious authority from institutional clerics to digital authority.

Data were analyzed thematically through the stages of data reduction, coding, categorization, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Interviews, digital observations, and TikTok documentation were triangulated to identify consistent patterns across informants and data sources (Larasati & Abdullah, 2023). The analysis then focused on the relationship between user experience and platform-based communication characteristics, specifically algorithmic personalization, short video formats, digital interactions, popularity, and content visibility. This process yielded three main themes that serve as the basis for the discussion on the TikTokization of Islamic knowledge among Generation Z in Aceh.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study are based on interviews with 12 Generation Z informants in Aceh who have diverse backgrounds, including students, university students, non-student or working Generation Z, Islamic boarding school (*pesantren/dayah*), and Islamic boarding school (*pesantren/dayah*). The diverse characteristics of these informants allow the study to capture differences in experiences in using TikTok as well as their patterns in acquiring, understanding, and assessing Islamic knowledge in the digital space. Based on the analysis of interview data, the study found three main trends that indicate the TikTokization of Islamic knowledge, namely the shift in TikTok's function from an entertainment medium to a source of Islamic knowledge, the emergence of micro education and the fragmentation of religious knowledge through short video formats, and the reconstruction of religious authority from institutional patterns to digital forms of authority that are also influenced by algorithmic visibility, popularity, and *engagement*.

Table 1. Characteristics of Generation Z Informants in the TikTokization of Islamic Knowledge Research

Informant Code	Age	Status/Background	Educational Activities	Relevant Characteristics
GZ-01	17 years	High school students	formal education	Active TikTok users and access to Islamic content
GZ-02	18 years	Students	Islamic Boarding School/Dayah	Following religious education and using TikTok

Informant Code	Age	Status/Background	Educational Activities	Relevant Characteristics
GZ-03	19 years old	Student	College	Using TikTok as a source of religious information
GZ-04	20 years	Student	College	Actively follow Islamic preaching and content accounts
GZ-05	21 years	Student	College	Access and compare various digital religious content
GZ-06	18 years	Not currently studying	Non-formal education/workers	Obtaining religious information through social media
GZ-07	20 years	Young workers	Non-students	Using TikTok in daily activities and following Islamic content
GZ-08	19 years old	female students	Islamic Boarding School/Dayah	Comparing knowledge from teachers with TikTok content
GZ-09	22 years	Student	College	Actively save and share Islamic content
GZ-10	23 years	Islamic boarding school alumni/workers	Religious and non-formal education	Have experience in Islamic education and use of digital media
GZ-11	17 years	General teenager	Not currently pursuing higher education	Consuming TikTok content for entertainment and religious knowledge
GZ-12	21 years	TikTok creators/active users	Higher education/non-formal	Have high intensity in production or consumption of Islamic content

Source: Primary research data, processed by researchers

Based on Table 1, the research informants consisted of Generation Z with diverse educational backgrounds and social activities, namely students, students, Generation Z who are not currently pursuing higher education or are already working, Islamic boarding school students (*santri*), and alumni of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren/dayah*). This diversity provides a more comprehensive picture of Generation Z's experiences in using TikTok as a space to access and acquire Islamic knowledge. The differences in informant backgrounds also allow the study to compare patterns of religious knowledge acquisition between those with institutional Islamic education experience and users who primarily obtain information through digital spaces. Based on these characteristics, further analysis of the research results identified three main forms of TikTokization of Islamic knowledge: the shift of TikTok from an entertainment medium to a source of Islamic knowledge, the fragmentation and microization of religious knowledge in short video format, and the reconstruction of religious authority through algorithmic visibility and digital actors.

The interview findings also revealed clear differences in how Generation Z participants from different educational backgrounds used TikTok to obtain Islamic knowledge. Participants with *pesantren/dayah* backgrounds tended to use TikTok as a complementary source and compared digital content with knowledge obtained from teachers or religious institutions. As GZ-08 explained, "I usually watch Islamic content on TikTok, but I still compare it with what my teacher has explained." Similarly, GZ-05, who had a university background, stated, "TikTok makes it easier to find different explanations, so I can compare one religious opinion with another." In contrast, participants who were working or not currently pursuing formal education relied more heavily on TikTok for convenient access to religious information. GZ-07 noted, "I often learn about religious issues from TikTok because I do not attend religious study sessions regularly." Meanwhile, GZ-11 described TikTok as providing both entertainment and religious learning: "At first I opened TikTok for entertainment, but when religious videos appeared repeatedly, I started watching and saving them." These accounts indicate that TikTok does not replace institutional Islamic education in the same way for all users; rather, its role varies according to participants' educational backgrounds, existing religious learning experiences, and access to formal or non-formal sources of Islamic knowledge.

TikTok's Shift from Entertainment Media to a Source of Islamic Knowledge

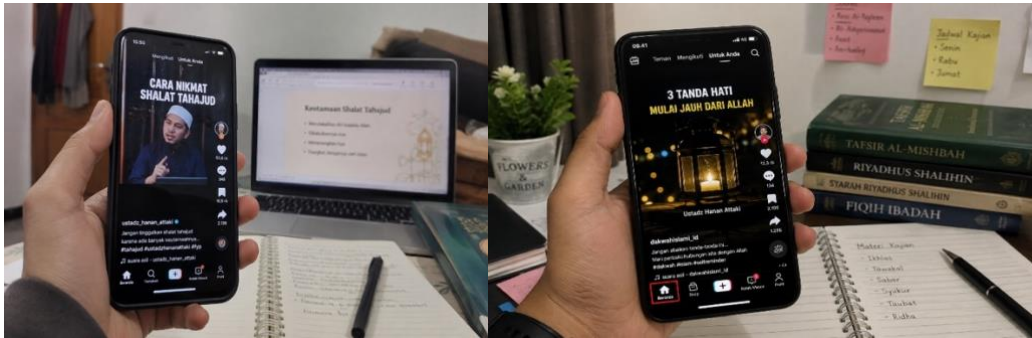


Figure 1. TikTok as an Alternative Islamic Education Space for Aceh's Generation Z

Figure 1 illustrates TikTok's shift from a mere entertainment platform to a part of the everyday religious learning ecosystem. Smartphones have become a medium connecting Generation Z with various sources of Islamic knowledge, previously primarily acquired through direct interactions with teachers, religious scholars, Islamic boarding schools, schools, or religious study groups. However, this shift does not mean that Islamic educational institutions have lost their role entirely. Rather, a new relationship pattern has emerged where TikTok serves as an initial space for discovering, recognizing, and consuming Islamic knowledge, while further deepening and verification can be conducted through other religious sources.

These findings demonstrate that Islamic education in the digital age is increasingly flexible and needs-based. Generation Z can access content on specific issues when they are deemed relevant to their lives (Setianto, 2015). For example, users can search for content on prayer procedures, social relationships, social etiquette, family issues, or spiritual motivation simply by using specific keywords (Hakim et al., 2024). This pattern differs from conventional Islamic learning systems, which generally follow a curriculum structure, schedule, material levels, and pedagogical relationships between teachers and students. TikTok offers a more personalized, spontaneous learning model that is based on the individual needs of users.

While providing easier access, this shift also creates new problems in the form of the potential fragmentation of Islamic knowledge (Leśniczak, 2023). Knowledge gained through short videos tends to be presented in chunks of information focused on a specific issue. Users can obtain answers quickly, but they don't always understand the context, differing views, the basis of arguments, or the relationship between one concept and other Islamic concepts (Alamsyah et al., 2024). This situation suggests that TikTok's transformation into a space for Islamic education is not only related to changes in the medium of message delivery, but also to changes in the structure and patterns of knowledge acquisition.

These changes are related to the characteristics of digital communication, which allows Islamic knowledge to be disseminated in a concise and easily accessible format (Grewal et al., 2022). Generation Z does not always begin their knowledge seeking process through Islamic study groups, books, teachers, or educational institutions, but rather through content appearing on the *For You Page* (FYP) (El-Astal & El-Youssef, 2025). Algorithms then play a role in reinforcing these consumption patterns by resurfacing content that aligns with the user's interaction history. When a user likes, saves, shares, or repeatedly watches Islamic content, the algorithmic system has the potential to increase the frequency of religious content appearing in their digital experience (Fitzpatrick, 2023). Thus, the process of acquiring Islamic knowledge occurs not only through conscious search but also through repeated exposure shaped by algorithmic personalization. Therefore, the results of this study demonstrate that TikTok has undergone a functional transformation among Generation Z in Aceh (Srinita & Saputra, 2023). The platform is no longer positioned solely as an entertainment medium but also as an alternative Islamic educational space that matches users' personal needs with an algorithm based information distribution system (Rahmah, Hakim, Abdullah, et al., 2024). This shift marks the beginning of a broader phenomenon, namely the emergence of the TikTokization of Islamic knowledge, where the process of acquiring, understanding, and internalizing religious knowledge is increasingly influenced by short video formats, algorithmic personalization, and a culture of digital information consumption.

Fragmentation and Microization of Islamic Knowledge



Figure 2. Micro-Education and Fragmentation of Islamic Knowledge in Short Video Format

The research findings indicate that the use of TikTok as a source of religious knowledge has driven a shift in the way Aceh's Generation Z acquires and understands Islamic teachings. Religious knowledge, previously primarily acquired through systematic learning processes within families, schools, Islamic boarding schools (*dayah*), religious study groups (*pesantren*), and religious study groups (*majlis taklim*), is now also consumed in the form of short video-based content. Information on worship, morals, Islamic law, social relations, and even everyday life issues is presented in concise, topic-oriented formats. This allows for a faster and more flexible learning process, but at the same time, it tends to fragment as users receive knowledge in chunks that are not always connected within a coherent learning structure.

As shown in Figure 2, this process forms a pattern of Islamic micro-education, namely the process of acquiring religious knowledge through short units of information consumed based on the user's personal needs and algorithmic preferences. Generation Z can select, save, share, and repeat specific content without having to follow the sequence of material as in conventional Islamic education (Lestari et al., 2026). Thus, TikTok enables a more personalized and accessible educational process, but also shifts the structure of knowledge acquisition from a systematic pattern to a more episodic and thematic pattern (Hurmaini et al., 2025; Muslim, 2024). This fragmentation of knowledge is evident when understanding a religious issue is constructed through a number of separate pieces of content originating from different creators, perspectives, and contexts.

Theoretically, this finding can be explained through the concept of fragmented knowledge in the digital communication environment, where platform technology transforms knowledge into units of information that can be produced, consumed, and distributed separately (Abu et al., 2025). In the context of TikTok, the logic of short videos reinforces this process because the complexity of religious issues must be simplified into concise, visual, and attention grabbing messages (Bahijah & Khumairoh, 2025; Suyitno et al., 2025). While institutional Islamic education generally places knowledge within the curriculum structure, learning stages, and pedagogical relationships between teachers and students, digital micro education operates through a different logic: personal relevance, speed of access, user interaction, and algorithmic visibility. This comparison demonstrates a transformation from *structured Islamic learning* to *algorithmically mediated Islamic learning*.

Based on this interpretation, this study proposes the concept of Micro Islamic Education as a theoretical addition to explain new patterns of Islamic learning in the digital platform era (Barus et al., 2024). This concept refers to the process of religious education that occurs through small, daily needs-based information fragments, consumed flexibly, and mediated by algorithms. Thus, the phenomenon of TikTokized Islamic Knowledge demonstrates not only a change in the medium for disseminating Islamic messages but also a change in the structure of knowledge itself. Islamic knowledge is no longer solely acquired through linear and institutional learning pathways, but is increasingly shaped through the intersection of individual user needs, short video communication formats, and algorithmic selection mechanisms (Alimron et al., 2023; Kosim et al., 2023; Mudzakkir et al., 2025). This study's contribution lies in explaining that the digital transformation has produced a new form of Islamic education that is faster and more personalized, but also presents challenges in the form of fragmented understanding and the need to verify and deepen knowledge.

The Shift of Authority from Scholars to Algorithms and Digital Influencers

Figure 3. Illustration of the Reconstruction of Religious Authority: From Institutional Clerics to Digital Authority



The research findings indicate a shift in how Acehnese Generation Z recognizes and legitimizes sources of Islamic knowledge. Religious authority, previously associated with Islamic scholars, teachers, Islamic boarding schools (*dayah*), and Islamic educational institutions, is now being negotiated through digital spaces. TikTok enables content creators, digital preachers, and Muslim *influencers* to become sources of religious reference through content that recurs on the *For You Page* (FYP). In this context, digital visibility, number of followers, intensity of interaction, and the ability to convey messages in an engaging manner are factors that contribute to user perceptions of a person's credibility. Thus, algorithms do not directly replace Islamic scholars as holders of religious authority, but they play a role in determining who is more frequently seen, heard, and potentially becomes a reference for Generation Z.

As illustrated in Figure 3, the reconstruction of religious authority occurs through the intersection of scholarly legitimacy and digital visibility mechanisms. In traditional systems, authority is generally built through mastery of knowledge, experience, community recognition, and connections to religious institutions (Tolchah & Mu'ammam, 2019). Conversely, in the TikTok ecosystem, legitimacy is also influenced by popularity, *engagement*, communication skills, and algorithmic content distribution (Fandir, 2024). This shift demonstrates that religious authority in the digital era is increasingly negotiable, as Generation Z no longer receives knowledge solely from a single, hierarchical source but instead compares, selects, and validates various religious sources available in the digital space (Ascarya & Sakti, 2022; Miftahuddin et al., 2024). Therefore, this phenomenon can be understood as a transformation from institutional religious authority to hybrid religious authority, a form of legitimacy built through a combination of scholarly competence, social recognition, digital popularity, and algorithmic visibility (Al-Razi et al., 2024; Sirojuddin et al., 2025).

Conclusion and Suggestions

Conclusion

Transformasi digital di bidang pendidikan membawa peluang besar untuk meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran. Dengan teknologi digital, proses belajar menjadi lebih interaktif, personal, dan relevan dengan kebutuhan siswa, sehingga mereka dapat memahami konsep dengan lebih baik, termotivasi untuk belajar, dan lebih aktif dalam berpartisipasi dalam diskusi maupun proyek kolaboratif. Selain itu, transformasi digital memperluas akses pendidikan, termasuk bagi siswa di daerah terpencil atau dengan keterbatasan fisik, sehingga membantu menciptakan pemerataan kesempatan belajar. Di sisi lain, transformasi digital juga menghadirkan tantangan yang perlu diatasi, seperti kesiapan lembaga pendidikan, kesenjangan digital, kompetensi guru, dan keamanan data. Keberhasilan implementasi transformasi digital sangat bergantung pada strategi yang jelas dan terintegrasi dengan visi serta misi lembaga, keterlibatan pemangku kepentingan, serta evaluasi dan monitoring yang berkelanjutan.

This study suggests that the TikTokization of Islamic knowledge is reshaping how some Generation Z participants in Aceh encounter, access, and evaluate religious information. Rather than replacing established Islamic educational institutions, TikTok appears to function as an additional and increasingly influential space for informal religious learning, where content is encountered through personalized recommendations, short-form videos, and user interactions. The findings indicate that participants' experiences differ according to their educational and religious backgrounds. Those with

pesantren/dayah experience tended to compare TikTok content with knowledge obtained from teachers or religious institutions, while some participants with less regular access to formal religious learning relied more directly on TikTok for convenient religious information.

The findings further indicate that this process can be understood through the concept of Micro Islamic Education, in which Islamic knowledge is encountered through short, focused, personalized, and fragmented units of content. Within this environment, religious authority appears to be negotiated through the interaction between perceived religious competence, institutional legitimacy, digital visibility, popularity, and audience engagement. However, these findings should be interpreted cautiously because the study involved only 12 purposively selected Generation Z participants in Aceh and therefore does not represent Generation Z or Muslim youth more broadly. The study also focused on participants' reported experiences and selected digital observations rather than measuring the long-term effects of TikTok use on religious understanding. Future research with larger and more diverse samples, comparative settings, and longitudinal designs is therefore needed to examine whether the patterns identified here extend beyond the participants and context of this study.

Suggestion

Based on these findings, Islamic educational institutions, *dayah*, schools, and religious educators should consider TikTok as a complementary space for informal religious learning while maintaining the importance of contextual, systematic, and institutionally grounded Islamic education. Digital Islamic literacy should be strengthened by helping Generation Z evaluate the credibility of religious content, examine the competence of content creators, verify religious claims, and recognize how algorithmic recommendations influence what they encounter. Future studies should compare different regions, age groups, and educational backgrounds and investigate the longer-term relationship between short-form religious content, digital literacy, critical thinking, and the depth of Islamic understanding. These directions can help determine the broader applicability of the present findings without assuming that the experiences identified among the 12 participants are representative of Generation Z as a whole.

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